

Fire and Rescue Service: An overview

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report sets out the first annual stock take of the Fire and Rescue Service using a range of data and information covering: service performance; customer satisfaction; operational arrangements; equalities; fire fighter safety and finance.

The report draws on a range of publicly available quantitative data. The indicators that are included provide a snapshot of the sector. As with all indicators they measure different aspects and need to be combined with softer intelligence to give an overall picture.

The report has been prepared in consultation with the CFOA.

Recommendations

Members are asked to consider the findings in the report and agree that:

- they provide FSMC with the reassurance that the fire and rescue service is delivering a good service to communities;
- FSMC can offer reassurance to the Improvement and Innovation Board on the effectiveness of the sector;
- the findings can usefully inform the development of the OpA and peer challenge and the wider improvement agenda; and
- the findings can be used to inform the future development of the LGA's Fire Leadership Academy.

Action

Officers will take action as directed.

Contact officer: Eamon Lally
Position: Senior Adviser
Phone no: 020 7664 3132/07799768570
Email: eamon.lally@local.gov.uk

Fire and Rescue Service: An overview

Background

1. The Protocol on Government Intervention action on FRAs in England recognises the role of the Fire and Rescue sector in maintaining an overview of performance in the sector and offering preventative support. It indicates a primary role for the LGA in maintaining an overview of performance in the sector so that preventative improvement support can be provided and the need for intervention alleviated. This echoes arrangements in place for the wider local government sector.
2. The role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of the performance of the sector in order to identify potential performance challenges and opportunities – and to provide tools and support to help councils take advantage of this new approach.
3. As a result of new governance arrangements, the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board oversees LGA activity relating to the support of local authorities in improving their performance. The objectives of this Board include, challenging poor performance in local authorities and supporting poor performers to improve. The LGA has worked closely with the Chief Fire Officers Association to include the fire and rescue sector in this process.

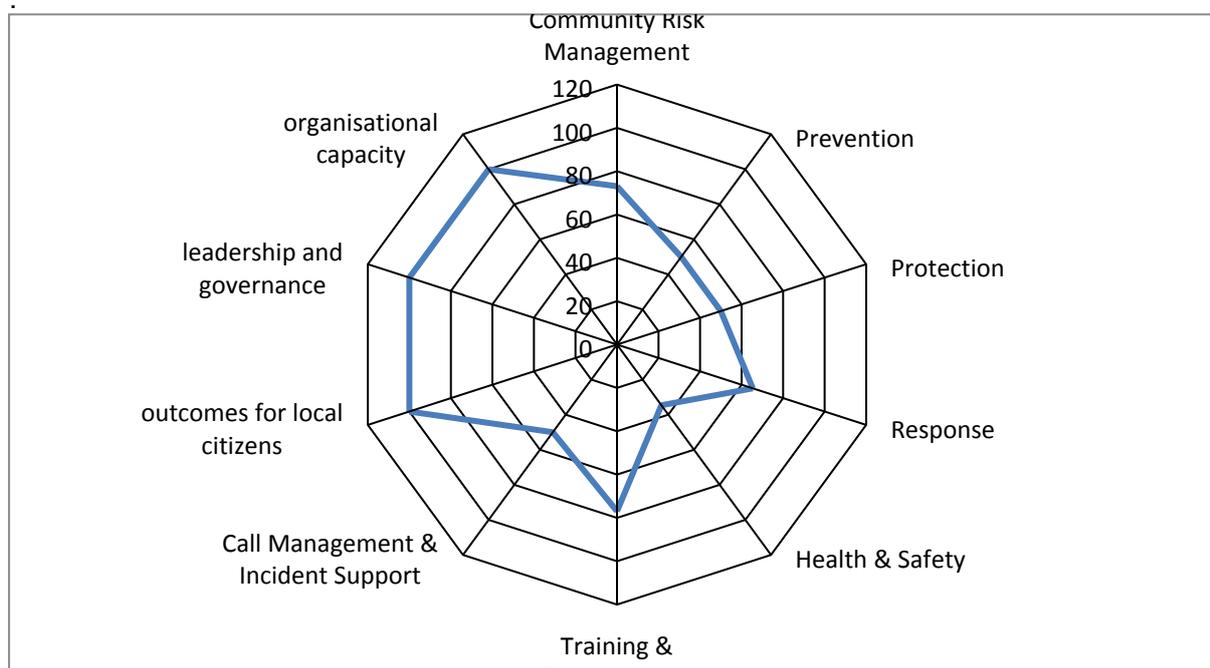
Overview of fire and rescue performance

4. There is a range of measures by which the performance of the fire and rescue service can be assessed. The measures are both quantitative and qualitative and none of them is perfect. This report draws together a range of indicators to provide a general overview of performance. In summary the data and information shows that the sector:
 - 4.1. Continues to be successful in driving down the incidence of fire and in serving a wider community safety agenda;
 - 4.2. Maintains an exceptionally high satisfaction rate amongst users and is held in very high regard by communities;
 - 4.3. Has a strong commitment to health and safety evidenced in the reduction in major injuries to firefighters;
 - 4.4. Has maintained a high level of performance during the 2010 spending review period which has seen a substantial reduction in government funding for fire and rescue services;
 - 4.5. Is embracing the transformation agenda as a means of improving services and making them more efficient; and
 - 4.6. Has made significant progress in reducing the number of false alarms due to equipment.

The focus of peer challenges and emerging issues

5. To date 35 fire and rescue authorities have undertaken OpA and fire peer challenge, with the remaining 11 scheduled for 2014. An analysis of the published reports from fire peer challenges has been undertaken to yield information on the common issues. 27 fire peer challenge reports have been reviewed.
6. Fire peer challenge is a constructive and supportive process with the central aim of helping FRAs/ FRSs improve. They are forward looking and are therefore concerned with the preparedness of fire and rescue authorities to meet upcoming challenges. Each fire peer challenge is worked up with the FRS individually and does not always cover all the Key Areas of Assessment outlined in the Operational Assessment (see **Appendix 2**), but focuses on the specific areas as identified through the outcome of the self-assessment. Some authorities, however, did choose to cover all KAA's. In addition to the KAA's all fire peer challenges look at three strategic areas: leadership and governance, organisational capacity and outcomes for local citizens.

Fig 1. The focus of peer challenges (%)



7. The story that emerges from peer challenge reports is a broadly positive one. The service is characterised by strong professional leadership with a strong community service ethos that underpins the good performance in reducing the number of fires and injuries and deaths from fires. The reports also highlight the range and effectiveness of the broader community safety work.
8. Working with less, managing capacity and the organisations priorities, managing large scale change and the better use of technology and systems are all key challenges for fire and rescue authorities.

9. Fire and Rescue Authorities are working to develop and refine their strategic direction, so that they can manage finances and target resources more effectively. The reports also suggest that Fire and Rescue Authority Members could play an even greater role in developing the strategic direction and take a lead in communicating the consequence and benefits of reform in their communities.
10. The main areas of focus for fire peer challenges delivered to date identify the key priorities of understanding their community risk profile (73%), ensuring their resources are targeted effectively (65%) with the appropriate skills and training in place (77%).
11. Under 40 percent of challenges focused on the issue of health and safety which reflects the high proportion of fire and rescue authorities assessing that they made strong progress in this area of responsibility.
12. It will be important for Fire and Rescue Authorities to continue to develop their processes for measuring and evaluating effectiveness and improving performance. This is an area where a deeper understanding of sector best practice could be valuable.

Service transformation

13. The Knight Review questioned the sustainability of the current model of delivery and challenged the sector to embrace transformation. In practice it seems that Knight was swimming with the tide and that the sector has already begun the process of reform.
14. The LGA, through its membership of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, has taken forward the matter of reviewing pay, terms and conditions for operational staff. The need for such a piece of work was also referred to in the Knight Review. It will incorporate a strategic overview of the future role of such staff in delivering the service of the future and will be cognisant of information that has been provided by fire and rescue services. Furthermore, industrial relations support continues to be provided to fire and rescue services to facilitate change at local level.
15. Future control is one of the current major transformation programmes. 21 partnerships across the sector are set to deliver £129 million in savings. Some of these partnerships include other blue light services, for example Merseyside, where the project combines the control rooms of the fire and rescue service and the police.
16. A number of Fire and Rescue Authorities are considering merger as a route to delivering a more effective and efficient service to communities. For example Dorset FRS and Wiltshire and Swindon FRS are in discussions on merger as are Hereford and Worcester FRS and Warwickshire FRS.
17. Discussions are underway in some areas about the creation of a more strategic alliance between the fire and rescue service and the police. In Northamptonshire for example, the Home Office has awarded £620,000 to help pay for plans to “fully integrate” Northamptonshire Police and the county’s fire and rescue service. Surrey is looking to transform services so that high cost response can be rationalised and prevention and early intervention can be prioritised. With the support of the Public Service Transformation Network the county has set out a programme of work that includes emergency service collaboration, the scope of which potentially extends beyond Surrey, to include Sussex Police and East Sussex and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services.

18. In addition, a number of co-responder arrangements between the fire and rescue service and the ambulance service are in place and are being deepened. Hampshire FRS and South Central Ambulance Service have been working in partnership to deliver a co-responder scheme in the county for a number of years. This partnership has expanded its scope across the county with co-responders now operating from 21 fire stations. In Lincolnshire the co-responder scheme supports the primary emergency medical providers East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) and the Lincolnshire Integrated Voluntary Emergency Service (LIVES). The aim of this partnership is to provide a timely response to Category A medical emergencies throughout the community of Lincolnshire.
19. Fire and Rescue Authorities are also becoming more commercial. At least 10 FRAs have established trading companies. These companies are in a position to provide significant financial benefits to their parent fire and rescue authorities. For example, the total financial benefit of HFR Solutions to Humberside FRS over the two years 2012/13 and 2013/14 is £1.13 million.

National initiatives

Procurement

20. Following publication of the Knight Review, which raised a number of issues about procurement and where there are opportunities to buy more efficiently, a spend analysis report was commissioned by DCLG through PA Consulting and supported by the National Procurement Group and some pilot fire and rescue authorities. The CFOA National Procurement Group has now developed a new draft Procurement Strategy in response to the report and is starting consultation with Chief Fire Officers before finalising the document. The strategy, and its success, will depend on the sector working together to identify future procurement opportunities early on and aggregating demand, approaching the market with clear volume requirements. This will maximise efficiency and achieve value for money.

Data benchmarking and performance: what makes a good fire and rescue service?

21. A new CFOA strategy is being developed which aims to unify the Fire and Rescue Service in its approach to understanding and utilising its own and other agency data with a view to improving the outcomes for communities.
22. The focus will be in five key areas:
- 22.1. Research: Why do fires and other emergencies occur and what are the factors that lead to death, injury or loss, how do we share our successes and innovative thinking across the sector and how do we sharpen our approach based upon accredited thinking?

- 22.2. Social marketing and analysis: Who is most likely to suffer death or injury from these incidents and what are the factors that mean they are most at risk. How do we connect and understand social networks better?
 - 22.3. Data Collection/sharing: What data do we need to collect and share how do we best do that? What data do we need to improve our own effectiveness? Can we take a collective approach to data sets?
 - 22.4. Benchmarking: Which data is best used to determine our effectiveness and success as a sector?
 - 22.5. Fire and Rescue Portal: How do we best present this data back to the sector for their use?
 - 22.6. The strategy will be completed in draft within the next few weeks and LGA/CFOA will be consulting on the issues it raises.
23. **LGIinform** is playing an important role in supporting the sector to understand the data and how to present it effectively.

National operational guidance and Standard Operational Procedures

24. The NOG programme has been successful in taking on the function, previously held by central government, to deliver and maintain guidance for the sector. A project is currently underway to manage the integration of the programmes producing generic standard operating procedures (SOP) (the Collaborative Partnership) with the National Operation Guidance programme (NOG). Bringing these initiatives together makes sense and will lead to greater alignment between the overarching guidance and the practices through which that guidance is implemented.

Finance

25. Fire and rescue authorities have started the 2014/15 financial year, with on average a third less in government funding than they had four years ago. A cut of another 10 per cent is expected for 2015/16.
26. The Knight Review made much of the disparity in expenditure across fire and rescue authorities, implying that further efficiencies could be gained in the sector. Estimates for 2013/14 show that the most expensive fire and rescue authority is around 50 per cent more expensive than the cheapest, see Fig 2. However, as Fig 3 shows there is a very close correlation between fire and rescue service expenditure and the number of incidents attended, which implies a rationale for the expenditure disparity.

Fig 2 Net Expenditure per 1000 population 2013/14 estimate

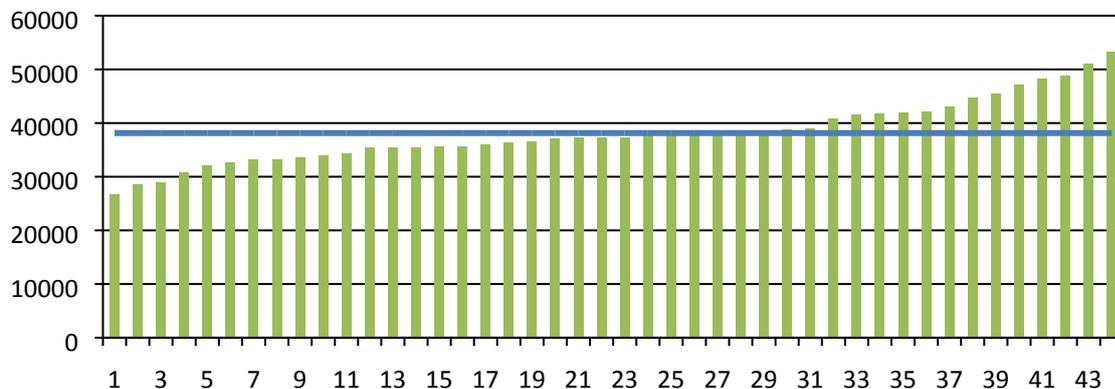
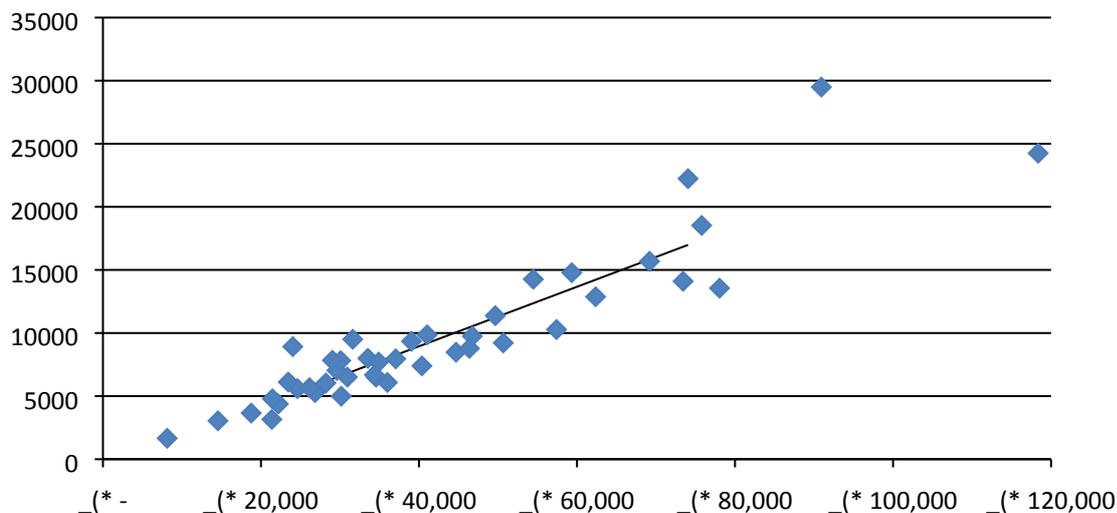


Fig 3 Incidents vs Net Expenditure 2012/13



Conclusions and implications for the sector and CFOA/LGA support

27. From the range of data presented, it is fair to conclude that overall the sector is efficient and effective. However, future challenges are significant as the sector anticipates further funding reductions in the next spending review which will require:

- 27.1. Fire and Rescue Authorities to develop and refine their strategic direction, so that they can manage finances and target resources more effectively;
- 27.2. Fire and Rescue Authority Members to play an even greater role in leading the debate in communities on the consequence and benefits of reform; and
- 27.3. Fire and Rescue Authorities to continue to develop their processes for measuring and evaluating effectiveness and improving performance.

28. The reform agenda will also continue to be challenging as Fire and Rescue Authorities continue to adjust to the changed circumstances in which the service is being delivered. In some quarters mergers are being discussed, but these can be testing and these initiatives are still not widespread. In any event mergers are not a substitute for the difficult decisions on service provision that Fire and Rescue Authorities will need to take.
29. The LGA, working in partnership with CFOA, is taking these issues into consideration in reforming the focus of OpA and fire peer challenge and redefining the content of the fire leadership academies to:
- 29.1. Revise the FRS improvement offer in order to better meet the changing needs of FRS; and
 - 29.2. Assist FRSs to take a broader strategic view on the issues identified via their OpA and fire peer challenge.

Next Steps

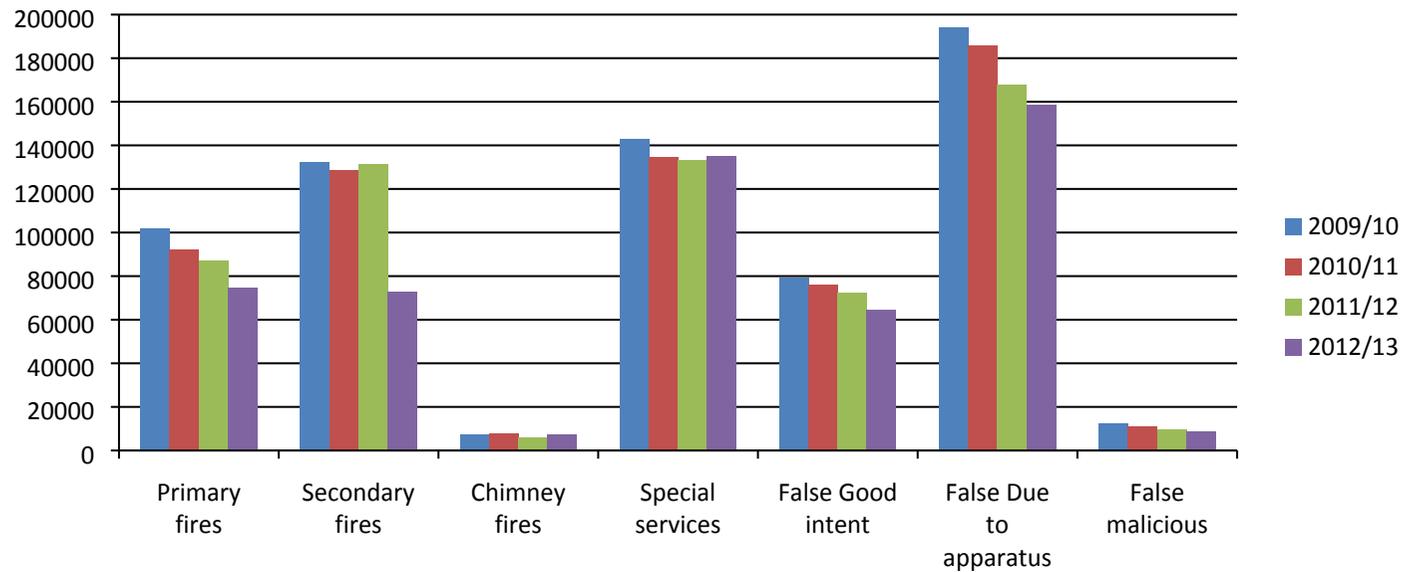
30. Following FSMC deliberation this report will be submitted as amended to the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board in July 2014.

Appendix 1: Fire and Rescue Service Trends

Incidents

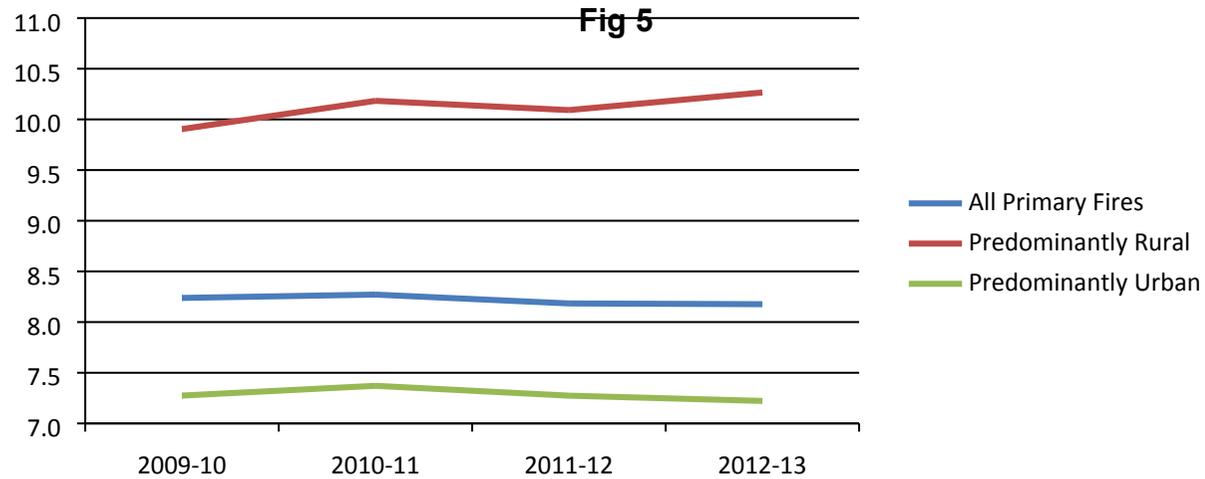
The total number of incidents attended by the fire and rescue service in England has declined from 669,000 in 2009/10 to 521,000 in 2012/13. This is a fall of 22 per cent. See Fig 3. Incidents have fallen across all incident types. Primary fires declined by 26 per cent and false alarms due to equipment by 18 per cent in the period between 2009/10 and 2012/13. Special service incidents which include RTCs have also fallen over this period. See Fig 4.

Fig 4 Incidents by Type



Response Times

Response times have remained fairly constant in the period 2009/10 to 2012/13. Response times are longer on average in rural areas and there is an indication that response times in rural areas are on the increase, see Fig 5.

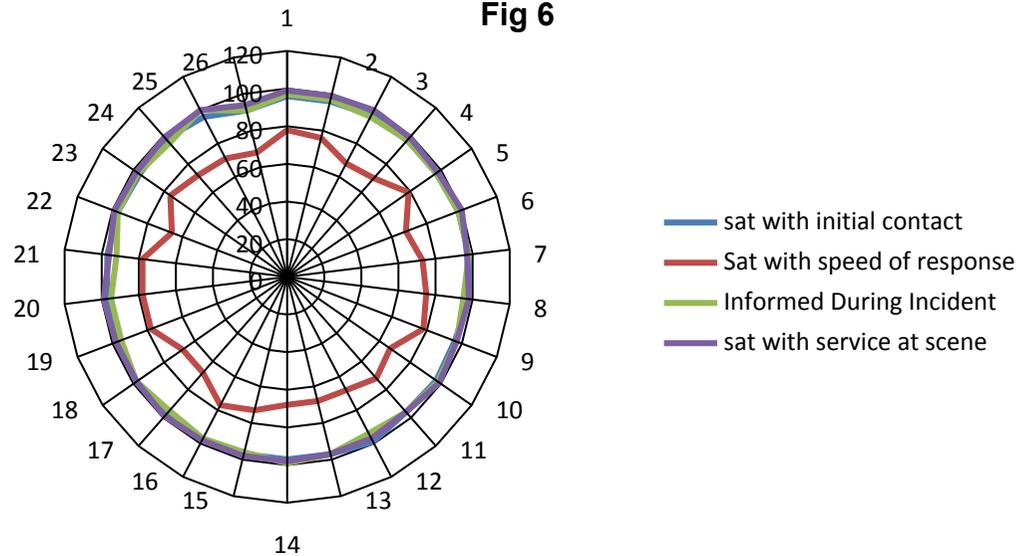


Customer satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction in the fire service is very high. Satisfaction levels for 26 authorities are set out in Fig 6. Satisfaction with the 'initial contact', 'the service at the scene' and 'the information received at the incident' are over 95 per cent. Satisfaction with the speed of response drops to under 80 per cent, but this is still very high, see Fig 6.

In comparison the percentage of victims satisfied with the overall service provided by the police in England and wales ranges from 84.8% to 85.2%.

Fig 6



Staffing

The overall number of staff employed in the fire service has declined from 51,835 in 2008 to 47,337 in 2013. The majority of that decline has been in the numbers of wholetime staff which have fallen from 30,580 to 27,209 (- 11 per cent). The number of retained staff has increased between 2008 and 2011, but since then the numbers have declined to 11,335 around 4% lower than the 2008 level. Non-uniformed staff have declined by 6 per cent between 2008 and 2013, see Fig 7.

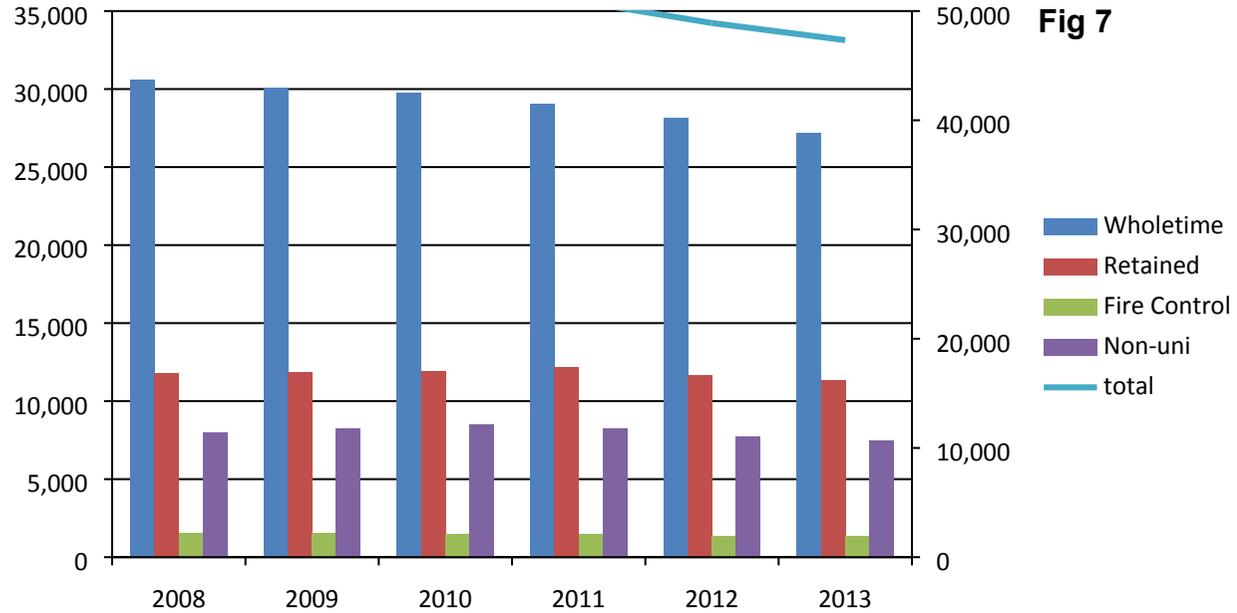
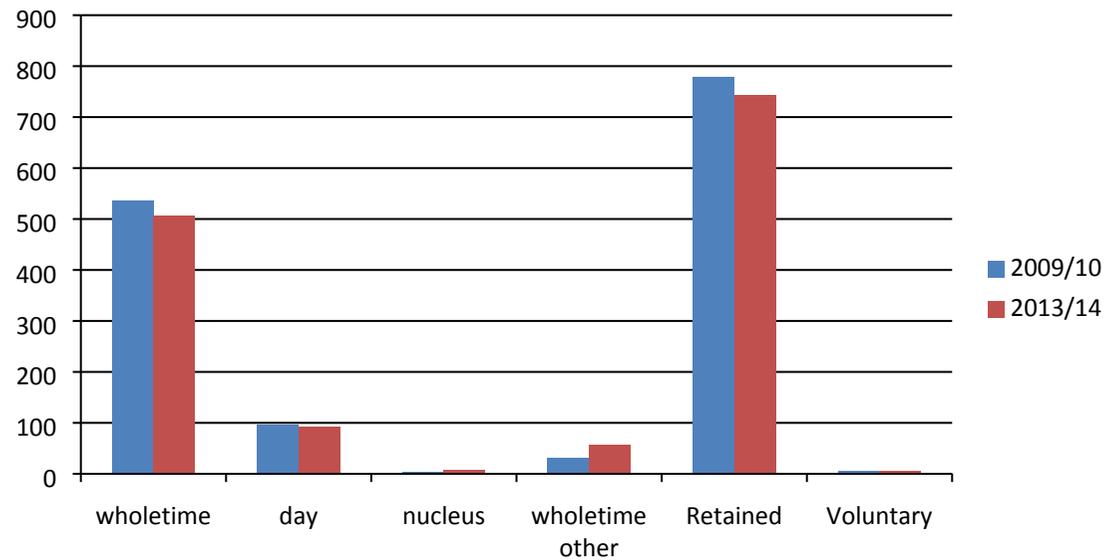


Fig 7

Fire Stations by Crewing

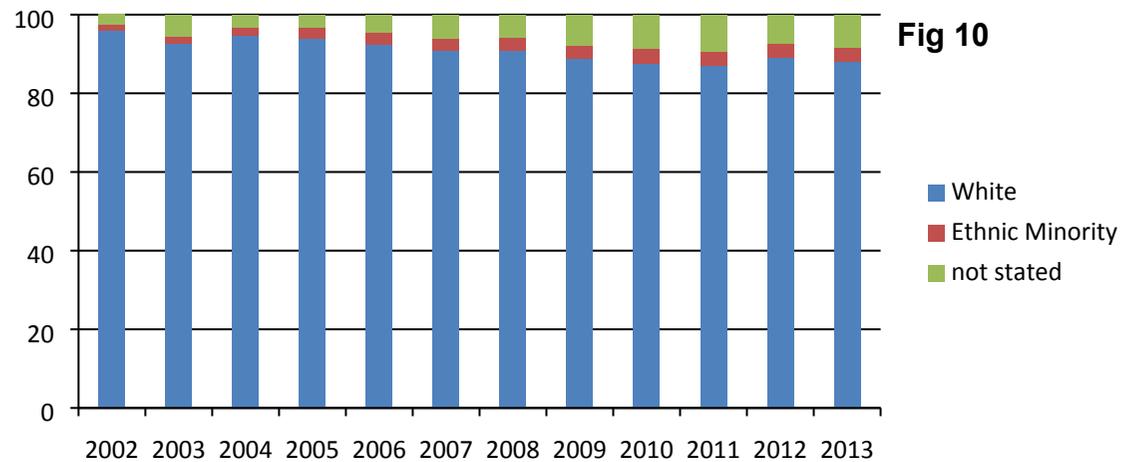
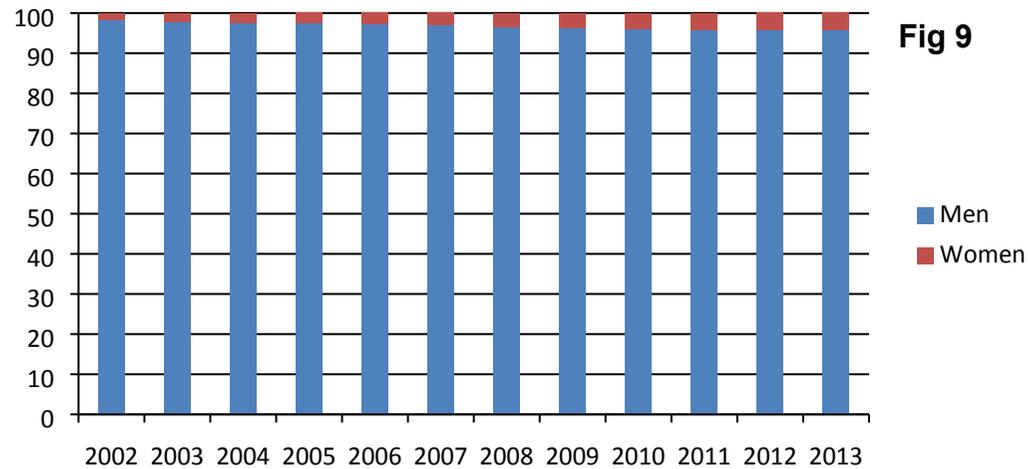
There has been a loss of around 40 fire stations between 2009/10 and 2013/14 and this is reflected across both wholetime and retained stations. Reforms to crewing arrangements are reflected in the increase in the 'wholetime other' category of stations. See Fig 8.

Fig 8 Fire stations by Crewing



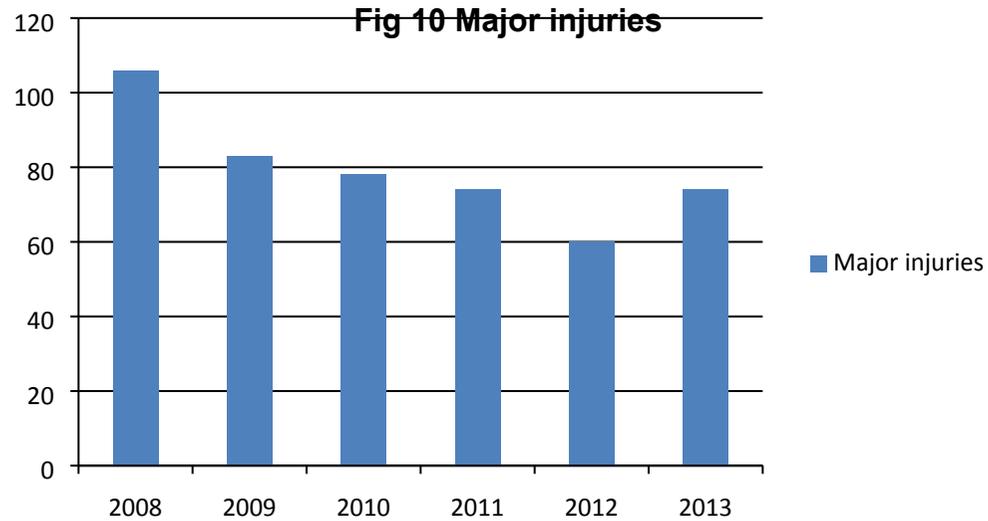
Equality and Diversity

The composition of the work force has not changed substantially either in terms of gender or ethnicity (Fig 9 and Fig 10). This reflects the low level of recruitment in recent years. Data on the distribution of women and firefighters from ethnic minority groups across the service grades is not readily available.



Health and Safety

The emphasis on firefighter safety is borne out in the reductions in major injuries that has been achieved by the sector. Major injuries have fallen by 30 per cent between 2008 and 2013, see Fig 11. However, the upturn in 2013, must serve to ensure that the sector continues to focus on this area.



Appendix 2: OpA self-assessment questions

1 Community Risk Management	
How well is the Authority identifying and prioritising the risks faced by the community?	
1.1	Does the FRA have an effective risk strategy that reflects the diverse nature of the community, and identifies and prioritises those most at risk through its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)?
1.2	Does the FRA use the outcomes of its risk analysis effectively and efficiently to plan and successfully implement and deliver prevention, protection, call management and incident support, response, health, safety, training and development activities within its IRMP?
1.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and improving performance of its risk analysis process?
2 Prevention	
How well is the Authority delivering its Community Safety Strategy?	
2.1	Has the FRA clearly defined, planned and implemented a Prevention strategy linked to its IRMP?
2.2	Does the FRA effectively engage partners and stakeholders in its Prevention activities?
2.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and improving performance of its Prevention activities?
3 Protection	
How well is the Authority delivering its Regulatory Fire Safety Strategy?	
3.1	Has the FRA clearly defined, planned and implemented a regulatory fire safety strategy linked to its IRMP?
3.2	Does the FRA engage partners and stakeholders effectively in its protection activities?
3.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and improving performance of its protection activities?
4 Response	
How well is the Authority delivering its response activities?	
4.1	Has the FRA clearly defined, planned and implemented a response strategy linked to its IRMP?
4.2	Does the FRA engage partners and stakeholders effectively in its response activities?
4.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and improving performance of its response activities?

5 Health and Safety	
How well is the Authority ensuring its responsibilities for health, safety and welfare are met?	
5.1	Does the FRA have clearly defined and effective arrangements to take account of its Health, Safety and Welfare responsibilities?
5.2	Do effective management structures and arrangements exist within the FRA to support the development and implementation of Health, Safety and Welfare?
5.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness, and improving performance of its health, safety and welfare activities?
6 Training and Development	
How well is the Authority ensuring its responsibilities for training, development and assessment of its staff are met?	
6.1	Does the FRS have clearly defined and effective policies to take into account of its training, development and assessment responsibilities?
6.2	Do effective management structures and arrangements exist within the FRA to support the development and implementation of training, development and assessment activities?
6.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and improving the performance of its training & development activities?
7 Call Management	
How well is the FRA delivering its call management and incident support activities?	
7.1	How well is the Authority delivering its call management and incident support activities?
7.2	Does the FRA have in place effective arrangements for delivering the call management and incident support activities?
7.3	Does the FRA have a robust process for evaluating the effectiveness, and improving performance of its call management and incident support activities?