



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MAKING YOU SAFER

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

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Operational Assurance



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Executive Summary

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service has undertaken a self-assessment of our delivery of front-line services, using the Operational Assurance Toolkit provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Managers across the service have had the opportunity to contribute to, and consider the findings of, the report.

The key finding of the report is that our performance evidence clearly shows improving public and firefighter safety.

We believe we can show strengths in our Prevention and Protection activities, which are rapidly developing as we rebalance our resources to provide a more rounded service to the public.

We have acknowledged weaknesses in our ability to analyse and interpret data, which is limiting our ability to manage performance more effectively. In particular, our information sharing systems currently lack integration – we collect a great deal of information, in many different ways, but are still developing processes that will allow us to make sure this information reaches the right people quickly enough, in a form that is immediately useful to them. This has limited our risk management planning, and our resource management.

The performance management function, covering delivery of both operational and support services, is crucial to maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. Existing proposals, which have been identified in this report, for the further development of Operational Audit and the Central Intelligence Unit, are intended to develop this function. Early delivery on these proposals will be crucial to the future maintenance of operational assurance.

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1. Introduction

1.1 What Is This Report About?

Fire and Rescue Service Circular (FRSC) 21/2005 was published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on 14th June 2005. Its purpose is to provide a self assessment diagnostic 'toolkit' for use in improvement planning, to reassure the public and ministers of the operational effectiveness of their fire & rescue service.

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service (BMKFRS) has used the toolkit as a diagnostic tool, to look critically at our delivery of frontline service to the public, in comparison with other fire and rescue services. We are seeking to clearly identify our strengths and weaknesses, so that we can focus our activity on further improving what we do. BMKFRS is working hard to be a learning organization, and we welcome this circular as an opportunity to take stock of our position.

This report follows FRSC 21/2005 closely, and seeks to answer in turn each of the questions asked in the toolkit. Each question is in italics; for each, we have identified which are the relevant processes we have in place, and how effectively they work. Wherever possible, case studies and evidence taken from current activity are used to illustrate what is actually happening on the ground now, rather than simply restating a policy directive on what should be happening.

Operational assurance in this context includes all aspects of service delivery to the public. This includes prevention, protection and response, along with all of the supporting functions and planning that ensures a robust and effective operational performance.

The flowchart shown in figure 1 is taken from FRSC 21/2005; we have dealt with each box as a separate chapter in this report.

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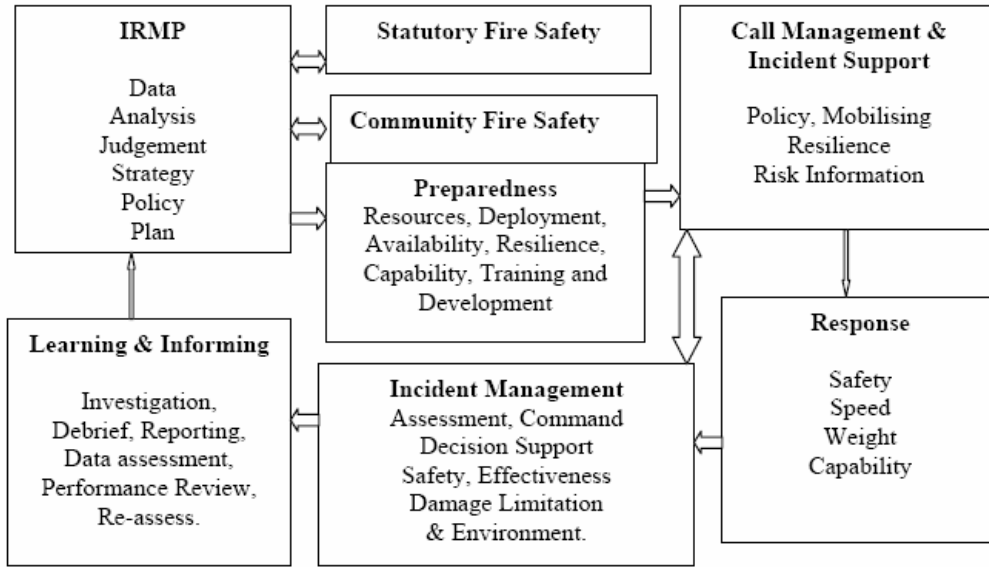


Figure 1. The Operational Assurance Process, FRSC 21/2005

1.2 About Us – An Overview

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Authority (BMKFRA) serves a population of approximately 700,000 in the South East of England. It comprises the four districts of Buckinghamshire – Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe and the unitary borough of Milton Keynes. The major centres of population are the designated new city area of Milton Keynes, which occupies much of the south of the borough (172,033 in the 2001 Census), High Wycombe (77,178), Aylesbury (69,021), Chesham (20,343) and Amersham (17,719).

The area which the Fire and Rescue Authority serves is expanding extensively; Milton Keynes, for example, has more than trebled its population in the last 30 years from 67,000 to around 220,000. Current government plans for housing and commercial development in the region could see an additional 100,000 new homes built in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes over the next 25 years. Other expansion of the urban infrastructure, including education, health care and other public services, will also be required with evident implications for the Fire and Rescue Authority in terms of the increasing demand for fire safety education and community safety partnerships, as well as emergency operational response provision.

Although many parts of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes enjoy the affluence associated with the Home Counties, there are pockets of deprivation in all four districts and the borough of Milton Keynes. The area served by the Fire and Rescue Authority includes stretches of the M1, M25, M4 and M40 motorways - working in partnership to improve road safety is a clear priority of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

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The Fire and Rescue Authority is a combined body, with membership drawn from Buckinghamshire County Council (12 members) and Milton Keynes Council (5 members). The current political representation on the Fire and Rescue Authority is ten Conservative, 2 Labour and 5 Liberal Democrat. The Fire and Rescue Authority set a revenue budget of £23 million for 2004/05 (2003/04: £20 million) and a capital budget of £1.9 million for 2004/05 (2003/04: £1.3 million). The Fire and Rescue Authority moved into their new headquarters in April 2005, remaining in Aylesbury roughly at the centre of the area it serves. The Fire and Rescue Authority employs approximately 670 staff, with 546 firefighters operating from 20 fire stations – 6 whole-time, 4 day-crewed and 10 retained. The Fire and Rescue Authority operates 42 frontline and specialist vehicles. In 2004/05, the service attended 9,829 incidents (11,033). Of this total, 2,030 were primary fires (2,376), 2,025 were secondary fires (3069), and 1,568 were calls for special services such as road traffic accidents (1504). Figures in brackets are the 2003-04 equivalents.

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1.3 Making You Safer – The Headlines

BFRS has a strong tradition of providing a professional, effective and efficient fire safety and 999 emergency service to the communities of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Overall, your chances of being injured in a fire in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are lower than the national average, and are steadily reducing.

The single most important measure of our performance is your safety. The vast majority of fire injuries occur in the home, so the key results we look to are the number of dwelling fires, and the number of injuries that result from them. In the following charts, as in all the performance measures presented in this report, we have, wherever possible, compared ourselves to the overall national average for fire and rescue services, to our family group of thirteen similarly sized services, and to the nine fire and rescue services in the South East. We have used the longest time span we can for each chart, and the most up to date information we can obtain. National 2004/05 results were requested from ODPM, but are not yet available, so we have had to estimate last years performance for other services.

Safety is crucial to us, both for the public and for our own staff. The evidence clearly demonstrates that we are achieving our aims of rebalancing service delivery to improve public safety, whilst continuing to improve the safety of our firefighters.

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1.4 Performance Summary

The following table sets out the performance measures that ODPM have asked to be considered within the Operational Assurance context.

However, it should be noted that a number of the internal targets that we are currently using have their basis in a different historical context. The table therefore sometimes indicates poor performance against our targets, when our performance might actually be good when compared against our own trends or against family group, regional or national figures.

We are actively reviewing our target setting processes and plan to introduce more meaningful targets, which are evidence based and more readily support the modernisation agenda, in due course.

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Best Value Performance Indicators	Green - Bucks performance equal to or better than benchmark or target	BFRS Outturn 2003/4	Family Group Average 2003/4	National Average 2003/4	2003/4 Upper Quartile	BFRS Target 2004/5	BFRS Outturn 2004/5	BFRS Target 2005/6
	Red - Bucks performance worse than benchmark or target							
Indicator	Description							
BV12(i)	Proportion of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence by wholetime uniformed staff	6.6	9.7	9.9	8.6	6.50%	10.5	6.30%
BV12(ii)	Proportion of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence by all staff	7.7	10.7	10.6	9.7	7.5%	10.9	7.2%
BV142(i)	Total number of calls to fire (excluding false alarms) per 10,000 population	79.7	72.7	91.4	63.7	82.2	60.1	85.1
BV142(ii)	Primary fires per 10,000 population	34	30.3	34.1	26.4	36.7	29.3	36
BV142(iii)	Accidental fires in dwellings per 10,000 dwellings	16.2	16	17.4	14.4	15.1	15.04	14.2
BV143(i)	Deaths arising from accidental fires in dwellings per 100,000 population	0.72	0.44	0.52	0.33	0.44	0	0.44
BV143(ii)	Injuries arising from accidental fires in dwellings per 100 000 population	8.4	7.68	9.4	5.9	6.2	6.8	6.2
BV144	Accidental dwelling fires confined to room of origin	49.01	n/a	n/a	n/a	90.4%	47.8	92.1%
BV145(i)	% of calls to fire at which the number of appliances met the standards of fire cover	100	99.3	99.1	100 (i)	100%	100	100%
BV145(ii)	% of calls to fire at which the number of riders met the standards of fire cover	85.1	87.3	86.8	88.6 (i)	85.8%	76.5	87%
BV145(iii)	% of calls to fire at which the attendance times met the standards of fire cover	94.3	95.1	94.6	97.6 (i)	95.2%	93.9	96.4%
BV146	Number of calls to malicious false alarms per 1,000 population	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.60	0.5	0.58
BV147	Average time taken by fire authorities to issue fire safety certificates	38	74	78	53 (ii)	35	19	N/A
BV206	Deliberate fires per 10,000 population	19	n/a	n/a	n/a	19.7	19.7	19.4
BV149	False alarms caused by automatic fire detection apparatus per 1,000 non-domestic properties	136.8	130.8	128.7	110.8	139.4	124.6	140.5

(i) The upper quartile boundary was calculated by identifying the top 25% of fire and rescue services in 1998/99.

(ii) The upper quartile boundary was calculated by identifying the top 25% of fire and rescue services in 2000/01.

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ODPM & CIPFA Data						
	Green - Bucks performance year on year indicates improvement	BFRS Outturn 2001/2	BFRS Outturn 2002/3	BFRS Outturn 2003/4	BFRS Outturn 2004/5	% Variance 2003/4 vs 2004/5
	Red - Bucks performance year on year indicates a decline					
Ops 4	Number of incidents at which:					
	persons were extricated from vehicles	144	131	168	201	20%
	services only rendered	279	320	303	335	11%
	no services rendered	43	35	36	12	-67%
	TOTAL:	466	486	507	548	8%
Ops 5	Spills and leaks (other than RTA)	190	170	183	152	-17%
	Water - removal/provision	20	51	19	19	0%
	Effecting entry	93	108	107	106	-1%
	Lift release	107	113	110	118	7%
	Animal rescue	48	66	62	48	-23%
	Other rescue/release of people	98	104	103	114	11%
	Removal of objects from people	61	46	60	35	-42%
	First aid	12	7	15	8	-47%
	Making safe	73	76	72	100	39%
	Recovery/retrieval of objects	2	5	4	2	-50%
	Standby/precautionary action	16	15	13	7	-46%
	Aircraft incident (no fire)	1	4	2	4	100%
	Assistance to Police and Ambulance	26	18	14	19	36%
	Industrial accident	2	2	0	1	100%
	Sports activity	0	0	0	0	0%
	Farming accident	0	0	0	0	0%
	Suicide/attempted suicide	2	10	4	5	25%
	Railway accident	0	1	0	0	0%
	Provision of advice:					
	Officer and appliance/equipment	12	17	6	12	100%
	Officer only	59	144	51	78	53%
	Use of appliance/equipment not specified	29	25	14	14	0%
	Services not required					
	Malicious	8	1	4	0	-100%
Good intent	104	99	114	106	-7%	
Other	0	0	14	0	-100%	
Call type not known	3	0	0	0	0%	
Any other special service	45	43	26	35	35%	
	TOTAL:	1011	1125	997	983	-1%
Ops 6	Total number of calls handled by fire control	23691	21198	23350	20174	-14%
Ops 7	No of operational vehicles	39	40	40	39	-3%
Ops 11	Fire Stations					
	Wholetime Shift	5	5	6	6	0%
	Day Crewing	5	5	4	4	0%
	Retained	10	10	10	10	0%
HRF 1	Wholetime					
	W/T Establishment and Strength	317/304	342/330	346/352	353/349	
HRF 2	Retained					
	Retained Establishment and Strength	226/142.75	226/145	232/138.75	232/136.50	
HRF 3	Fire Control					
	Fire Control Establishment and Strength	22/22	21/20	21/20	21/21	
HRF 4	Establishment by duty System					
	Wholetime shift	193	223	240	241	0%
	Day Crew	78	77	56	56	0%
	Day Duty	17	18	19	21	11%

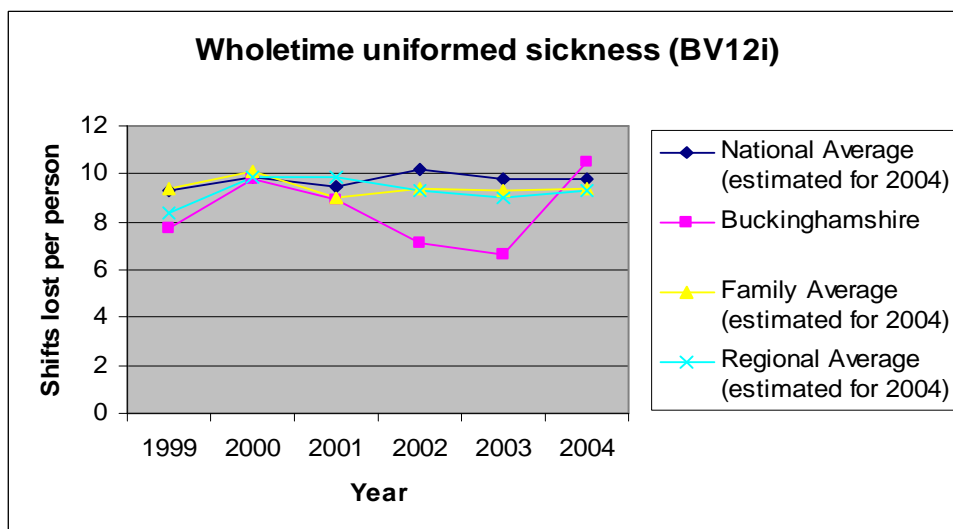
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HRF 7	Days lost due to sickness by duty system					
	Wholetime shift	1605	1363	1531	2574	68%
	Day Crew	723	519	317	724	128%
	Day Duty	71	122	71	105	48%
	Flexible Duty	177	175	310	327	5%
	Fire Control	260	129	137	178	30%
	Non-uniformed	1407	964	941	925	-2%
HRF 80	Injury rate at operational incidents	71	21	21	15	-29%
HRF 81	Injury rate during training	24	2	17	8	-53%
HRF 90	Ill health retirements due to service	1	0	1	1	0%

1.4.1 Commentary

Data quality

Before discussing the figures shown above, it is important to ask first whether we are confident that they are accurate. Frankly, there are areas where we are not. The service has been introducing a number of new IT databases and automated data collection systems, principal amongst which is the ‘Snowdrop’ Human Resources database. As with all complex IT systems, Snowdrop has required a working-up period, whilst software glitches are ironed out. This working-up extended across the period when performance returns were submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for 2004-05. The impact of this can be seen in the chart below:



On the face of it, the last eighteen months have seen us go from best in field to worst in field for sickness levels. We have carried out an internal audit of the data, which has established that the dramatic jump in recorded sickness coincides with the introduction of automated reporting of sickness levels via Snowdrop. The audit has resulted in the identification of several possible data or processing anomalies. We are revalidating the data, and are cross-checking against other reporting/counting methods, to identify whether we are now either accurately reporting a serious problem, or over-reporting a less serious issue. Obviously, this is a matter of urgency, and it would be

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unwise to take precipitous action before we are confident in the quality of our information. The revalidation exercise for sickness data will be completed by the end of September.

So, does this mean that all our information is suspect? The answer is no – operational and injury figures are collected on separate systems, which have not been changed during the period shown in the tables above. They have been tested over a longer time period, and we are more confident that they are accurate.

Target Setting

The second issue to consider, after accuracy of the information, is what we do with it, in terms of setting performance targets for the future. Again, there is little point in beating around the bush - the service recognises that there was inadequate data collection or analysis during the production of the last Best Value Performance Plan and IRMP and insufficient time and resources given to generating solid local performance targets. In recognising the brigade's shortfalls in this area, the introduction of the Central Intelligence Unit (CIU) was a central feature of our latest IRMP. It is being established specifically to deal with this problem and will initially be focusing on data validation across all our performance measures, to ensure that we are providing the public and managers with robust, accurate and timely information. Currently, the service considers it more useful to look at trends in performance rather than notional and potentially arbitrary and inappropriate local performance targets. A prime example is BV 143(ii), *Injuries in domestic dwelling fires*, where we have achieved a 20% drop in injuries in the last year. Ordinarily, this might be seen as commendable performance, except that we had set ourselves a target of a 26% drop, which does not appear to have been based on either national framework targets, or previous performance of ourselves or other brigades. Thankfully, last year no-one died in an accidental dwelling fire in Buckinghamshire, but we do not believe fire fatalities are a statistically valid performance measure for a single brigade the size of ours; fatal fires are extremely rare, and one is enough to completely distort any analysis at brigade level. It is far more reliable for us to look at fire injuries, where there are enough figures to give us meaningful indicators of how we are doing locally.

If we look at performance trends over the last six years, we are clearly achieving success in driving down the number of fires, and the number of injuries caused by fire, through our rapidly developing prevention work. Evidence to support this conclusion is presented in the Community Fire Safety chapter of this report.

The number of rescues we carry out from road traffic collisions is increasing. Again, in recognition of this trend and, acknowledging the high number of fatal road traffic collisions we attend, a new focus on road safety was introduced into the current IRMP. We are actively working in collaboration with other organisations to reduce the numbers of road accidents, and

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examples are again provided in the Community Fire Safety chapter. Set against these outcome results, which measure your safety directly, we have seen a decline in the number of firefighters actually riding fire engines to calls. This issue is discussed further in the chapter on Preparedness; briefly, this is partly deliberate, as we have consciously moved some staff into prevention and other modernisation related work, and partly the result of staffing difficulties, particularly with our retained crews. The limited move to prevention is simply explained: we can achieve more for public safety by helping you not to have the fire in the first place, rather than by just relying solely on rushing to close the stable door after the horse has bolted. Quite simply, prevention is better than cure. This doesn't mean we won't be there when you need us – we always will. It does mean that we know, and this year's figures prove, that a better balance of our resources between prevention, protection and response will make you safer.



Figure 2, Joint service rescue

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2. IRMP

Examine IRMP Action Plan in the light of CPA conclusions and reports from Implementation Support Teams (IST) to consider:

- *The extent to which community fire safety and statutory fire safety activities influence and contribute to the effectiveness of operational fire and rescue service delivery.*

The structure of the service has been radically overhauled to reflect more closely the interdependencies of prevention, protection and response, which have all been brought within a single Directorate to provide clear strategic focus, led from the highest level of the organisation.

- Process

Policy on transfer of risk information is set out in OC 6/1, '1(i)d Procedure', which was reviewed in 2003, and is current until 2006. Section 3.3 of that document provides specific guidance on information to be collected and passed on by Fire Safety Officers for the use of operational crews. Partnership managers from the CFS team are based at fire stations, to maintain active and ongoing relationships with frontline staff in jointly delivering services. The impact of other CFS activity on operational work has been set out in the CFS chapter below.

- Evidence

The Risk Management Directorate meets quarterly as a body to consolidate prevention, protection and response strategies, and to review performance. The Response group holds monthly briefings, attended by heads of group from across all directorates, to confirm progress and to action necessary work.

Risk Management Directorate newsletters, and Operational Briefing notes, are routinely circulated, to ensure that matters identified at these meetings are rapidly shared across the workforce.

- Case Study - Brunel Centre, Queensway, Bletchley.

Multi-occupancy premises that upon inspection by a fire safety officer was found to be empty and poorly maintained due to redevelopment plans.

The Fire Safety inspecting officer carried out a Site Specific Risk Assessment inspection proforma, notifying the Operations Group of concerns regarding, risk from unauthorised entry, vandalism and the degradation of the inherent fixed fire

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resisting separation, including Fire Alarm system along with an increase in fire loading.

The risk information for the site was updated to reflect these changes, Hazard awareness was passed on to the local station at Bletchley. Site specific information was updated in the Command and Control mobilising system, enabling any crews responding to the premises to be made aware of these risks. Guidance was also provided to incident commanders to consider early enhancement of resources as part of their Dynamic Risk Assessment

- *The expertise exercised in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data and the professional judgement exercised in transposing the information into strategy, policy and action.*

Key Task Area

KTA 21/05

'Business and project planning systems'

The long-term vision is to have in place systems and processes which support the brigade in:

- Managing the projects which will deliver the key priorities.
- Assessing, managing and monitoring performance
- Planning future strategy.
- Matching this to financial requirements.

A Policy and Planning Manager was appointed in August 2005, with responsibility for delivering this KTA.

○ Process

Data collection and analysis is a full time role for three staff, each covering a focus area – one for FSEC, one for Active/Mosaic, and one for performance indicators. Three more staff are being recruited (2 information officers & 1 senior analyst) to complete the Central Intelligence Unit (CIU). Interpretation of information is the responsibility of managers, who provide option appraisals for Brigade managers and Authority Members, who have the responsibility for strategic choice and policy direction. Delivery on these decisions and policies is monitored by the appropriate Director.

○ Evidence

The three existing data analysts have role-specific training and experience, and it is intended that new recruits to the CIU will be trained and experienced in relevant systems.

KTA project managers attended training workshops in April 2005, and a further £25 000 has been allocated in the

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current budget for further project management training. Programme management training for senior managers has also been agreed. PRINCE2 methods have been introduced as part of this training. Audit by Corporate Governance is in accordance with PRINCE2, and is carried out by staff with relevant qualifications and experience.

- Case Study – Relocation of fire stations in South Bucks
 - A long-standing capital project has been underway to replace fire stations in Marlow, High Wycombe and Beaconsfield. Existing decisions on site locations and shift systems for these areas had been based on professional judgement. This is now being tested against FSEC modelling, to assess the relative suitability of available sites and crewing systems. As a direct result, it is proposed that crewing models and appliance disposition as originally intended are now placed on hold, whilst they are tested against the IRMP requirement that all changes to emergency response standards are clearly evidence based.

- *The consistency of assumptions in respect of expectations and targets arising from the IRMP in the context of the data and by comparison with other appropriate FRS.*

Our concerns over data and targets have been explained above. Managers have already identified inaccuracies in data, which have distorted performance information, and we are working to correct these faults as a matter of urgency. Generation of correct data, and timely analysis of that information, will be the first target for the CIU, as it becomes fully operational.

- *Whether ambition and the pace of change are balanced with justifiable judgements in respect of safe and effective service delivery.*

So far, IRMP has been largely used to test previous decisions to ensure their robustness, and to establish firmer foundations for the future. A clear principle is now enshrined within our IRMP – ‘evidence based change’. BFRS is not going to make radical changes until support systems are robust enough to provide solid, reliable data, on which we can base our decisions. We have been pioneers in many areas in the past, and not always reaped the benefits expected.

- *Whether a lack of ambition or change is justifiable in the light of evidence and emerging good practice elsewhere.*

BFRS has a history of innovation, particularly in equipment, appliances, and collaborative working. As an example, Rescue Pumps, Maxi-cab appliances, and Defibrillators, which are only now appearing

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in many brigades, have been operational in Buckinghamshire for many years. Appliances, equipment, training and fleet management are shared with our neighbours as a matter of long-standing routine. Such innovation was achieved despite being one of the lowest cost authorities in the country, but only by focusing what resources we had on frontline service delivery. Support services have undoubtedly suffered as a result, and have been badly overstretched. Our recent priority has been to maintain operational performance, whilst we build up the support side to the point where it can provide the right information and back-up to frontline managers. We are starting to reach that position, and concrete, evidence-based, proposals for change are now beginning to be put to the FRA.

- *Compare IRMP ambitions with results recorded as BVPI and local performance targets and safety related data.*

Our IRMP sets out where we want to be in a series of twenty three 'Key Task Areas', grouped under three headings – 'your service', 'our people', and 'our governance'. The IRMP explains in detail why we have chosen these as priorities, and lists specific tasks for 2005-06.

CPA comment

- *The single comprehensive IRMP is an effective framework document to capture all the pressures facing the service and to implement its plans. The IRMP is the corporate strategy and primary planning tool which has ensured that all the Fire and Rescue Authority's ambitions are captured and distilled into one all embracing strategy. The development and implementation of the IRMP is significant to the Fire and Rescue Authority demonstrating its agility to change.*

Para.8

- *The Fire and Rescue Authority has assessed what is and what is not a priority. The vision statement is underpinned by five key priorities, that have a further 23 key task areas (KTAs) that detail action plans to achieving the vision and the IRMP. There is a clear statement within the IRMP on what are not priorities and the process of delivering non-priority areas has involved some difficult decision-making by elected members.*

Para.9

- *Action plans to deliver key priorities are not fully costed or resourced and lack stated measurable targets and timescales. The absence of such arrangements puts the Fire and Rescue Authority at risk of not achieving the improvements and developments stated within their objectives and plans.*

Para.25

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3. Statutory Fire Safety

Fire Safety work is a strength within the brigade – over the last four years, for example, we have halved the time it takes to issue a Fire Certificate, and over the same time frame, have been operating to the latest best practice standards, which will shortly become mandatory for all other brigades.

BMKFRS statutory fire safety activity is exclusively risk driven. This enables us to provide consistency across the whole spectrum of protection activities and it will facilitate a seamless transformation when the Regulatory Reform Order becomes law in 2006. To this end the service uses the principle of risk assessment described in the Health and Safety Executive “Employers guide to fire risk assessment” as a basis for all its inspections.

BMKFRS has been at the forefront of the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 within the county. This has been achieved through training seminars and liaison meetings with all “relevant” authorities. We have centralised, through our dedicated Regulatory Support Officer, procedural processing of all applications within the county during the two “appointed dates”, thus ensuring a consistent approach towards both the licensing agencies and the applicants themselves.

We have developed a matrix profile system, which enables buildings to be given a qualitative risk rating. The following factors are considered as part of the risk profiling:

- Age of Building
- Means of Escape
- Use of Building
- Occupancy of Building
- Number of Persons
- Management of Building
- Sleeping Provision
- Cubic Capacity
- Occupants requiring assistance
- Active Fire Protection
- Sprinkler Provision
- Disabled Facilities

This system was first introduced in 2001; since then, 5,000 buildings have been risk assessed, including all 2,800 buildings in the county that currently have a fire certificate in force under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. The risk details are held on an in-house database, which is accessible on each inspecting practitioner’s desktop.

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All inspections within the Brigade are carried out on a risk-prioritised basis in accordance with FSC 1/2004. It is brigade policy to consider premises for inspection on the following basis:

- Those assessed by the risk profile as having the highest risk to life.
- Any commercial building that has experienced a fire or been the subject of an arson attack.
- Any building that has generated an excessive number of unwanted fire signals.
- Any building subject to a complaint from a member of the public.
- A building subject to work requirements from statutory legislation, or from partner agencies.
- Buildings selected as a consequence of thematic reviews initiated either nationally, or locally.

In the calendar year 2005, all inspecting practitioners will have achieved an NVQ level 5 in Legal Practice, having undertaken four 2-day modules with Bond Solon, a legal training provider. This will ensure that we are able to underpin the enforcement element of the new regulations from April 2006.

In June 2005, Members received a full presentation and briefing on the implementation of prevention and protection strategies, and approved the service's application of Authority policies.

Key Task Areas

KTA 04/05

"Regulatory Reform Order"

The Protection Group will facilitate full and effective implementation of the Regulatory Reform Order from the date it becomes law. We will also train and brief all operational personnel within the county prior to this, to enable them to use the new legislation as applicable to the extent of their duties.

Currently the Protection Group have undergone two of the four legal modules cited above, and the Brigade Technical Officer is providing collaborative training to all inspecting officers within the three Thames Valley brigades during the months of August and September.

A risk assessed inspection protocol is already in place; this has been fully utilised and amended as necessary over the last four years.

KTA 05/05

"Fire Suppression Systems and Sprinklers, Domestic Properties and Schools"

The Protection Group is actively pursuing the installation of sprinklers in schools through the mechanism of risk review by the schools themselves. This will be done by ensuring that all schools in Buckinghamshire have the

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facility to carry out an on-line risk assessment; in order to maximise the effectiveness of this exercise a representative from each school will be offered specific training at a 2-hour seminar facilitated by the fire authority. During these sessions each school will be given an arson profile within a 1-mile radius of their site. We will be able to access the outcomes of the on-line risk assessment to determine, on a risk basis, where to target Protection Group interaction.

To date agreement has been reached with both the education authorities that make up Buckinghamshire as to funding of the initiative, and a bespoke on-line risk assessment has been sourced for use by the schools. The initiative is currently being publicised within the Bucks schools network and twelve seminars will be run in September, October and November 2005.

Once each school has carried out a risk assessment the fire authority will assist analysis of the significant findings, which will ultimately lead to support for sprinklers on a cost benefit basis.

KTA 08/05

“Reviewing response policy to unwanted fire signals, automatic fire alarms/automatic fire detection.”

The target for 05/06 is to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals emanating from the top twenty worst offending buildings/sites within the county.

This is to be achieved by a comprehensive audit of the relevant building by an inspecting practitioner in partnership with the responsible person. The recording protocol and tolerance thresholds cited in BS5839: Part 1 is to be used as the compliance model. These audits are being carried out under the FSC28 concordat, and they carry the statute of the Fire Precautions Workplace Regulations 1997 (as amended 1999).

As of 31st July 2005 unwanted fire signal calls to the top 20 offenders have been reduced by 8%.

A paper putting forward options for future response to unwanted fire signals is scheduled for consideration at the next full FRA meeting, on the 23rd September, 2005. The paper will seek an endorsement of current activity, particularly with respect to data validation, being pursued by Protection Group and will offer up extensions to FRA policy, which seek to improve the effectiveness of service delivery.

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4. Community Fire Safety

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment stock-take, undertaken by ODPM representatives between 11th-16th August, 2005, is intended to bring the CPA up to date. Its preliminary conclusion is that Community Fire Safety should be removed from the list of areas identified by the Audit Commission as most in need of improvement. This is due to the “high level of commitment and co-ordination” found in the new CFS team during the stock-take.



Figure 3, The CFS Team

Key Task Areas

KTA 01/05

“Developing Community Safety and Partnership Working”

Partnership managers, and the whole of the Prevention Team, are now heavily involved in gathering risk information, partnership working and education, across a range of public safety issues, including road safety and youth offending.

Key activities include:

- Persuading Milton Keynes Council to purchase and fit 7000 smoke detectors in their housing, with equipment, training and HFRC material provided by the service. The two housing associations in Milton Keynes

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are now following this example. Such collaborative work vastly increases the provision of smoke alarms and safety information in an extremely cost effective manner, as the service's involvement can be limited to initial start-up guidance, and targeted follow-up work at high risk properties identified by the housing agencies HFRC's. This targeted work, when delivered by operational crews, is a highly effective means of reaching the most vulnerable in our communities, and developing sustainable prevention strategies.

- Reviewing partnership working. The partnership managers have discretion to modify the level of service involvement in specific partnership activity, to reflect the potential impact on service related targets. Financial resources and time have been focused on those partnerships that offer the greatest potential, and these resources have been moved as specific projects have achieved their aims, or where they have been less successful. As an example, within the Milton Keynes Community Safety Partnership, the partnership manager is joint chair of two working groups, a member of two groups, and an associate member of three others, with the level of involvement directly linked to potential impact.



Figure 4, Schoolchildren using the Hazard House

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KTA 02/05*“Identifying and supporting vulnerable groups”*

Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRC's) began in June 2004, with a hot strike leaflet campaign after fires, and targeted leafleting of high risk areas. These areas were identified using Active mapping software to plot incidents covering the period 2001 – 2004, overlain with demographic information taken from the Mosaic market information database, selected to plot high risk groups as defined by the National Community Fire Safety Centre. Subsequently, leaflets were included in Council tax bills, sent to every household in the FRS area. HFRC's are generated from calls received in response to leafleting. A total of 1230 have been completed between 13th June 2004 and 31st July 2005. They are carried out predominantly by wholetime operational personnel, although retained staff are now being trained, and have begun to carry out HFRC's, as well as continuing their active participation in CFS events.

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KTA 03/05*“Reducing arson and deliberate fire setting”*

The service is the first in the UK to adopt the police national intelligence model, a common information sharing system with Thames Valley Police (TVP) & RBFRS for arson investigation, which drives police resource deployment, and has seen a 32% drop in arson fires in the last year. The three Thames Valley brigades have agreed with TVP to jointly fund a single sub-regional Arson Investigation Coordinator, seconded from the Police, to further develop joint working.

- Evidence
 - The impact of the Arson Intelligence Officer can be seen in the 34% reduction in secondary fire calls over the last year, from 3,069 to 2,025.
- Case Study: The service is involved in local distraction campaigns to reduce anti-social behaviour; the 2004 campaign on the Lakes Estate, Milton Keynes, saw a 30% drop in crime on the estate.

KTA 12/05*“Road safety”*

- Case Study: The Impact Road show – run collaboratively with the Youth Offending Service & Two Shire NHS Ambulance Trust, to deter young offenders from vehicle crime. The final event of the most recent course was an RTA exercise hosted by High Wycombe Fire Station, with offenders used as casualties.
- Case Study: The Milton Keynes Cruise.
 - The Cruise is a weekly event, where large numbers of young 'hot-hatchback' drivers gather. Local fire crews, assisted by CFS staff, have attended the Cruise on several occasions,

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demonstrating extrication skills and delivering road safety messages.



Figure 5, MK Cruise safety demonstration

CPA Comment

- The Fire and Rescue Authority's current level of community safety work is low. There are some community safety activities being delivered, for example, leaflet drops, basic home fire safety checks and the fitting of smoke alarms. The potential of resources available on stations to deliver community safety projects has not been realised. Utilising this resource is paramount to the Fire and Rescue Authority achieving their KTA 1/05 'Developing community safety' and resultant change of focus between preventative and reactive service delivery.*

Para.27

- The Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to a stronger focus on community safety. Four partnership managers have been appointed to strengthen partnership working and to support the delivery of community safety at stations. Home fire safety checks are being piloted*

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and CFS training is being delivered to watch and crew managers. The Fire and Rescue Authority's objectives and targets for community safety are detailed within KTA 01/05 'developing community safety and partnership working'. Delivery of these targets is fundamental to achieving the Fire and Rescue Authority's aspirations in developing its community safety focus.

Para.32

5. Preparedness

5.1 IPDS & Operational Training

In the light of CPA conclusions and reports from IST's [Implementation Support Team], consider the extent to which IPDS has progressed in its connectivity with IRMP requirements. In particular, whether:

- Operational training and development undertaken clearly relates to plans for all aspects of service delivery and is sufficient to meet statutory requirements.*

Clearly defined development paths are established for all core roles with ongoing revision to programme content being developed progressively in response to changing circumstances. A wide programme of operational skills CPD is delivered by a combination of

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station based continuation training utilising the TAPS recording system, supplemented by trainer led input in safety critical subject areas agreed corporately on an annual basis. Skills delivery in emerging risk areas such as water rescue or working at height have been researched and delivered to a high standard and in an appropriate timescale.

A series of structured IPDS based development programmes related to the I.P.D.S. have been formalised for each role and geared to the forthcoming roll out of Supervisory and Middle Manager ADC's. These include mandatory operational courses such as the core progression courses at the Fire Service College (CMMI and SMMI) as well as the use of external providers for Management and Health and Safety modules i.e. BTEC level 3, 4 and 5 and IOSH / NEBOSH. These modules are being reviewed and updated progressively to ensure fitness for organisational expectations of staff. Recent developments in response to identified requirements being for example enhancing community safety skills and providing media management training within core programmes.

Over the last year a dedicated officer was assigned to furthering the provision of Incident Command Training and Assessment. This role has been supplemented by a second officer who has devised a programme of development utilising the Vector Command system as well as the Minerva Fire Simulation system aimed at all operational staff. This commenced in September of this year initially focusing on retained staff.

- *Training and development accords with appropriate service guidance.*

The phase 1 Fire-fighter development course is a collaboration project with Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue services and has been cross mapped to the role maps. Phase 2 training and assessment uses the NVQ level 3 'Operations in the Community' as a quality assurance mechanism. We are a satellite centre linked to Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. Phase 3 training uses the TAP's system to ensure skills are maintained within a competency based framework.

All safety critical Learning points from Station training events are sent to Training School (copy of activity log) which will be incorporated in training delivery on central courses if appropriate. A 'That's Training' notice may also be generated.

All Operational personnel display their potential for career progression at Assessment Centres. The three Thames Valley brigades are collaborating to run the first ADC in the UK to comply fully with the national ADC process, as a pilot project for the South East region.

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- *The use of operational scenario based training, (possibly supported by IT, table top or practical exercises) and actual incident monitoring, reviews and debriefs is providing effectively for the needs of operational crews.*

Our site-specific risk assessment policy is that all level 3 and 4 risks will have a practical or table top exercise performed annually.

- Case Study – Exercise at Hughenden Manor, 16.08.05
Hughenden Manor is the headquarters of the National Trust, and is categorised as a Level 4 risk. As part of his NVQ, a probationary firefighter from the local station has been carrying out a project to review the risk information for this site. With the support of his Station Manager and the Operations Group, his project culminated in a full exercise at the site, to test out the changes he has proposed, which include new open water sources and additional vehicle access, agreed and provided for by the National Trust.
- Case study – Exercise at Thornton Convent, 11.08.05
A six pump exercise was held to test ICS, BA and firefighting procedures. The debrief report identified significant failings in procedures and in the organisation/execution of the exercise. As a result, the Response Team have instructed all stations to submit details of all planned exercises, which will be subject to a higher level of scrutiny. This venue is to be used for a follow-up exercise on 29th September, to check that recommendations arising from the debrief have been implemented.

The Director of Personnel has been personally sponsoring an enhancement to the Brigade's approach to incident command training with dedicated resources and an officer who now attends the national special interest group. In terms of delivery this involves the use of the Vector Command package that is currently being used in both a routine capacity and on an individual basis e.g. as a return to work programme for officers or those newly promoted. The Command Training project is also actively piloting the Minerva simulation system for flexible duty officers and new accommodation dedicated to its use has been secured. In addition the use of Tactical Decision Exercises and Gold Command interagency training is being implemented in the Brigade this year.

To date, five staff have been assessed using Vector prior to returning from operational duties. All retained sections will have received Vector familiarisation training by the beginning of October (four sessions have been completed to date). Individual Assessments have been programmed to start after that date and will be concluded by

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February 2006. Fifty four officers have been programmed to receive Minerva training by the end of December 2005.

The Brigade is an active member of the national Training Collaboration Group and delivers a number of appropriate packages to the workforce via this route.

All four-pump incidents are formally debriefed with any learning points incorporated into future policy or training, and routine monitoring of incidents is practised in line with an agreed Brigade policy.

- *Accident reporting is comprehensive and feeds into training events and organisational knowledge when appropriate.*

A standardised accident and near-miss reporting process is in place. The senior manager present carries out an immediate assessment, using a standard reporting form, to generate a risk score, which determines the level of investigation. The duty officer is notified of all occurrences immediately by Control, and vets the incident to ensure that the correct level of investigation is in place. Above a preset risk score, a NEBOSH qualified Accident Investigation officer is automatically mobilised. Reports are forwarded by Control to the Group Manager, Technical, and the Health & Safety Advisor, who is responsible for collating information on the HR database.

- Case Study

Monitoring of accident reports has indicated a rising trend of vehicle accidents over the first quarter of 2005. Consequently, a joint working party, consisting of representatives from stations, Training, the FBU and Health and Safety, has been formed to urgently identify underlying and root causes, and to put forward corrective actions before the end of the next quarter.

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The TAP for low speed manoeuvring of Appliances was amended in 2001 to reflect an upturn in low speed accidents. All operational staff are expected to undertake the TAP at least annually, either as drivers, or as crew members who are expected to know procedures and personal expectations when acting as look out for appliance drivers undertaking manoeuvres in restrictive areas

Whilst examples such as this show evidence of learning from accident information, the service recognises that resources within the Health & Safety team to comprehensively analyse and act on information received are limited. A budget growth bid for additional operational officers within this team is being submitted for the 2006-

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07 round. The aim of the enhanced team will be to fully apply the principles of HS(G) 65, specifically in the areas of audit and review of operational activity. This intention will also satisfy the requirements of the regional ICS policy, which has agreed the availability of specialist Health & Safety advisors for monitoring at operational incidents.

- *The use of specialist training facilities such as the Fire Service College, flashover and backdraft, New Dimension, water rescue and collaboration with neighbouring authorities are being used constructively to meet needs.*

£135K worth of Fire Service College courses have been successfully bid for this year - a 40% increase in FSC spend from the previous year. The focus has been on safety critical operational courses, particularly CMMI, SMMI and HMEP, as well as a number of instructor courses for new staff in training school. This investment has affected crewing levels at stations, but it is essential to clear the significant backlog in such training, to set the foundations for future safe working.

Real fire behaviour training has previously utilised facilities provided by Hertfordshire F&RS. Following the termination of this facility by Hertfordshire, negotiations are reaching their final stages for the provision of dedicated backdraft and flashover attack boxes within the Brigade area via an external provider. This is a collaborative partnership with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. This agreement will also incorporate the completion of P.P.V. stage 1 training for all front line staff and the planning of P.P.V. stage 2 & 3 training next year. In addition, the upgrade of an existing BA chamber at Great Holm Fire Station to provide LPG fuelled hot fire facilities is underway as a capital project, scheduled for completion in 2006.

The service has participated actively in national development of Working At Height (WAH) guidance, providing the draft text of CFOA guidance, and contributing to ongoing revision of relevant Fire Service Manuals. WAH training is carried out collaboratively with Oxfordshire, within a shared operational response capability. All appliances now carry WAH equipment, for work restraint and fall arrest, with technical rescue response for work positioning systems provided by Oxfordshire's line rescue team. WAH equipment and procedures are compatible across the two services, and satisfy the most recently enacted (April 2005) legislation.

All operational personnel have received annual water awareness training from an external water awareness training provider, for the last three years. This training is now being augmented in the light of the Near Miss investigation described below.

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Selected staff are undergoing USAR training at the FSC, given the Brigade's development of a dedicated USAR team in 2006.

Other collaborative work includes:

Officer driver training with Thames Valley Police

Level 1 Fire Investigation training (Oxfordshire)

Phase 1 retained training to a common standard with Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, with a view to future joint training.

Provision of Regulatory Reform and legal training to neighbouring fire safety teams

Receipt of FPA training courses, provided by Oxfordshire

The brigade is actively developing further collaborative work with neighbours, building on this broad base of existing achievement

- *The particular training needs associated with the range of duty systems, including those for flexible duty officers and retained staff, are being satisfied.*

Significant attention is now being given to incident command training needs of flexible duty officers as described above. The Brigade has traditionally specified very carefully the operational skills expected of retained staff although is now reviewing the training needs of retained staff to bring them up to the necessary standard to permit full mixed crewing with wholetime staff. The specific training needs associated with specialist appliances such as boats, Unimog 4x4 vehicles, and the Command Unit – most of which are crewed by retained staff – are well established and delivered appropriately.

Records of training for officers and retained staff are held on Individual Training and Assessment Records and the Training School year planner.

- *The monitoring of training and development is effective.*

Station inspections by the Operations group include checking of training records against attendance records and activity logs. However, practical observation of training is not included in these inspections.

The training programme includes instructors from Training School to visiting stations twice yearly to conduct safety critical training and to monitor operational competence. This year this training time has been used to introduce working at height equipment and new Road Traffic Accident equipment.

All training is recorded in the Individual Training and Assessment Record (I.T.A.R.) Current I.T.A.R.'s will be held on station

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whilst previous years are held at Training School and the Brigade Archive.

Water Awareness, Positive Pressure Ventilation and Working at Height training course records are also held at Training School and can be accessed using Snowdrop.

- *The health safety and welfare of the workforce and those affected by operations is embedded effectively in operational planning, preparedness and service delivery. And whether the outcomes of investigation and review of accidents and near misses are used effectively to improve safety and operational effectiveness.*

Operational planning is dealt with in our Site-specific Risk Assessment policy – buildings are risk assessed using a quantitative risk assessment method and risk cards and operational strategy cards are produced relevant to risk. OC 6/1 sets out criteria for selecting buildings (this policy is due for review in September 2006). Risk cards for higher risk premises are vetted by the Operations group, and tested as part of the exercise programme.

The Brigade has adopted national ICS guidelines underpinned by the Incident Command training initiatives referred to above. All accidents and near misses are investigated at an appropriate level based on a quantitative risk assessment approach. Underlying causes are identified and where appropriate policy and training programmes are reviewed based on these outcomes. Watch managers training programmes include IOSH ‘Managing Safely’, whilst Station manager programmes include NEBOSH training. Accident and fire investigation roles are combined, with a list of suitably qualified officers held at Control, for mobilising for investigation duties as required. The service has, on advice from HMFSI, recently circulated HSG 245, “Investigating Accidents and Incidents”, for comment from investigating officers, with a view to amending recording systems to reflect the HSG methodology more closely.

- Case Study – Near Miss Investigation, Marlow boat accident.
Background:
 Following attendance by two personnel on a swift water rescue technician course, the service contacted an external specialist training provider, and requested an independent audit of service water rescue activity.
The event:
 Shortly before the audit was due to be carried out, a boat crew training on the Thames capsized their vessel, thankfully without injury.
The aftermath:

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The incident was reported to Control as a near miss, and investigated in accordance with policy. Immediate corrective actions were taken to confirm a safe system of work during the investigation period, for example by replacing boat operations within high risk areas by other, safer, rescue systems. The external audit was incorporated in the investigation, and was augmented by information sharing with ODPM (HMFSI and CRD).

Outcomes:

HMFSI have circulated a Significant Safety Event notice, which acknowledges and supports the corrective measures introduced by the service. A risk based review of water rescue requirements has been carried out, and the Chief Officer's Forum has approved a systematic upgrade of specialist capability, to conform fully with national best practice. Water rescue staff from the service are participating actively in national and regional interest groups, to share learning from this incident, and to learn from others.

CPA Comment

- *IPDS is being effectively implemented. There is a dedicated IPDS team, an agreed action plan and the senior management team are putting on pressure to accelerate its implementation. Assessors and some verifiers are in place on all whole-time stations and a number of staff are working towards their national vocational qualifications (NVQs). IPDS will not be rolled out to retained staff until it has been fully implemented for all whole-time and non-operational staff. Development of staff is key to the achievement of both personal and corporate objectives.*

Para.63

- *The Fire and Rescue Authority demonstrates a proactive approach to health and safety issues. This has led to a commensurate reduction in insurance premiums, through the application of robust management systems. Implementation of IPDS is proceeding against the Authority's timetable.*

Para.80

5.2 Operational Preparedness

Consider the extent to which:

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- *The appropriateness, deployment, availability and utilisation of operational resources and the resilience of those arrangements including personnel, fleet, equipment and PPE reflect statutory requirements; the risk modelling and planning assumptions in the local IRMP, service policy and current national guidance.*

Our IRMP now clearly sets out the Authority's commitment to a risk and evidence based approach to making you safer. This approach will not compromise the safety of the public or our staff, but will deliver long term, sustainable improvements in effectiveness and efficiency.

KTA 14/05

"Developing and testing alternative staff duty systems"

5.2.3 Personnel

The following chart shows a recent fall in ridership levels, i.e., the number of firefighters actually riding our fire engines when we attend incidents.

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A number of factors are affecting ridership. Some are deliberate, balanced decisions, such as increased numbers of courses at the FSC, or secondments to project work. In these cases, the needs have been weighed carefully against the impact on operational cover, and are felt to be justified. However, there are two factors that are less directly under management control – loss of wholtime staff through transfer, resignation or sickness, and retained availability.

Transfer/resignation

Since the beginning of 2005, 49 operational staff have left the service. Of these, nineteen were retained, seven were wholtime transferees, and four were wholtime resignations.

Sickness

Errors in sickness recording have been discussed above. However, latest information suggests that, whatever the baseline, the trend is worsening in 2005, particularly for long term sickness, which has risen sharply over June and July. The chart of injury rates shown above demonstrates that overall sickness levels are not related to injuries, which have declined steadily over the study period.

The 2005-06 Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) identifies objectives for the HR directorate in relation to staff absence. The BVPP recognises that resources within HR are limited, and that effort has to be

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focused on priority areas. Sickness has not historically needed such focus – now that it does, the HR directorate is reviewing procedures for management of sickness, and is developing an action plan identifying the causes of sickness absence and dealing with these. This includes seeking to obtain the services of a dedicated Occupational Health nurse, to augment existing medical support. This proposal is subject to budget approval for 2006-07. The current increases in establishment in HR are intended to enable greater assistance to line managers, including helping them in more closely managing sickness absence.

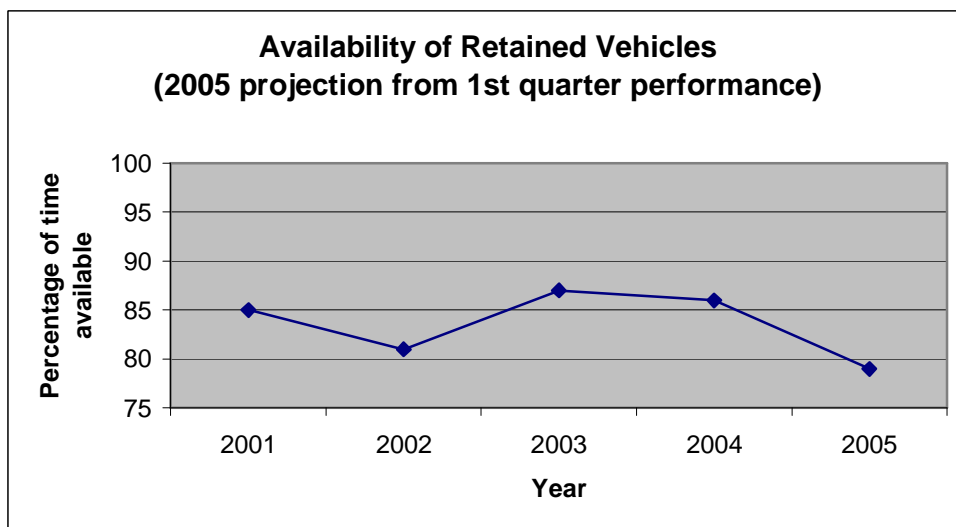
Retained Availability

Key task Area

KTA 15/05

“Retained Deployment and Part-time Working”

A research project has been undertaken as part of the IRMP, to identify exactly the evidence for problems of availability of retained appliances, particularly during weekdays. An example of the findings is shown below:



A project officer has begun working to improve retained recruitment, to correct the long-standing deficiency in the retained establishment, but the service clearly recognises that considerable and prolonged investment in effort and money will be required to raise the strength of the retained service to the establishment level. The service is studying with interest the work of other retained review working groups, for example the retained recruitment officers in Oxfordshire and Surrey, with a view to taking on board transferable good practice. The officer reported to the principal management team

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in June 2005, identifying issues raised by the ODPM Retained Review; proposals for action are to be reported in November 2005.

A policy on wholetime/retained working has been completed, and is due for publication and implementation in September. A number of staff have expressed interest, and their home locations are such that crewing problems at several retained stations should be considerably improved.

It is important to note that the brigade does not mobilise appliances with a crew of three, or where a junior officer is not available. This particularly reduces the availability of our retained appliances, in comparison to neighbouring brigades who do use crews made up of three firefighters only. This was a decision made following a risk review of resources and minimum crew levels, competencies and supervisory officers required on responding appliances. As part of ICS training, crew and watch managers are encouraged to make-up for additional resources early, if they are in any doubt as to the sufficiency of available resources, to ensure maintenance of safe and effective systems of work.

Mixed crewing is established custom and practice. Operational staff assigned to day-duties, for example in Fire Safety, Training or HQ, routinely augment crewing of appliances at their work places, subject to maintenance of competence. Wholetime crews that fall below minimum strength, or who lack a junior officer, form mixed crews with retained, although this measure is not frequently required, other than occasionally whilst awaiting stand-bys. The FRA will shortly be considering options to formalise and consolidate this process.

5.2.4 Fleet

The average age of the fleet is 7 years. For pumping appliances, the average is 6 years. The Fire & Rescue Authority has this year agreed to invest capital in significantly enhancing the specification of the three rescue pumps currently on order, with delivery scheduled for November 2005. The design and inventory for these pumps has been led by the Response Team, with active participation on the design group by a range of station personnel and representative bodies. Procurement of fire appliances is made through the agency of the FSPA.

The Headquarters site includes a brand new, purpose built, workshop, where servicing of all vehicles and equipment is carried out (other than for specialist work by manufacturers). Workshop staff provide a 24 hour call-out facility of a duty mechanic, mobile workshop van, and reserve mechanic. This call-out service has been used less over recent years, as the average age of the fleet has been reduced, but is maintained to ensure maximum appliance and equipment availability.

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Vehicles and major items of equipment are serviced annually. This major service normally takes a week per vehicle, dependent on the inventory. Service records are held on the 'Tranman' database, which is in the process of being linked to an electronic reporting system. Once completed, this will allow automated interrogation of these records. At present, electronic performance measurement is not possible.

5.2.5 Equipment

Equipment recording is currently paper based for the majority of items, and is based around the vehicle inventory, rather than individual items. Major items of equipment (ladders, hydraulic rescue, pumps, etc) are recorded individually, on the Workshops Tranman database. Recording is subject to audit during station inspection visits, in addition to weekly checks by watch managers.

The service is investigating the potential for upgrading Tranman to cover all equipment, or the purchase of an integrated asset management package, and a funding bid is anticipated for 2006-07.

A defect reporting form is held with the equipment testing and maintenance records on stations (the 'PITS' folder). These are faxed to workshops or the Equipment Officer as appropriate. Response categories are shown on the defect form, and are returned to the station by fax, detailing actions to be taken to fix the defect. There is a fallback system in the Technical Services team to cover staff absence. The Equipment Officer monitors workshops progress reports, providing feedback to the Operations Group. Repair times average one to four weeks dependent on the priority/nature of the defect – there is a same day repair service for high priority items.

The existing Change Management policy, which sets out the process for identifying equipment needs, selection and procurement, is currently under review, to streamline the policy and link it more explicitly with IRMP.

- Case Study – 51mm Delivery Hose

The service has been trialling 51mm hose at three stations with high rise risks on their grounds. Using the findings of the BDAG review of equipment for high rise incidents, risks in the brigade area have been assessed, and it has been determined that 45mm hose is appropriate across the majority of our area, when combined with the appropriate branch. 51mm hose is to be retained at the three high rise stations. Branches used by the brigade have been checked against the BDAG performance trials, and requirements for replacement of some have been identified, and are being actioned.

5.2.6 PPE

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Firekit is provided through a managed contract with Bristol Uniforms, who provide scheduled servicing and inspection. Audit reports are provided by Bristol to the Equipment Officer. Other p.p.e (gloves, flash-hoods, helmets, boots, etc) is provided via an in-house stores service.

Breathing apparatus servicing is carried out by an in-house specialist technician, within the Technical Services team. Our technician has been consulted for advice by the manufacturers on a number of occasions. He is due to retire in eighteen months, and a budget bid has been submitted to provide an apprentice for training up. Our breathing apparatus is not compatible with neighbouring brigades, so joint provision of technical support is unfortunately not possible at present.

Working at height equipment is serviced by firefighters at Buckingham fire station, with oversight from assessors in the Technical Services team.

- *The arrangements for obtaining and using risk, topographical and water supplies information are effective and current.*

5.2.7 Risk Information

Policy on risk information is set out in OC 6/1. Risk assessments are carried out by station personnel, using a standard proforma. Paper records are held on station, with a master index maintained by the Operations Group. Copies of level 3 and 4 risks assessments are held at Control, and on the ICU.

A mobile data system is being fitted to four appliances as a trial. At present the information available to crews is Chemdata, Vehicle Data (Airbags etc) and maps indicating the appliance location (AVLS). The intention is to eventually build up a database with risk information both generic and site specific, operational policy guidance, hydrant and water related info and anything else that can be thought of that will be of use to operational crews. The system will integrate with Firelink/FiReControl when they are delivered.

The pilot of the three devices and software on the ICU is to gain experience with mobile data, develop our back office systems to manage the information on the devices, and lay the foundations for the rollout of Firelink to all frontline appliances.

Encapsulated A5 size quick reference 'Q-cards' were introduced in 2002, as a revision to the previous aide memoir system.

5.2.8 Topographical Information

Road closures, and information on new roads and developments forwarded to BFRS by local authorities. Updates are sent to Control, and to local Station Commanders for informing crews and updating of route cards, etc. A record of these notifications to stations is held at control.

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A range of GIS are used by the service, but these have not yet been integrated into a mobile data system available to crews at incidents. They include FSEC, Active, Mosaic and Flood Explorer.

5.2.9 Water supplies

Policy on water supplies is provided in OC 61/1. Hydrant location information is held at Control and compiled centrally at HQ as a full time role for one member of staff. Control can use this hydrant mapping overlay to advise crews responding to incidents, and a specific area can be printed and faxed to appliances or the command unit by means of fax phones. Information on open water supplies is held at station level, and audited during station inspections. Work is underway to transfer an overlay of the hydrant database into FSEC.

- *Policy, plans, procedures and operations related information are current and effectively communicated to responding personnel.*

There are a very large number of policy documents held as 'Operational Circulars' (OC's). However, the sheer volume of these documents means that many are considerably overdue for review. Responsibility for their revision is dispersed across the service, and is not centrally coordinated. This was recognised some months ago, and Corporate Governance are introducing a centralised publication process, which is providing a level of quality control for final drafts of revised or new policies. An electronic library system ('Trove') is being installed over the next six months, which is intended to improve the quality and currency of our information.

Risk information is sent by the station to the first six pumps on the PDA, including over the border appliances. This information transfer is not monitored centrally.

- *Over the border risk information and operating practices for joint service working and training have been effectively addressed.*

Officers routinely attend the South East regional and LFEPAs cross-border working groups, to ensure conformity of operational procedures. The regional memorandum of understanding on cross-border working is described under Incident Command below.

Mutual aid agreements are in place with all neighbouring brigades. A regularly used example is cover provision for Silverstone race-track in Northamptonshire.

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A number of specialist resources are shared with neighbours. These include:

- Bulk Carbon Dioxide, which is a Thames Valley joint resource stored in Buckinghamshire
- Hose Layer, jointly funded with Oxfordshire
- Foam carrier, integrated into the SE regional foam plan as part of resources on call to incidents at Luton and Heathrow airports
- Line rescue equipment, which was procured collaboratively with Oxfordshire, and which incorporates attendance by the Oxfordshire specialist line rescue team to incidents in Buckinghamshire
- DIM Hazmat monitoring is available from Surrey on request, and has been mobilised to incidents in Buckinghamshire. Mutual support for Hazmat incidents is currently under review, in line with developments in CBRN capability.
- Buckinghamshire fuel bowsers are on call for bulk fuel supply to Berkshire and Oxfordshire.
- Canteen van, on call to Oxfordshire

Thames Valley Police is coordinating joint services liaison for Road Traffic Accident procedures.

A joint services exercise was planned at Pinewood Studios for this year, but it was postponed at the request of the venue. A brigade exercise at Stowe School was carried out in August 2004. A joint exercise involving Police and on-site specialists was carried out at the Prime Minister's country residence, Chequers, in November 2004

Work underway on Civil Contingencies will improve this position, through the development of a common risk register, shared by all Category 1 responders across the Thames Valley Police Area, compliant with the national civil contingencies guidance.

- *Resource provision, planning and exercising arrangements for joint service responses to national and regional emergencies are effectively managed.*

The FRA, and the CFO personally, are heavily involved at the national and regional level in New Dimension planning and implementation. The CFO is the national CFOA lead on the USAR capability work stream, and BMKFRA is the regional lead authority for Resilience.

Key Task Area

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KTA 10/05

“Civil Resilience and New Dimensions”

The CFO represents the FRA at both regional and local resilience forums. In addition, a Buckinghamshire Principal Officer represents the three Thames Valley brigades at the local resilience forum working group. The same officer also chairs the Risk Assessment sub-group of the Local Resilience Forum, which is leading sub-regional civil contingency planning in the Thames Valley Police Force area. This sub-group is responsible for producing the integrated risk assessment for all Category 1 and 2 responders required under the Civil Contingencies Act. Two meetings of the sub-group have been held, and draft assessments are being compiled to the national format.

Recent counter-terrorist operations in Aylesbury involved service resources over a prolonged period, both in terms of augmented operational cover in the risk area, and Principal Officer liaison at Police Gold and Silver. Buckinghamshire is involved in joint planning for Operation Sassoon.

‘DIM’ Hazmat monitoring equipment is being delivered to the brigade in November, and four Hazmat officers have been booked onto FSC training for this equipment, which forms part of the national and regional CBRN capability.

Recruitment and training of key members of the USAR team is already underway, with the team expected to become operational in November 2005, with preparatory work being led by dedicated New Dimension and USAR officers.

Joint training for CBRN incidents has been carried out with Thames Valley Police and the military, and is again scheduled for this winter. Additionally, Thames Valley brigades provided collaborative CBRN training for Bronze level commanders last year. Our New Dimensions team believe that this is the first training to have been carried out at this level nationally.

CPA Comment

- *The recruitment and retention of retained staff is recognised as a serious issue for the Fire and Rescue Authority. The recently established personnel client group is considering the appropriate departmental responsibilities in addressing retained recruitment and a specific KTA of the IRMP is to consider retaining deployment and part-time working more fundamentally.*

Para.58

- *The Fire and Rescue Authority has not made any significant changes to work patterns or shifts. Although, it is in the process of gathering information to inform an options appraisal and implement KTA 14/05 ‘developing and testing alternative staff duty systems’. Without the options appraisal, the Fire and Rescue Authority is at risk of not securing efficiencies in service delivery.*

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6. Call Management & Incident Support

Consider the adequacy and the extent to which:

- *Call management policy together with the actual speed and effectiveness of call and incident handling are monitored and benchmarked against notable practice.*

The current mobilising system, Fortek Fires 3, was last upgraded in 2001, by installation of the CMS7 mapping system. A hardware refresh is scheduled for this year, to keep it running effectively until the national FiReControl project replaces local systems in 2008. Call handling is not monitored by the Fortek system, although call handling times could potentially be retrieved from the telephone exchange system. No manual sampling is carried out at present. There are no local targets for call-handling, or comparisons made against other Control rooms.

- *The resilience of control and communications facilities and arrangements has been considered and addressed in contingency plans; the fall-back arrangements are routinely exercised and learning from such events is shared with the Centre.*

Key Task Area

KTA 11/05

“Mobilising resilience”

This KTA covers two areas that are central to Business Continuity planning. The first is the maintenance of a suitably qualified and competent workforce during the transition to regional fire controls. Through considerable effort, the service has been able to meet FRA concerns in this area, and have maintained a full establishment, albeit the experience base of our staff is diminishing as highly skilled staff leave the service.

The second is concerned with the more traditional issues of Control room resilience. This second process is outlined below:

- 1st fallback – 2 machines run in parallel; A is online & B is on standby. Changeover time between the machines is only limited by the time required to logon to the standby.
- 2nd fallback – Paper based mobilising (was laptop, currently not available) whilst the Incident Command Unit (ICU) is brought to Control from Headquarters, or Control transfers to it. There is no current training for Control staff on the use of ICU, although it does come with its own crew. A car is dedicated to Control use at all times. Use of the ICU is a holding position, whilst staff transfer to Secondary Control at High Wycombe Fire Station. On arrival at High Wycombe, set up time for Secondary Control is limited to the logon time for the standalone computer. Data can

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be transferred either way by ISDN, if communications are available. The 2nd fallback system was tested and used operationally at the previous Control, but has not been tested at the current site. If staffing levels are too low (i.e., 3), then Flexible-duty officers are called in to assist (this has occurred, on rare occasions) with crewing the ICU & providing admin support, whilst the Control Operator handles fire calls.

- 3rd fallback – Overflow calls shared mutually with Bedfordshire (occurs every few months, evenly shared)
 - Recall to duty of Control staff is available, but is used rarely. In contrast, short notice overtime cover is used frequently.
 - Control officers seconded to HQ retain a 20 hour per month commitment to provide cover at Control.
- *The effectiveness of dynamic mobilising and on line support and advice for callers in distress or danger is monitored and comparable with notable practice elsewhere.*

Call-challenge is long established custom and practice. Policy on dynamic mobilising has been drafted, based on national guidance. Fire survival guidance has been in use since its introduction nationally; several staff have received commendations for their assistance to callers.

- *Engagement of communications centre staff appropriately features in training and exercising for major or special incidents and in post incident reviews and debriefs.*

Control staff attend debriefs, crewing permitting. Informal and formal feedback is provided. Exercises are participated in at Control, and at table-tops, although the latter have not been held for several years. Buckinghamshire took part in Exercise Red Signal, in February 2004, a major CCBRN exercise led by Oxfordshire. The FCO observed at Oxfordshire Control.

- *Operational management support is available to Control Centre staff.*

Operational officers are available to support Control on request. At incidents of five pumps or larger, the nearest principal or senior (DO) officer is mobilised to Control. There is no formal mobilising to Control for Hazmat incidents. If only one DO is on duty, the duty principal officer can authorise recall to duty.

Incident Command familiarisation has been provided to Control recruits by the ICS Training officer, and is planned for all Control staff.

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- *The management of cross border incidents is embedded in procedures together with the necessary risk and procedural information to ensure effectiveness.*
 - Formal mutual aid arrangements are in place with all neighbours. Geography dictates that they are particularly used for Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Berkshire will liaise with Control to agree despatch of required resources; in contrast, Bedfordshire sends their full pre-determined attendance, regardless of what resources are already available. The draft document on mutual assistance and discharge of functions (Sections 13/16 agreements) produced by BMKFRS has been provisionally adopted across the SE region.
 - Specialist resources are shared with Oxfordshire. These include Line Rescue from Oxfordshire (Kidlington); Canteen Van from Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury); and a jointly owned Hose Layer at Stokenchurch (Bucks).
 - Communications are now configured via the national FireLink scheme for interoperability; previously, Bedfordshire's main scheme radio could not be used.
 - If over the border appliances are expected to be part of an initial PDA, Site Specific Risk Card information is passed to those appliances. For example, for the Schwarz site at Haddenham, crews from Thame (Oxfordshire) attend, and risk cards are forwarded to them.
 - Control managers in the South East region meet monthly, but staff rarely visit neighbours, other than through informal networking.

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7. Response

Consider the extent to which:

- *The speed and weight of operational response is in accordance with service policies and whether this is monitored for safety and effectiveness and to shape policy development.*

Key Task Area

KTA 07/05

“Formulating A Revised Standard Of Operational Response To Incidents”

Our objective is to determine a prevention, protection and response strategy which optimises the safety of our communities and our staff, through an incremental evidence based process.

Work is progressing towards standards of emergency cover for the areas of highest risk, i.e., RTC's and fires, and options will be presented to the FRA in due course. The KTA has been broken down into work packages, the first of which is to be presented to the FRA on 23rd September, 2005. This will address the following incident types:

- Localised flooding
- Lifts
- Animal rescue
- AFAs

Members will be asked to choose from a range of options for each incident category, which address mobilising standards and opportunities for rebalancing workloads to drive safety improvements.

Current work on the review of the frontline fire appliance fleet, will progress to include a full review of special appliances and officer cover, in collaboration with regional partners.

KTA 08/05

“Unwanted fire signals, automatic fire alarms/automatic fire detection”

A paper is to be submitted at the next full FRA meeting (23.09.05), which will seek endorsement of a robust strategy for reducing unwanted fire signals.

KTA 09/05

“Co-responder strategy”

A paper is to be submitted at the next full FRA meeting (23.09.05), which will present a range of options to Members for their deliberation.

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- *Fleet and personnel availability are managed and monitored to ensure that delivery policy is resilient.*

Crewing levels are circulated to the Duty DO & Territorial DO's at change of shift, or circumstance, for confirmation of cover arrangements. Territorial DO's will follow up with local managers as required.

There is no proactive central monitoring prior to change of shift, as crewing is managed at local level by Station Commanders, with referrals to Territorial DO's. The Response Group used to check back with stations to actively query crewing deficiencies, but this practice is currently in abeyance whilst new Access database queries are developed, for sickness, leave, crewing levels, skills deficiencies, reasons for appliances being OTR, reasons for standbys, etc. This database is being constructed now, and should be on the run in October 2005.

Retained availability is currently monitored by Control, and recorded on a spreadsheet for the Response Group. An automated system, 'RAPPEL', which integrates availability with mobilising began its first live trials, at two retained stations, in September 2005.

Examples exist of transfers to maintain balance of skills & to overcome crewing deficiencies.

The workshops vehicle servicing planner is sent to Response Group to confirm availability in advance.

Cover moves of appliances for training are requested by the Training Centre Manager, checked and booked by the Response group, and are held on a common folder on the IT system.

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8. Incident Management

Consider the effectiveness of outcomes related to the arrangements for the:

- *Use of the national standard Incident Command System, and that it is uniform within and across service boundaries.*

The brigade initiated a common protocol for incident command and cross border working in the Thames Valley area some years ago, which was subsequently adopted by the South East Region through a memorandum of understanding signed in 2001. The latest ICS policy was produced in 2003 (OC 15/1).

BMKFRA has committed to adopting the regional management board's common Incident Command System as it is developed. An ICS training officer was introduced this year, to revise procedures in line with regional working. His work includes revision of command and control equipment, such as the command boxes on appliances, and the ICU, to conform to the regional standard.

A related step has been to increase officer attendance to Make-Ups, to include a dedicated Command Support Officer in the pre-determined attendance. Whilst this role does not exclusively cover the monitoring/risk recording areas, it does demonstrate the authority's commitment to auditing, reviewing and amending systems of work, in line with HSE guidance as set out in HS(G)65.

Within Thames Valley, the three brigades have agreed protocols for joint use of Incident Command Units, to provide mutual cover. This facility has been used, for example through the attendance of the Berkshire ICU at a Buckinghamshire incident at Stoke Poges.

- *Management of safety at incidents.*

Currently, BMKFRA has a two stage risk assessment process for emergency incidents, comprising an initial dynamic risk assessment, followed by a formal written risk assessment (Risk Assessment Record Sheet), both of which can be recorded centrally at Control, for onward transmission to other affected staff. Guidance on this process was issued in O/C 15.1, in May 2003.

- *Active monitoring of operational effectiveness and whether this addresses both individual and crew performances and shares lessons learned.*

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Operational briefing sheets circulated in May & July 2005 contained reminders to officers to complete Monitoring reports (FB17.3) when attending incidents. These reports are drawn from a process initiated in May 2001 (under O/C 15.2). A formal debrief process is in place, with learning points actioned via the Response Group.

It is likely that the regional work will, in particular, strengthen the role of monitoring officers in two key areas - firstly, audit of the use and effectiveness of the Incident Command System, and secondly, the fulfilling of statutory obligations to complete formal health and safety risk assessments for places of work, which include the fireground. This common regional system will require additional resources, in terms of officers attending the fireground, who are capable of auditing operational activity. There are a number of ways in which these additional resources could be provided, and work is ongoing to identify the most efficient and effective solutions.

- *Environmental and salvage considerations feature effectively in planning and training and delivery.*

There is no policy document on environmental protection, although there is a Memorandum of Understanding with the Environment Agency (EA). EA grab packs are carried on all pumps. The two Operational Support Units carry enhanced equipment, supplied by the EA. Additional stocks of equipment, supplied by the local authority, are held in Milton Keynes.

Training and Assessment Plan 1.27 details the competencies required to use the spill control equipment. All chemical and environmental incidents attract the attendance of a Hazardous Materials Environmental Protection Officer.

- *Fire investigation, including access where appropriate to specialist support – police, forensic, dogs etc.*

Key Task Area

KTA 06/05

“Specialist fire investigation”

- Process
The service has nine formally qualified Level 2 Fire Investigation (FI) officers, who are mobilised on request from the incident commander. The service has adopted the regional memorandum of understanding on fire investigation, and complies with the three level FI system set out therein.
- Case Study 1

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Call to smell of petrol, Northern Rd, Aylesbury, 22.07.05.
Level 1 investigation by first attendance crew – recognition of fire of suspicious origin, establishment of cordon for scene preservation, request for police attendance. Property correctly identified by crew as being involved in national terrorist investigations.

Level 2 investigation by FI officer, including attendance of Hertfordshire FRS Hydrocarbon sniffer dog, in conjunction with TVP Scenes Of Crime Officers.

Level 3 investigation by Forensic Science service.

Hot strike CFS leaflet drop in local area carried out by the Arson Intelligence Officer (AIO) and police officers during the incident; CFS advice was also provided at the local mosque on the same day by a Moslem staff member from BFRS.

Three persons were arrested and charged with attempted arson later that evening.

- Case Study 2

Call to fire in flat, Netherfield, Milton Keynes, 28.07.05

Level 1 investigation by the fire crew identified the possibility of a fire of suspicious origin.

The Level 2 investigation by a FI officer was unable to determine cause between either careless disposal of smoking material, or deliberate ignition.

Follow up investigation by the AIO identified a history of fires in previous residences of the occupant; prompted by the AIO, the police interviewed the occupant, who confessed to a series of arsons, and has now been charged. Analysis of FSEC and ACTIVE data has corroborated the investigation, and identified a requirement for follow up fire safety action at the affected premises. Without the AIO, and the data analysis capability of new software, the previous pattern of undetected arson is likely to have continued.

- *Management of incident review and whether debrief to monitor performance is routine practice and use of learning from such events is fed into policy and practices development.*

- Incident review policy is set out in OC 15/2. The process is managed by the two Response Group Managers. So far in 2005, the Response Team has held sixteen formal debriefs (form FB17.3) and received thirty Operational Performance Monitoring reports (form FB17.1). Learning points are identified by the relevant Group Manager, as a debrief report, which is circulated to all station commanders/stations in the routine Response Briefing Sheet and held in a public folder on the IT system. There is no formalised follow up audit to check

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compliance, other than through later operational monitoring or debriefs. Neither is there a comprehensive evidence trail to demonstrate modification of policy/procedures following debriefs, although the learning process can be tested by studying individual cases - examples include revision to procedures for Acetylene and Water Rescue, and amendments to mobilising policy.



Figure 6, Incident command briefing

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9. Learning & Informing

9.1 Central Intelligence Unit

KTA 23/05

“Improving our corporate intelligence – establishing a central intelligence unit”

The CIU was planned as part of our IRMP, in recognition of the need to provide reliable, accurate and timely information and analysis to support the processes of risk management and performance management. The PB Views software package was purchased, and partially populated with information, with a view to providing managers with performance information in a user friendly format.

The Group Manager, Technical, is currently providing support to the CIU. Planning is underway for workshops for managers, where the principles of performance management and performance measurement will be outlined, so that managers can be assisted in developing performance indicators that are relevant and useful to their targets.

In addition, the establishment of the CIU gives us an opportunity to review our data collection practices in line with good practice from other organisations.

9.2 Inspection and Audit

There is no overarching policy document for inspections, but elements are covered separately under OC 28/1. The Response Team uses a Tracking Sheet to provide a single central task manager for its work. Station inspections are carried out in three phases of pre-planned visits annually. The 1st phase covers finance; the 2nd, premises; the 3rd phase, appliances and equipment. Reports are compiled and signed off by the Territorial DO, forwarded to station commanders for action, and followed up on the next inspection, unless their importance requires more urgent action.

- Case study – personal kit held in firegear/bags was inspected following a spot check by a Group Manager; knives, obsolete kit, unsafe p.p.e., etc., were found and removed. As a result, a “That’s Unsafe” notice was sent out (2004).

It may be fair to say that the brigade’s position in the area of learning and informing reflects our history of having had to prioritise operational activity over support systems when making difficult choices with limited funds. Performance management is not deeply embedded across the service, and, whilst evidence of learning can be shown, there is not a comprehensive and robust system for ensuring that the information we gather is consistently turned into outcomes that improve what we do.

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However, these matters are now clearly recognised by officers, and plans are in place to formalise budget growth bid proposals which will provide the staffing and resources necessary to consistently deliver organisational learning.

CPA Comment

- The monitoring of performance information and actions to address performance is not systematically applied across all areas of the Authority. Performance is monitored by the senior management team and there is evidence in some areas that performance monitoring is driving improvement, for example, statistical information has been used to target areas of arson and this has led to a decrease in the number of incidents. Member monitoring has not been robust but a member PAG has now been set up to strengthen the monitoring process. The Fire and Rescue Authority has purchased a performance management system that will enable performance information to be readily accessible to all staff and will highlight, through a traffic light system, both good and poor performance. The new system has still to be populated before it can become a useful tool in performance monitoring.*

Para.70

- Best value performance indicators (BVPIs) and local targets are monitored adequately by officers. BVPIs are reported annually in the best value performance plan (BVPP) which is accessible internally and externally. The plan sets out clearly where the Fire and Rescue Authority is meeting its targets and where improvements need to be made. It is clear that the Authority is very aware of its performance and the areas that it needs to improve.*

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