Developing our people

Many people in the Service now have access to one of the most up-to-date personal development processes available in any industry. The stage is set for the next, exciting phase in the story of workforce development in the fire and rescue service (FRS). On 14th March 2006 at the Local Government Association (LGA) Fire Conference, Jim Fitzpatrick invited the LGA and the Chief Fire Officers Association to work with the government to develop detailed proposals for a national centre of excellence (COE) to support improvement and modernisation in the Service in line with the National Framework. A COE is therefore being developed and within it, under the banner of an Organisational Development Centre, a Workforce Development Unit has been established. Here’s just a taster of what the Unit is already working on:

- Central responsibility for the stewardship of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) now rests in the hands of an IPDS team, led and directed by the FRS and funded by the DCLG. This team is reviewing the components of IPDS and actively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the embedding of IPDS within the Service carries on apace.
- As part of ongoing IPDS stewardship, a National Assessment Development Centre team is being formed in response to last year’s national consultation. It will manage, maintain and develop all the ADC processes, including the National Firefighter Selection Tests.
- With the Learning and Development Strategy, a Quality Assurance project is developing a QA framework that the FRS can use to help ensure a nationally consistent, high-quality approach to all aspects of workforce development.
- A further project will develop a Qualifications Framework that will provide guidance on access to the qualifications that are available to people as they undertake role-related learning and development. The FRS is forging ahead with improvements that benefit the communities it serves. This is being achieved through its greatest asset—its people. The Workforce Development Unit within the new Organisational Development Centre is there to help the FRS make the most of the great work that’s already been done.

Further copies of this newsletter are available from:
frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk

The Future of the Fire and Rescue Service: June/July 2006

FiReControl and Firelink
— progress through partnership

The FiReControl and Firelink projects continue to take shape. Planning consent has been received for all the new regional control centres outside London, and building work has commenced in the North East at Durham (pictured), in the East Midlands at Castle Donington, and in the South West at Taunton.

A contract has been awarded to O2 Airwave for the Firelink digital radio communication system, which is critical to the delivery of the FiReControl project.

As well as moving forward with contracts and construction, progress in building new levels of community protection also depends on working in partnership with key stakeholders.

For the FiReControl project this means day-to-day contact with regional managers, business change and project teams, regular meetings with senior users, a sounding board and joint working groups to deal with operational, technical, legal, financial and human resource priorities.

Over the next few months, regional seminars are being arranged between the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CFOA), Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and fire and rescue authorities to provide the opportunity for elected members and principal officers to discuss a variety of issues relating to FiReControl and Firelink, and to obtain feedback on areas of particular interest and concern, such as the governance of the regional control centres.

Underpinning all the planning and implementation are the professional skills and first-hand knowledge of a wide and diverse range of fire and rescue staff who have extensive experience of control rooms and fire and rescue operations in all their variety. As volunteers or full-time seconded staff, they are playing an essential role in building and developing requirements, and contributing to the design processes for the new control centres.

In recent months, staff from a number of fire and rescue services (FRSs) have worked with CFOA and the national project team on the detailed work to review the requirements of the FiReControl project. Other FRS volunteers have been able to use their particular skills and expertise through involvement in the process of bringing together different ways of working and terminology, developing common or ‘convergence’ approaches. Fire and rescue staff have also undertaken secondments to become involved in testing work to ensure that the technical solutions will meet the demands of a modern, effective and resilient network of control centres for the FRS.

For more information, contact
Ian Evans on 020 7944 5780, or email ian.evans@communities.gsi.gov.uk
How would you test an effective regional response to the following scenario? A light aircraft sprays a white chemical over a crowd of spectators at the Goodwood Motor Racing Circuit. Within a short time, the victims’ reactions range from skin irritation to breathing difficulties and vomiting.

John O’Brien, New Dimension Regional Planner at the Government Office for the South East, spoke to FRS about the background to this scenario, which formed the basis for Exercise CanAm held at Goodwood last October.

Multi-agency exercise
CanAm was planned from the start as a multi-agency exercise, which would test the regional response to a chemical incident, in conjunction with mass decontamination procedures.

Welcome to FRS18
This edition of FRS looks at the increasingly wide range of work that firefighters are doing to save lives in their communities. It includes a look at how two fire and rescue service members have taken to the airwaves, sometimes using poetry and short stories to get a range of fire safety messages to a wider audience. We also explore the work done in fire and rescue services to create positive experiences for young people by working with them in various innovative programmes.

We are always interested in hearing your views and finding out what issues you would like to see covered in future editions. If you have any initiatives or good news that you would like to share with the whole of the fire and rescue service, please email us at frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The key regional players were two fire and rescue services (FRSs) – West Sussex and Hampshire – together with Sussex Police, Sussex Ambulance Service, West Sussex County Council and the Environment Agency. Each partner had a range of individual as well as shared objectives. High on the list of aims for the Environment Agency, for example, was to test the environmental implications of a CBIRN (chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear) incident and the possible disposal options for contaminated waste.

Analyse this
In order to analyse and identify the potential contaminants, officers from both Hampshire FRS and Sussex Police deployed Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) equipment, including HazMat ID. The exercise provided an opportunity to test the protocols for deploying DIM equipment by two blue light services working together at the same incident, and their ability to agree outcomes.

Decontamination
The procedures for decontaminating over 100 people who simulated exposure to a hazardous substance were tested. Twenty of the volunteers acted as non-ambulant contaminated casualties, to be decontaminated by NHS decontamination units.

New Dimension equipment
The mass decontamination equipment, carried on the Incident Response Units (IRUs) used during the exercise, was supplied by the Department for Communities and Local Government’s (DCLG) New Dimension programme. The equipment included decontamination structures for the public and for firefighters, water pumps, water heaters, lights, hoses, disposal and re-robe packs for the public, and gas-tight suits for firefighters. The IRUs also carried a unit for decontaminating personnel from the emergency services.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
DCLG and the Department of Health are jointly developing a new generation of PPE, called Powered Respirator Protective Suits (PRPS), for use by the FRS and the Ambulance Service. The first prototype versions were worn by fire personnel and tested over an extended period of time during the mass decontamination procedures. Learning points included the ability of fire personnel to communicate while wearing PRPS during the decontamination process.

Lessons learned
A number of key lessons were learned from Exercise CanAm. These include the need for an effective system for monitoring the movement of personnel from all agencies in and out of the inner cordon, and the need for specialist CBIRN officers from each blue light service to meet regularly throughout the incident to discuss tactics. Communications with the casualties were enhanced by using a public address system to facilitate effective movement of the public through the shower process. The PRPS suits worn by Hampshire FRS personnel worked well during the mass decontamination process.

Looking ahead
From summer 2006, new DIM equipment and mass decontamination resilience modules, containing additional disposal and re-robe packs and firefighter decontamination structures, will be rolled out across the country.

As New Dimension enters the implementation phase, following delivery of the equipment, the focus of the programme will shift to testing, training and evaluating. Behind the scenes, away from the public eye, exercises such as CanAm play a vital part in maintaining competence and capability, helping to make this new investment a reality.

Exercise timetable

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Testing a regional response at Goodwood

Photo: DCLG
Fire and ambulance service personnel help non-ambulant casualties through the decontamination process.

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Firebuy Ltd, the national fire procurement body, was launched on 30 March 2006.

Firebuy Ltd enables savings to be made by negotiating better deals for buying in bulk and will eliminate the duplication of procurement of fire-specific equipment by individual fire and rescue authorities (FRAs). Rather than all 47 FRAs negotiating separately for service-specific items such as vehicles, protective clothing and respiratory equipment, Firebuy Ltd will negotiate contracts on their behalf and take the lead in subsequent contract monitoring and service-level monitoring. It will be a contracting authority for the purposes of the EU procurement rules, but ultimately it will remain the FRAs who acquire the assets.

Firebuy Ltd can already demonstrate some successes:

• Hand-held portable radios — by using the new framework agreement negotiated by Firebuy, Hereford and Worcester FRA has been able to increase the number of radios provided and still demonstrate a budgetary saving. Their budget allocation was originally for a total of approximately 250 radios (supply only) but they have increased this to 362 (meeting the operational needs of the brigade completely) while saving £12,000 on the budget allocation.

• Smoke alarms — A new smoke alarms framework agreement will generate up to £400,000 in savings. The level of savings depends on how many FRAs buy, but the procurement exercise produced savings of 43p per smoke alarm. FRAs have a target to fit 1.25 million smoke alarms between spring 2006 and spring 2008.

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The Integrated Clothing Project is proceeding well. The Health and Safety Laboratories that have been contracted to assist in the trials are actively looking at incorporating the methodologies employed in the new British Standard on physiological testing for firefighters’ Personal Protective Equipment ensembles.

The board’s first meeting was on 5 April and the members are keen to go out and meet regional management boards, FRAs and chief fire officers as soon as possible to hear their views on procurement issues.

Visit the dedicated Firebuy Ltd website (www.firebuy.gov.uk) for more information about current projects and how to contact them.

Fire safety through the airwaves

Two fire and rescue service members have taken to the airwaves to get out some ‘powerful’ fire safety messages to listeners.

In Shropshire, firefighter Drew Perkins, of Blue Watch at Telford Fire Station, makes regular broadcasts on Telford FM, reaching thousands of listeners in Shropshire, parts of Worcestershire and the neighbouring West Midlands.

Kitchen safety, the dangers of chip pans, cigarettes and carbon monoxide, hoax calls and DIY safety all have featured in Drew’s weekly radio spots, which are broadcast throughout the day.

“It was an idea I had to get important fire safety messages to the public. I contacted the radio station and they were extremely accommodating,” said Drew, a firefighter for nine years, who has previously worked in drug and alcohol counselling.

“I knew it was a fantastic media opportunity to get our community fire safety messages out to people at all times of the day.”

Telford FM newscaster Rob James said: “Many of the fire safety messages, especially the one on hoax calls, are really very powerful and we do get a strong reaction from the public. People are very supportive of what we are doing.”

Meanwhile, in Wirral, Merseyside, Community Fire Safety (CFS) Manager Haydn Lipscombe has also taken to the airwaves to get the fire safety message across.

Haydn broadcast four, weekly one-hour shows on Wirral radio community station, on which were discussed a number of topics to do with fire safety and the local fire brigade. The shows also featured other, less conventional methods of getting the message across, such as short stories and even poetry, written by a local writers’ group.

Haydn said: “I got the idea while attending the Local Regeneration Partnership Forum. With only four of us in the CFS team, we have to make the most of limited resources to get our message across. It was a daunting prospect, not having had any previous experience in radio, but we’ve had a good response and plan to do more shows.”

As luck would have it, one of Haydn’s staff is Older Persons’ Advocate Jan Carr. Before joining Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Jan had worked for a local radio station, and she has been invaluable on this project.

Other features on the shows included adverts for free smoke alarms and features on what a firefighter does and on what your local fire station can do for you, which promote initiatives such as the healthy lifestyle scheme for local kids featured in the last issue of FRS.

Having now been on air for some months, Drew and Haydn hope the programmes have had an impact on the listeners.

To contact Firebuy Ltd, visit the website www.firebuy.gov.uk or call the dedicated Firebuy Ltd website on 020 7215 6888.

Fire and Rescue Service on 01743 260200, visit www.shropshirefire.gov.uk or call publicity co-ordinator Elaine Adams on 01952 505026, or contact Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service on 0151 296 4000, Haydn Lipscombe on 0151 606 5422, or email haydn.lipscombe@merseyfire.gov.uk.

Retaining talent in Shropshire

At a medals ceremony held at Shrewsbury Fire and Rescue HQ and attended by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant, a 62-year-old retired firefighter was given a unique award for his ‘outstanding’ service to the community.

“Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service doesn’t believe in wasting good talent by retiring people just because they have reached a certain age. As long as they are fit, we want their expertise.”

He also praised Mick for his diplomatic, his firmness when difficulties arise, and for being enthusiastic and a ‘very able’ leader with a well-motivated station staff.

Mick, who runs his own radio and TV shop, said: “There are highs and lows in this job but I wouldn’t have changed it for the world. Your everyday job can be a bit mundane sometimes but when that bleeper goes off you just don’t know where or what you are going into. I would recommend it to anybody. It is for someone who enjoys doing something separate from their normal job.”

His wife Sue also received an award, for her ‘long-suffering’ understanding and support through years of abandoned meals, missed children’s parties and family events disturbed by a 999 call.

For more information, contact Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service on 01743 260200, visit www.shropshirefire.gov.uk or call publicly co-ordinator Elaine Adams on 01952 505026.

New department oversees the fire and rescue service – Department for Communities and Local Government

Number 10 Downing Street announced the creation of a new Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on Friday 5th May, under the leadership of Ruth Kelly, a Cabinet Minister.

DCLG will be the successor department to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and will continue to have responsibility for policy in the fire and rescue service. Philip Woolas, appointed as Minister for Fire and Civil Resilience and is supported by Angela Smith, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

It is an expanded department with a powerful new remit to promote community cohesion and equality, as well as responsibility for regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, local government (previously held by the ODPM) and the fire and rescue service.

Mick Howe and Alan Taylor.

Mick Howe is believed to be the first firefighter in the UK to have served for 40 years, and he intends to hang up his helmet later on this year.

Chief Fire Officer Alan Taylor said:

“Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service don’t believe in wasting good talent by retiring people just because they have reached a certain age. As long as they are fit, we want their expertise.” He also praised Mick for his diplomacy, his firmness when difficulties arise, and for being enthusiastic and a ‘very able’ leader with a well motivated station staff.

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Four-legged fire friends

Meet Little Ern, Dudley and Holly. They have been specially trained to react to the sound of a smoke alarm.

Through a unique project being run by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (Merseyside FRS), Little Ern and Dudley will be placed with vulnerable people with mobility problems who live alone.

The dogs have been trained to a high standard so that, if a fire alarm sounds in the home, they will close the door and place a cloth against the bottom of it to stop smoke getting in, activate a Careline alarm and alert the occupant to the emergency.

It is part of an innovative partnership between Merseyside FRS, the Fire Support Network charity and Personal Assistance Dogs, a Sheffield-based organisation. The project has also received a grant of £5,000 from Radio Merseyside Charitable Trust towards the training cost and aftercare of one of the dogs.

The initiative follows research into the types of people who typically die in house fires in Merseyside. Of the 12 people who died in 2002/03, three had recognised mobility problems and were either housebound or regularly used walking aids. Seventy-five per cent were over the age of 60.

The Fire Support Network, a charity that provides considerable support to Merseyside FRS, came up with the idea of using a highly trained emergency response dog within the home of an isolated, bedridden individual.

The dogs, who come from animal shelters, go through a series of stringent assessment and training programmes, and there is continuous follow-up by Personal Assistance Dogs throughout the dogs’ working lives.

So far, two have been trained – Little Ern and one-year-old Dudley, a cross terrier – and a third dog, Holly, is being assessed to see if she would be suitable.

For further information, contact Sam Grady, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, on 0151 296 4417 or email samgrady@merseyfire.gov.uk

Launch of the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08

The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08 was published on 6 April. This version of the Framework draws heavily on its predecessors in terms of structure. Crucially, it now has a lifespan of two financial years, providing fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) with a strategic overview on which to build longer-term plans. The move to a two-year National Framework also reflects the Government’s increasing confidence that modernisation will continue to be embedded in the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and that FRAs will sustain the momentum for change that has been established. The Government will be considering the appropriate timescale for future versions of the National Framework with stakeholders, but it is likely that future versions of the Framework will have a lifespan of two years or longer.

The Framework has some new and important messages to communicate to the FRS. It goes further than before in stressing the responsibilities of Regional Management Boards, it puts greater emphasis on equality and diversity, and it emphasises the importance of the Core Values and appropriate behaviour among fire and rescue staff. It also provides information about a number of forthcoming changes within the FRS – the new firefighter recruitment and selection tests, the new Learning and Development and Leadership and Development strategies, which will have an effect on the training and development of staff, and the Audit Commission’s new proposals for performance assessment in the FRS, following Fire CPR in 2005.

Young people and RESPECT

A joint programme to work with troublesome and excluded young people in Cheshire has won £1.4 million in government funding.

The RESPECT (Reducing Exclusion Starting Positive Engagement with Children Together) bid was based on Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service’s experience of working with young people during the past decade. This has been done in partnership with Youth and Education Services from Cheshire, Halton and Warrington, Connexions and the Youth Federation. The aim of the programme is to reduce the numbers of permanently excluded children from schools in these areas.

The successful bid to the Government’s Invest to Save fund was based on the Kooldow project and involves developing the course content and materials by working with professionals in the areas of education and youth support. These agencies will assist in the development and targeting of the RESPECT programme to individuals and areas of most need.

Fire Authority Chairman Councillor Tony Hooton said: “We are delighted that this bid has been successful as it is a very practical example of how partnership working can bring major benefits to sections of our community in greatest need. The Fire Service’s past work with young people will be greatly enhanced by the knowledge and expertise of all the partners.”

The RESPECT programme is due to be officially launched within the next few weeks.

Young people ‘dig it’ at Bromborough Fire Station

A market garden is to be created at Bromborough Community Fire Station, Merseyside, as part of a project with young people in the area.

Over the coming months, the derelict land will be transformed into a growing area, with polytunnels for the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, flower beds, lawned and landscaped areas, decking and a sensory garden.

It will all be put together by young people who will pick up a range of skills along the way, including bricklaying, flagging, joinery, cooking, horticulture, responsibility and social awareness.

The unique project develops, the young people will be mentored by firefighters, Wirral Youth Service, the charity Fire Support Network and clients from Wirral Autistic Society.

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The young people jumped at the opportunity and asked if they could develop a market garden where they could learn to grow vegetables and how to cook them. The venture will provide young people with positive activities during the evenings and weekends.

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