**Evidence Base**

Additional detail and costing on all proposals can be found here:

**Proposal: Keep people in the private rented sector safer**

Electricity is the cause of nearly 50 per cent of all UK fires, and every year some 70 people are killed and 350,000 injured by faulty electrics and electrical equipment. Surveys carried out for the Electrical Safety Council show that those in rented accommodation are at a higher risk of electric shock[[1]](#footnote-1). According to the English Housing survey, the private rented sector in England accounts for some 18 per cent of the UK housing market, or roughly 4 million homes. However, private rented homes make up 32 per cent of the homes most at risk from fire. The Housing Survey also shows that private rented accommodation is the least likely to have a working smoke alarm of any tenure type.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Proposal: Increase data sharing between public services**

Fire and rescue services across the country have had great success in sharing data with other public services in order to improve outcomes and better target interventions. However, the current picture is patchy, and there remains some reluctance to share data, either due to lack of resources or fears around data protection. However, the current government has been committed to a more open and transparent data strategy[[3]](#footnote-3) in the UK public sector in general, which is welcome.

The enormous success of the UK FRS in driving down fire deaths, injuries and incidents[[4]](#footnote-4) has been thanks to a clear focus on prevention and protection. This approach is improved by better targeting and taking into account the widest range of risk factors, which is only possible with high quality data. Working with partners enables interventions to have maximum impact and deal with as many of those risk factors at once as possible.

We are supportive of the Cabinet Office’s efforts to create a more open data sharing policy with a view to creating better tailored public services, while protecting sensitive information[[5]](#footnote-5). We await the forthcoming white paper, due to be published in January 2015. We would urge the next government to push ahead with a new data sharing (rather than data protection) policy and take steps to encourage all public bodies to share data in order to facilitate collaboration, accessibility and transparency.

**Proposal: Keep drivers safer**

Young drivers are far and away the most at risk group on the road. Teenage drivers make up just 1.5 per cent of licensed drivers yet 12 per cent of all road casualties involve a teenage driver[[6]](#footnote-6). Drivers aged 16-19 are more than twice as likely to die in a crash as drivers aged 40-49[[7]](#footnote-7). Road accidents are the single largest accidental killer of young people aged 16-24 in the UK. Young drivers are most at risk immediately after passing their test. Research shows that nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of drivers between the age of 18 and 24 have a crash within six months of passing their driving test[[8]](#footnote-8).

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) is a key way that these figures could be reduced and is already in place in a number of countries, including Australia, New Zealand, parts of Europe and many US States. A form of GDL is also in place in Northern Ireland[[9]](#footnote-9), and the NI Assembly is looking to strengthen this legislation.

A 2011 analysis by the Cochrane Collaboration[[10]](#footnote-10) studies the impact of GDL schemes as implemented in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and overall found them to be effective in reducing crashes amongst younger drivers, with the most restrictive schemes being the most effective. For example when introduced in New Zealand, car crash injuries reduced by 23 per cent for 15-19 year olds and 12 per cent for 20-24 year olds[[11]](#footnote-11).

A report produced for the Department for Transport in 2013[[12]](#footnote-12) found that minimum learner periods, minimum practice hour requirements, night time restrictions and passenger restrictions were most effective in reducing risk. It also recommends that a GDL scheme which includes a lower drink drive limit and zero tolerance mobile phone policies are also more effective.

The DfT report estimates that the introduction of a GDL system in the UK would lead to a reduction of 4,471 casualties with associated savings of £224 million. This is just for the most at risk age range of 17-19; clearly if applied to the full age range these savings could be even higher. These are claims reinforced by an analysis by the RAC foundation in 2014[[13]](#footnote-13), which provides a breakdown of expected casualty reductions and savings by local area.

We would support the introduction of a GDL scheme, such as that as proposed by Brake[[14]](#footnote-14) that required a minimum number of taught hours, restrictions on night time driving and passenger numbers and a lower or zero tolerance approach to drink driving. We would also welcome the wider use of “black box” technology for younger drivers which can have clear safety benefits if used effectively - as discussed in the policy paper by RoSPA[[15]](#footnote-15).

Alcohol was reported as a contributory factor in 4,963 road crashes in 2012[[16]](#footnote-16), representing around 4 per cent of all crashes. However, they are also disproportionately lethal, responsible for 230[[17]](#footnote-17) deaths, from a total of 1,754[[18]](#footnote-18) – around 13 per cent. This figure, after coming down over a number of years, has plateaued in the past three years. Some 6.4 per cent of people surveyed as part of the ONS crime survey[[19]](#footnote-19) in 2012/13 admit to drink driving at least once or twice a year, which if replicated in the population at large represents some 1.9 million of the UK’s 30 million drivers.

Many people exceed the drink drive limit without realising it: a lower limit would remove this ambiguity and make it clear that even one drink is too many.

A NICE report[[20]](#footnote-20), produced in 2010, makes it clear that even one drink – typically resulting in a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.02 and 0.05 – will increase the chance of having a fatal crash by three times. Increasing BAC from 0.05 to 0.08 increases that risk a further six times. The risk of having a fatal crash increases exponentially the more that is drunk.

The NICE report estimates that by lowering the limit from 0.08 to 0.05, based on similar changes made in Europe, between 77 and 168 deaths could be avoided each year. With the average cost of a road death estimated at over £1.7 million[[21]](#footnote-21), this could produce savings from fatalities alone of as much as £285 million a year. It is shown that lowering the limit would have a deterrent effect upon even drink drivers who knowingly drive above the current limit.

However, they are clear that lowering the limit will only have maximum effect if an effort is made to raise awareness and understanding of BAC limits, since only 3 per cent of people surveyed could correctly name the BAC limit.

Both the Northern Irish[[22]](#footnote-22) and Scottish[[23]](#footnote-23) governments are looking to introduce a 0.05 limit in the near future. England and Wales will soon be left with the highest drink driving limit in the EU (alongside Malta). 15 of the 27 have a BAC limit of 0.05, with the remainder using a limit below that[[24]](#footnote-24). Some even maintain a zero tolerance policy, in effect setting the limit at the lowest detectable limit.

We therefore call for the government to lower the drink drive limit in England and Wales to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05. It is also clear that more needs to be done to increase awareness amongst the driving public, timed to coincide with the change in the law.

**Proposal: Keep people in sheltered housing safer by extending the 2005 Regulatory Reform Order**

This is about the definition of sheltered housing which gives older adults or younger disabled people the chance to live independently in their own home, managing their own affairs for as long as possible. Some residents may have domiciliary care provided through social services, voluntary agencies, family and friends. Properties are often flats or bungalows and operate a link to a 24 hour control centre which enables help to be summoned in an emergency at any time via phone, pullcords or pendants. Schemes may comprise 20-50 properties and these generally form part of the same building. Extra Care or Very Sheltered Housing is used to describe sheltered housing aimed at people who are more dependent on care services but who can still manage in their own home with the extra support that is provided on site. For many of these people this can delay the need for a full time residential or nursing placement.

London Fire Brigade attended 540 incidents in sheltered housing in 12/13, an increase of 7.4 per cent from 09/10. There have been seven fatal fires in sheltered accommodation in London between April 2009 and March 2013.

The Regulatory Reform Order 2005 (RRO) requires the responsible person for the premises to carry out an adequate risk assessment covering common parts and communal areas of the building. However individual units in which the residents live are considered private dwellings and therefore are not covered by the audit and inspection regime (which does apply to care homes).

Extending the Reform Order to the 480,000 sheltered housing dwellings in England[[25]](#footnote-25) would therefore bring these properties in line with care homes, clarifying the confusing legislation that governs fire safety in these properties. Further to this, communities would welcome the introduction of this approach to help protect and support vulnerable and elderly people living in sheltered accommodation.

**Proposal: Flexibility in local tax regimes**

Because Fire and Rescue Authorities levy low council tax precepts and often provide services which cover more than one local authority boundary, the cost and administrative burden of a council tax referendum makes such an approach practically impossible.

CFOA has gathered and analysed the costs to local authorities of running a referendum using Government published data and the cost guidelines issued by the Home Office for running the Police and Crime Commissioners elections as a comparison. If all precepting fire authorities had decided to run a referendum to raise their council tax by 5 per cent for 2014/15 the costs would total an estimated £41 million yet the income raised would be just £38 million.

In comparison, if the corresponding billing authorities held a similar referendum to raise council tax by 5 per cent the cost of running the referendum would be £41 million but the income raised would be nearly £500 million. The difference between the highest and lowest fire precept is 80 pence per week, significantly smaller than the difference between the highest and lowest overall council tax bill (£20 per week).

The public have clearly expressed an interest in engaging in debates about their local fire service. Any new system should allow FRAs to engage with their local community properly about the balance between resources and taxation without artificial constraints that effectively prevent such a mature debate taking place.

**Proposal: Flexibility to set rates and discounts for council tax and business rates**

Giving councils and FRAs the flexibility to set rates and discounts for council tax and business rates will allow authorities to provide support to those that need it most.

**Proposal: More flexibility to retain capital receipts to fund prevention work**

Local government, including Fire and Rescue Authorities can bid to use receipts from sales of capital assets to fund the revenue costs of service reforms. This follows a technical consultation over the summer. The total amount of capital receipts that will be granted this flexibility is limited to £200 million across the two years 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Although this is a positive move, more flexibility could be given as the total level of flexibility amounts to only 20 per cent of the total amount of ‘assets held for sale’ by local authorities. Upper limits should be determined locally and annually by prudential considerations determined by local government, rather than by an arbitrarily imposed national cap. The bid-based nature of the process is unhelpful and our preference would be a system which allows councils and Fire and Rescue Authorities to judge how this money should be spent, allowing services to spend it on fire prevention work.

**Proposal: Independent body for distribution of funding**

In line with our wider calls for local government funding, we advocate clarity of funding over a 5 year period, in line with the length of a Parliament in order to assist financial planning and provide stability. Financial certainty is crucial to good quality, well-run public services. We welcome the Chancellor’s decision to work towards multi-year settlements for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups, schools and adult education providers. We also urge the Government to establish an independent body for the distribution of funding to councils and fire and rescue authorities. This would take the politics out of financial distribution and would redistribute business rates income across the country in a way which would ensure those areas with less business activity do not lose out.

**Proposal: Recognise that resourcing is related to risk**

Fire and rescue services are unique amongst local government services in that its service delivery is based upon risk and not directly demand related. The legislative basis requires each FRA to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan, assess and mitigate all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks and to apply resources accordingly.

Fire and rescue budgets are already oriented heavily towards frontline service provision – three quarters of costs are staff wages, of which 80 per cent are firefighters. Most premises costs are fire stations; most vehicle costs are fire engines or specialist response vehicles.

It is often argued that the reduction in incidents should inevitably lead to a reduction in firefighter numbers. This holds true to a degree and most services have reduced their firefighter numbers over the recent years as more efficient staffing models are introduced.

However, the relationship between firefighter numbers and the number of fires is not straightforward – fewer fires do not directly equal fewer firefighters. While demand has fallen, risk remains and could increase given the impact that the recession is having on households and lifestyles and our service must provide resilience against this. This is best illustrated by the number of Control of Major Accident Hazard sites across the country which has remained fairly static at approx. 350 since 2005. The absolute risk of an incident at one of those sites remains relatively low - but the FRS has to plan to have the resources to cope with when an incident does happen, which would require very large levels of highly skilled and prepared resource. The range of incidents firefighters are expected to respond to has increased dramatically in recent years. National resilience against both criminal and natural threats requires that we maintain a minimum level of resources at all times. For most other (non-responsive) services, reductions in resources can be accommodated by scaling back the range or level of service. For the FRS, as a largely responsive service, the range and level of service can only be adjusted if the risks reduce or change in nature.

**Proposal: Commitment to fund national resilience assets**

Unlike most other local public services, Fire and Rescue Authorities have national resilience responsibilities defined in the National Framework 2012 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This model of risk planning has not only a local perspective but is also based upon national risk assessments as the fire and rescue service is part of the critical national response to all manner of major incidents and potential disasters.

The FRS has made significant strides to be more efficient in order to minimise the impact of the reductions in government funding, however inevitably the number of firefighters and appliances is reducing which reduces the capacity to deal with risks. Government must continue to assure itself that the impact of its funding reductions and other significant financial pressures has not compromised the capacity and ability to respond to risk both locally and more particularly nationally.

The Government does provide a number of specific assets and specialist vehicles that are strategically located around the country as part of its national resilience planning. These resources are currently funded by specific grant. These assets need to continue to be funded by central Government, and directed to the lead FRAs.

**Proposal: £114 million capital investment**

Fire Authorities’ capital investment is for the main part in the following key areas: fire stations build, refurbishment and maintenance; fire appliances purchase, ICT equipment, specialist operational equipment and personal protective equipment.

Expenditure is on the maintenance and replacement of standard assets that are required to deliver the essential service.  he need for such investment is clearly demonstrated in the tables below which estimates the required annual investment in fire stations and appliances just to ‘stand still’.

An estimated annual investment of a minimum £114 million is required in firestations and appliances alone in order to maintain the current infrastructure in England. There is significant evidence already of a backlog in asset investment with many fire stations in poor condition and an ageing vehicle infrastructure. This may impact upon firefighter and community safety.

The Government’s funding stream from 2011/12 to 2014/15 of £70 million per annum is the only departmental expenditure to fire and rescue services as capital grant. This is now the only capital funding stream for fire and rescue authorities to maintain core assets such as fire appliances and fire stations and to meet their statutory requirements in terms of building and equipment safety and compliance.

**Proposal: Reduce stamp duty on properties with sprinklers**

Current English law does not require sprinklers to be fitted in all but the largest and most at risk commercial premises. Despite the fact that sprinklers are proven to work to protect life and property, few business owners or construction companies who build commercial premises choose to fit sprinklers.

While total fires are reducing, the cost and impact of fires on businesses is actually growing. BRE estimates the cost of commercial fires at around £1.29 billion a year[[26]](#footnote-26), and the growth in insurance claims as a result of fire as 12 per cent between 2006 and 2008[[27]](#footnote-27). The CEBR, in a January 2014 report, estimated that preventable fires within warehouses alone had cost £1 billion and 5,000 jobs over five years, with a loss of £160 million in government tax income[[28]](#footnote-28). All of this is before taking into account the wider disruption to a local area caused by large commercial fires and the impact upon the environment, both locally and generally. If all warehouse premises were fitted with sprinklers, the BRE estimates possible savings of between £59 million and £211 million per year[[29]](#footnote-29).

CFOA has set out a clear and comprehensive case for sprinklers in the Business Case for Sprinklers document, including in commercial settings[[30]](#footnote-30).

One reason that sprinklers are not fitted is the perceived cost to business of fitting and maintaining the systems. Furthermore, sprinklers are often most effectively and cheaply fitted during the initial construction or renovation of a building, while the potential savings (in terms of reduced fire damage and business losses) are only felt in the long term. Those building commercial premises often have little incentive to fit sprinklers if they intend to sell them on.

We believe the government should incentivise the fitting of sprinklers through the tax system, in order to safeguard businesses for the long term and protect workers and the environment.

**Proposal: Give FRAs access to a share of the assets recovered from cannabis farms criminals**

Cannabis farms can represent a real danger to the public, dangerous electrics, booby traps and unsafe changes to the building can all put the public and firefighters at risk.

A total of 7,865 cannabis farms were identified in 2011/12 compared to 6,866 in 2009/10, which is an increase of 15 per cent from 2010/11. These farms often include equipment needing large amounts of energy such as lamps and heaters, which is sourced from illegally bypassing electricity meters. Wiring, cabling and plugs were identified as sources of ignition in around 7,000 fires meaning that a large number of these farms are a significant fire risk. These unsafe electrics may also be close to water pipes and other irrigation systems for the crop making it highly unsafe for any other residents in the building. The danger to firefighter safety when a fire is detected is very real.

These farms have a significant cost with the illegal sourcing of energy alone costing the public £70 million a year[[31]](#footnote-31). Between 2010 and 2012 police have seized over a million plants with an estimated value of £207 million[[32]](#footnote-32). This is clearly big business and consumes resources from a number of different local agencies, including fire and rescue services.

The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is an important mechanism to ensure that criminals do not enjoy the benefits of their criminal behaviour. FRAs should have access to a share of the assets recovered from offenders who have been prosecuted for crimes related to growing cannabis (as well as a range of other crimes including arson).

Under the Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme operated by the Home Office, local communities only currently receive a maximum of 50 per cent of what is recovered from criminals who have been operating in their area. In 2012 – 13 the National Audit Office stated that £133 million had been confiscated from criminals equating to £66 million for local areas. This local money is then divided between the investigating authority (eg police, local authorities etc), the prosecuting body (eg the Crown Prosecution Service) and the courts service.

We believe that more of this money should be returned to local areas. Fire and Rescue Authorities should also have access to a share of the assets recovered from offenders to help them recover costs for fighting these dangerous fires and to put towards further prevention activity. There are approximately 125 of these fires across the UK each year[[33]](#footnote-33) costing approximately £3,186 to attend each one at a cost of nearly £400,000 overall[[34]](#footnote-34). Recovering approximately 0.6 per cent of the £66 million returned to local areas would help to cover the costs of attending these fires and allow further prevention work about knowing the signs of a cannabis farm, identifying farms early before the public are put at any further risk.

**Proposal: Fire Kills campaign will be expanded to contain new core messages around cigarettes, cooking and alcohol**

The national smoke alarm campaign was originally started in 1988, and re-branded as Fire Kills in 1999. It has now been running for 26 years. At the start of the campaign the focus was on promoting the installation of smoke alarms within the home. Smoke alarm ownership has now increased to 92 per cent of households in 2014 in comparison to 9 per cent[[35]](#footnote-35) in 1987.

In 2003 the campaign shifted its focus from the installation of smoke alarms to their maintenance. This new direction was chosen following concerns that a number of people who owned smoke alarms did not test them regularly. In 2011-12 the campaign concentrated around two campaign blasts when the clocks change in March and October, and in 2013/14 the slogan ‘Tick, tock, test’ was used for the first time.

Analysis in 2009 estimated that 4 – 10 lives were saved per campaign blast, with 6 blasts of advertising each year costing approximately £1 million each. Since 2009 the cost of the Fire Kills campaign has reduced to £898,000 in 2010-11 and £980,000 in 2011-12. The campaign had a budget of £1 million in 2012/13.

To evaluate the campaign in 2014/14 1,750 people were surveyed: they found the impact of the clock change message led to 12 per cent of people testing their smoke alarm over the October 2013 clock change weekend, and 14 per cent in March 2014.

The campaign is very much a partnership between central Government and local FRAs and the national work has been run against a backdrop of community safety campaigns and initiatives run at a local level by FRAs. Approximately 600,000 personnel hours were spent on community fire safety campaigns and initiatives in 2013 – 2014 and 672,019 home fire safety checks were carried out. Legislation was also introduced in 1991 which required the fitting of smoke alarms to all new residences.

All of this work has contributed to a significant reduction in fire deaths, although the rate of decline has slowed.

Instead of the focus being solely on identifying when a fire has already started in the home (especially since in 19 per cent of fires a smoke alarm was present but did not go off) a larger number of people could be saved by the Fire Kills Campaign if it is expanded to include other core messages about the causes of fire so that fires are prevented from happening in the first place.

The fire statistics for 2012 - 13 show that the main source of ignition in accidental dwelling fires was the misuse of cooking appliances, which caused 52 per cent of fires. Whilst the main cause of fire fatalities in the home was attributed to cigarettes which caused a third of all accidental fire fatalities and 6 per cent of fires in 2012 – 13, these sorts of fires have also been linked in the past to alcohol consumption[[36]](#footnote-36). In 2011/12 alcohol or drug use was found to be a contributory factor in 8 per cent of fires, 41 fatalities, and 1,208 injuries from 2,483 accidental dwelling fires[[37]](#footnote-37).

A national campaign targeted at these interlinked causes of fires and fire fatalities could therefore have an impact on 58 per cent of all fires, as well as helping to prevent the 120 deaths and the 4,805 non-fatal causalities caused by these fires in 2012 – 13[[38]](#footnote-38).

Whilst the national campaign supports local activity through themed fire safety months, and publicises particular safety weeks, we feel a national campaign reinforcing local activity around the causes of fire would be a powerful tool.

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