Facing the challenge: review of FRS response to summer floods

In his report, ‘Facing the challenge’, Sir Ken Knight, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, praises the fire and rescue service for their dedication and professionalism in dealing with severe challenges during the floods last summer, and for their role in protecting lives, infrastructure and property.

The report, published on 17 March, examines a number of key issues including:
- FRS command and control
- the national capability to respond to major floods
- equipment and training
- health and safety
- effective use of flood risk information
- the national co-ordination of FRS assets, like high volume pumps
- the role of Category 2 responders, including utility companies, in emergencies.

Professional response
Sir Ken Knight said: "My review shows that there was a magnificent response by the Fire and Rescue Service’s firefighters, control room and support staff. Firefighters responded with their renowned professionalism and complete dedication to the challenges faced in very difficult conditions. The national coordination of the high volume pumps across the country worked well, helping to protect infrastructure and homes. However, it is clear that improvements can be made and lessons learned."

Control and communications
One of the critical issues faced by the FRS was the difficulty of dealing with the high number of calls from the public, especially during periods of peak demand. The review findings underpin the rationale for the FiReControl project, and conclude that a number of the difficulties experienced in the current disparate fire control arrangements will be overcome through the proposed network of regional control centres.

Key findings
Sir Ken’s review does not propose any flood rescue duty on the FRS or any other body, but identifies the key issue as one of resource provision, including personal protective equipment, boats, pumps and training, to facilitate the delivery of an effective national interoperable response by the FRS and other agencies.

His report also recommends the sharing of information on flood planning and weather risks. Utilities providers, such as gas and electricity, should consistently take part in coordination arrangements for emergency response. Common standards of training for inland water rescue operations should be considered by the Skills Council.

Next steps
Sir Ken’s recommendations will feed into the wider review of the flooding emergency by Sir Michael Pitt, which will be published in summer 2008. ‘Facing the challenge’, Sir Ken Knight’s review, is at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/floodingreview

photo: West Midlands FRS
Enhanced Command Support from New Dimension

The roll-out of New Dimension equipment and vehicles is now almost complete, with just the Enhanced Command Support capability to deliver, expected over the next few months.

Enhanced Command Support vehicles
Nine Enhanced Command Support (ECS) vehicles have now been procured by the New Dimension programme. This is the final stage of capital investment in the command and control capability. The new ECS vehicles are similar to the basic DIM (Detection, Investigation and Monitoring) vehicles, but are fitted out with resilient communications equipment. Telephone systems will be installed, together with satellite equipment and radio systems, including those which meet the requirements of Firelink, the new national wide-area radio system for the FRS.

Emergency role
During a serious emergency, when significant FRS resources are mobilised, ECS vehicles can deploy to strategic holding areas, supporting the incident commander and the national response by providing a resilient ECS function. The systems and operating procedures will provide all the facilities necessary to support the management of large scale emergency operations.

The ECS capability function was successfully exercised during Exercise Orpheus, held at the Fire Service College in March.

Crewing
Funding is being provided to the Fire and Rescue Authorities hosting the ECS capability, to cover the costs of initial and continuation training for the crews of the nine ECS vehicles. The nine host fire and rescue services will provide a 24/7 response capability, with the ability to sustain a response for seven days at any location.

Long term capability management
Attention is now focussed on embedding the New Dimension capabilities within the FRS through the Long Term Capability Management (LTCM) project. This includes the transfer of New Dimension assets to individual fire and rescue services, and the procurement of a 16-year maintenance contract to maintain the assets in line with interoperability and national resilience requirements.

Welcome to FRS 27

In this issue, FRS looks at the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser’s review of the Service’s role during the floods last summer, reports on the Spirit of Fire Awards and looks forward to the World Firefighter Games to be held in Liverpool in August.

Thank you to all who replied to the FRS readership survey. The winning entry is from Dave Williams, a retained firefighter from Oak Hill fire station in Dawlish in Devon. He will receive the £30 Marks and Spencer voucher.

If you have any initiatives, or good news to share with the whole of the fire and rescue service, please email us at frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk. The online version of FRS at www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk provides access to previous issues of FRS News, circulars, and more news.
Firelink vehicle fit out

The first Fire and Rescue Authorities to operate the new Firelink wide-area radio system will be Wiltshire and Devon.

However, the first region to become fully operational on Firelink will be Tyne and Wear. Telent, the Airwave contractor, recently fitted out five fire vehicles in Tyne and Wear FRS with Firelink equipment. This will allow Tyne and Wear FRS to check radio coverage in their own area.

Firelink is a critical enabler for the FiReControl project, providing the radio systems for the regional control centres, appliances and officers’ cars.

More information on the Firelink project is at: www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk/resilience

New FiReControl web pages go live

The FiReControl website has been updated and now sits on the Communities and Local Government website, with Firelink and New Dimension, as part of the Government’s Fire and Resilience Programme.

The new web pages contain background information on the FiReControl project and how it will work, a section on staff, information on each of the nine regions where the Regional Control Centres will be based, details surrounding the implementation of FiReControl and a comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions guide.

The new pages are at: www.communities.gov.uk/firecontrol

Please email any comments on the FiReControl web pages to: gayle.springett@communities.gsi.gov.uk
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service will host the 10th World Firefighters Games in Liverpool this summer. Merseyside won the bid to host the 2008 Games – which are part of Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture celebrations - against strong competition from Dubai and Northern Ireland.

International line-up
Up to 5,000 competitors from over 40 nations are expected during the ten days of the Games, between 24 August and 2 September. Registrations have already been received from Algeria, Brazil, New Zealand, France, Austria, Germany, South Africa, Sweden, Holland, Thailand, Finland, Isle of Man, Hungary, Netherlands, Venezuela and Spain – as well as from firefighters in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Sporting events
The competitions include everything from football, triathlon, snowboarding and boxing to chess, poker, table tennis and fishing. There are gender, age and ability categories, with individual and team games at every level. Merseyside FRS are encouraging people with disabilities to participate.

The Games Village will be the new Liverpool Echo Arena on the city’s famous waterfront. Sporting events will be held mainly in and around Liverpool city centre, with some venues in North Wales, Manchester and Derbyshire.

Who can compete?
Firefighters, serving and retired, and their immediate family members are eligible to compete in the Games. As well as local authority firefighters, representatives from industrial and commercial fire services, and from civil aviation, military and volunteer fire services are welcome to compete and enjoy the varied social programme.

Toughest Firefighter Alive
A highlight of the Games will be the Toughest Firefighter Alive (TFA) competition, the ultimate test of a firefighter’s strength, fitness and stamina. This will be contested over four days on St George’s Plateau, against the historic backdrop of St George’s Hall.

The TFA course is split into four timed sections, each with skill-testing and endurance elements. These include dragging and rolling up hoses, carrying a weight through a tunnel, carrying a dummy, climbing a wall, pitching ladders, and carrying a weight up and down stairs. The final section will be a challenging stair-climb, wearing breathing apparatus, up the 600 steps of Radio City Tower.
Iron Dog competition
For the first time in Games’ 20-year history, fire service dogs are eligible to take part in the Games. Firefighters with pet dogs are also welcome to enter. The competition includes an agility event, cross-country challenge and a casualty water rescue to showcase canine skills.

Accommodation
In addition to hotel beds, budget accommodation will be available in student halls of residence on university campuses in Liverpool city centre and the surrounding suburbs, which have good transport links into the city.

Social programme
The social programme for the Games includes:
- An ‘Olympic-style’ opening ceremony at the Games Village, with a competitors’ parade in the city centre, on Bank Holiday Monday, August 25
- A welcome gala dinner
- ‘Next host’ night with South Korea
- A ‘final goodbye’ gala dinner to officially close the Games

In addition to the sporting activities, features of the 2008 Games include:
- A community engagement scheme
- A volunteer programme
- A global photography competition
- The World Firefighters Games Charity Fund

Open invitation
Dave Robinson, General Manager of the Games, said: “We extend an open invite to all our Fire Service colleagues, both uniformed and non-uniformed, to come to Liverpool and take part in the World Firefighters Games 2008. It is our intention to make this the most successful Games ever, but we need your support to make this happen”.

“We have a very exciting sporting and social programme lined up for you, and can definitely promise you 10 days to remember.”

For a full events programme for the World Firefighters Games 2008 and online registration facilities, see: www.wfg08.com
Sharing information on the Incident Recording System

Representatives from 45 fire and rescue services, and software suppliers, shared information on the practical and technical aspects of the change to the new Incident Recording System (IRS) at a seminar held in Warwick.

As the first FRS to submit their incident data to Communities and Local Government via the IRS, Warwickshire shared their experiences, successes and lessons learned.

The IRS will enable data on incidents attended by the FRS to be collected electronically, improving on the timeliness and accuracy of the current, largely manual, collection methods.

If you would like to attend an IRS Seminar in Autumn 2008, to hear the experiences of those FRSs who have gone live, please email: firestatsprojectoffice@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The deadline for the switch to the IRS is 31 March 2009.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fire Service College learning goes online

The Fire Service College has launched FireLearn, a new e-learning system which allows College students to manage, monitor and conduct their own learning and development online.

Through FireLearn, users with an internet connection can access their learning records, materials and assessments at any time. This increased flexibility fits well with family friendly policies introduced by fire and rescue services.

FireLearn provides users with a personalised webpage to view their own learning records and materials, and interact with colleagues and course tutors at the Fire Service College.

More information on FireLearn is at: https://firelearn.fireservicecollege.ac.uk or contact: nthompson@fireservicecollege.ac.uk
NEWS IN BRIEF

Making the difference - national conference will launch FRS Equality and Diversity Strategy

The FRS Equality and Diversity Strategy, to be backed by the new National Framework, will be launched at a conference hosted by Communities and Local Government on 28 May, at the QEII Conference Centre in London. This national event will also see the presentation of the 2008 Equality and Diversity Awards to the winners by Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda.

The Conference will focus on the key themes of leadership and accountability and will give senior managers, Authority members, HR and equalities managers the opportunity to discuss what the Strategy will mean for the Service over the next ten years as employers and service providers.

The Conference will be hosted by Dermot Murnaghan, presenter of ‘Britain’s Bravest’. Speakers will include Parmjit Dhanda MP, Charlie Hendry (CFOA), Les Byrom (LGA), John McGhee (FBU) and Judy Foster (Unison).

For more information about the Conference please contact: mona.shah@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Top 100 employers

West Yorkshire FRA and London Fire Brigade have made it into Stonewall’s prestigious ‘top 100’ employers in Britain for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Stonewall works with a range of organisations to promote equality and encourage a more open and supportive workplace.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Alan Hughes from West Yorkshire said:

“I’m delighted that we’re seen as a gay-friendly employer because it is estimated that nearly two million people in the UK workforce unfortunately still feel fearful or unable to be open about their sexual orientation.”

London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson said: “We know that the more diverse our organisation is, the better we’ll serve Londoners and hope this successful result will show many more of London’s gay, lesbian or bisexual residents that London Fire Brigade is a workplace that will suit them.”
Simply the best – the Spirit of Fire Awards

The ‘Spirit of Fire’ Awards celebrate bravery and dedication in the fire service community. The Awards are run by the Fire Fighters Charity - the new name for the Fire Service National Benevolent Fund – which supports injured fire fighters and burns victims.

At a ceremony held on 15 March at Wembley Stadium, ten Awards were presented in recognition of both fire service and charitable achievements.

Fire Station of the Year
The winner in the ‘Charity Station of the Year’ category was Colchester Fire Station – for performing their rescue duties with outstanding dedication, and supporting the fire service community through charity fundraising.

Colchester’s charity achievements over the past year include the marathon efforts of fire-fighter John Hibberd, who raised £8,500 by running in the gruelling ‘Marathon des Sables,’ a six-day endurance race on foot across the Sahara Desert.

In the past 26 years Colchester Fire Station has raised £210,000 for the firefighters’ charity through its popular Fireswim – a sponsored 24 hour swimathon.

Downing Street reception
Colchester Station Commander ADO Danny Fearn, attended a special reception held at 10 Downing Street before the Spirit of Fire Award ceremony. He said: “It was a great honour and privilege to represent the Station at the reception and have the chance to meet the Prime Minister. I informed the PM of the outstanding commitment all of the personnel at Colchester Fire Station put into rescue, community and charitable work each year.”

Basildon Fire Station, also part of Essex County FRS, was one of the three other nominees for the Fire Station of the Year Award.

England’s bravest fire fighter
The award for ‘England’s bravest fire fighter’ was won by Khalid Obadele of London Fire Brigade, who showed outstanding courage in rescuing a suicidal man, who tried to jump into the Thames from the Millennium Bridge last year.

Information on the other Spirit of Fire Award winners is at: www.firefighterscharity.org.uk