

Review of Resourcing of the London Fire Brigade

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Background

The Mayor's manifesto for the 2016 Greater London Authority (GLA) elections included a commitment to:

"Undertake a full review of the resources required by the London Fire Brigade, with the aim of ensuring the service is fully equipped for the challenges ahead, not only for dealing with and preventing fires, but also coping with major civil contingencies such as a terrorist attack or a flood."

Following on from his election, Sadiq Khan commissioned Anthony Mayer to review the resources available to the London Fire Brigade (LFB). The review will feed into the preparations for the Sixth London Safety Plan (LSP6) which will cover the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2020.

The review's terms of reference are to consider:

- 1. The impact of the cuts during the previous Mayoralty on the LFB's core aims around prevention, protection and response;**
- 2. The ability for the LFB to effectively manage civil contingencies as defined by the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act; and**
- 3. What, if any, additional resources required by the LFB to undertake its work effectively now and in the future.**

Financial context

In addition to specific grants, LFB's 2016/17 revenue budget of £382.4 million comprises three elements: Revenue Support Grant (£126.7 million), Retained Business Rates (£117.4 million) and income from the council tax precept (£138.2 million). In the eight year period since 2009/10 (the Johnson Mayoralty), the LFB has been required to make gross savings of over £100 million.

£35.9 million of those savings has been delivered by reductions to fire stations and fire appliances. Those cuts include the £29.5 million which was achieved through the delivery of the Fifth London Safety Plan (LSP5). Importantly, also covering the period of the Johnson Mayoralty, 324 support staff posts (29 per cent of the non-uniformed workforce) were cut to save £12.8 million.

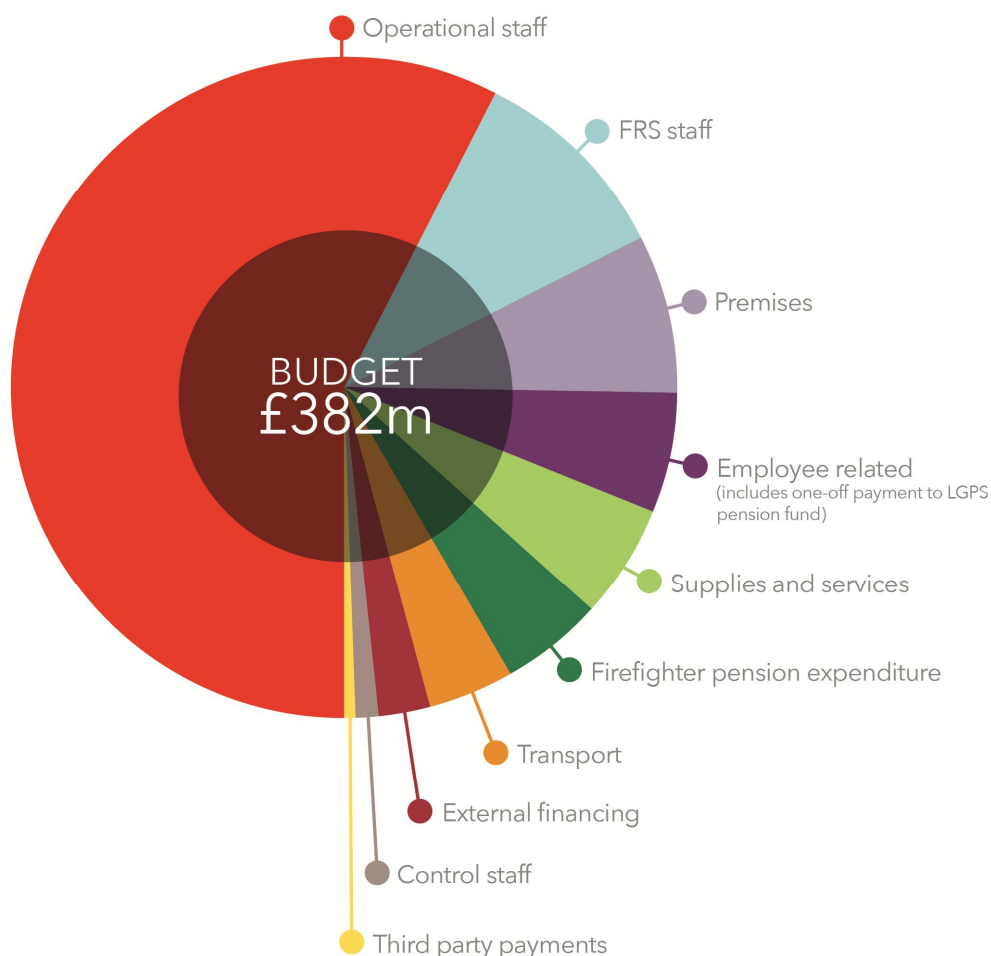
By any standards, these are significant cuts. Nevertheless, over the same period the LFB has spent within two per cent of the Mayor's £3.2 billion of funding, which represents satisfactory financial management given the number of complex change programmes delivered during the period, including significant capital investment in property and the fleet and frontline service reform. Profiling such a complex spend has led the LFB to rely on reserves in some years and to underspend in other years.

To put London's experience in context, £15.5 million and £19.6 million have been cut from Greater Manchester and West Midlands fire services' budgets respectively over the same period (13 per cent and 20 per cent of current budget in each case). LFB's cuts will be compounded by the inheritance from Mayor Johnson, which requires £23.5 million of further savings over the next three years to deliver a balanced budget.

To live within its means, LFB made a number of reductions to frontline services through the implementation of LSP5, most notably:

- Cutting the number of fire appliances by 27;
- Closing 10 fire stations;
- Cutting two Fire Rescue Units (FRUs);
- Cutting three training appliances;
- Reducing FRU crewing levels; and
- Cutting 552 firefighter posts.

Figure 1—How the London Fire Brigade spends the Mayor's funding (2016/17)



Demand context

As with any emergency service, LFB should be assessed by the capacity it might require in an emergency, as well as what it does every day. There are a number of demand challenges facing LFB, including the criticality of managing major incidents such as the 2005 Staples Corner fire, and multi-sited events such as the St Jude's storms in 2013, the 7/7 bombings and the 2011 London riots, alongside the daily demand on services.

These resource intensive incidents are rare but they are high impact in terms of damage to property, the economy, loss of life or social cohesion. LFB's capacity to manage these events appears to be sufficient, as demonstrated by each of these examples, where the LFB has performed well despite the considerable resource demands.

LFB's demand challenges are complicated by the need to be prepared for existing and emerging threats that have not yet occurred, and which are happening across the world, such as a marauding terrorist firearms attack (MTFA) or a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack.

In such a scenario, the LFB will play a central role in the capital's response. That such a threat has not occurred is testimony to the hard work of the security and emergency services—but LFB's capacity to manage an attack must not be compromised.

New demand

An emerging demand context for the LFB relates to the national trend for fire and rescue services to co-respond with ambulance services to certain types of health emergency. LFB and the London Ambulance Service (LAS) have been piloting co-responding arrangements in four boroughs in London; if that pilot was implemented London-wide, and LFB were to attend all current 'Red 1' calls (approximately 40 a day in London), that would lead to an additional 14,600 attendances annually. In 2015/16, the Brigade attended 99,935 incidents overall—16,000 fewer than in 2011/12.

LFB has not yet published any formal assessment of the impact of this additional demand upon attendance times.

FIRST TERM OF REFERENCE: To consider the impact of the cuts during the previous Mayoralty on the LFB's core aims around prevention, protection and response

Thanks to the professionalism of London's firefighters and the prudent oversight of resources by LFB management, the Brigade has coped well, within the context of significantly reduced resources, protecting its frontline response where possible and prioritising prevention work in the community.

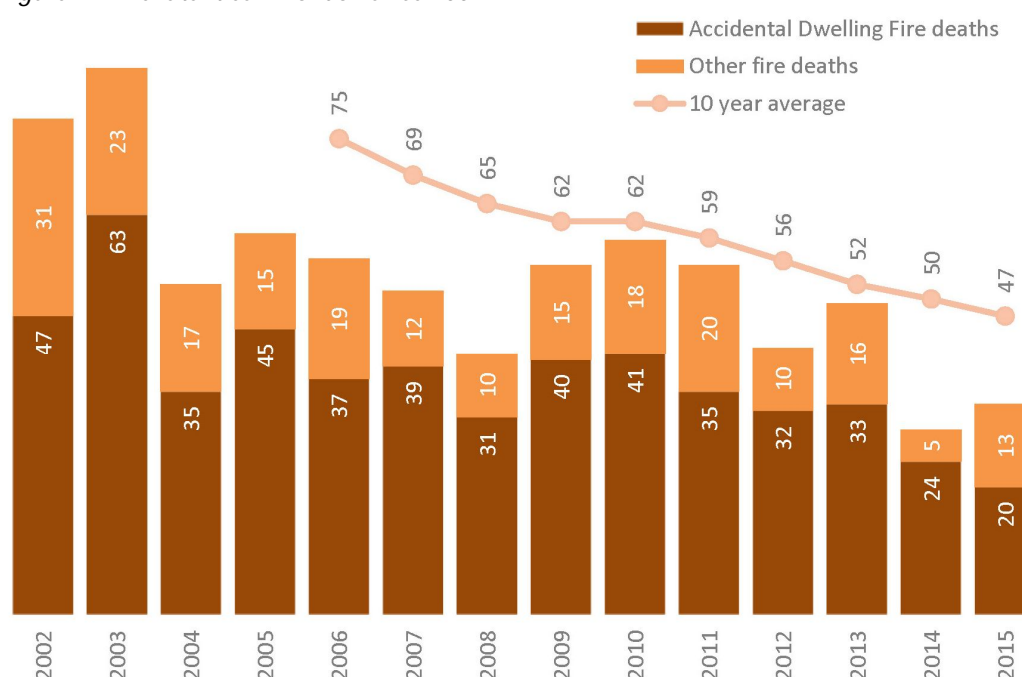
Protecting the frontline—how LFB's staffing model compares nationally

In contrast to other fire and rescue services, LFB has maintained a lean ratio of senior officers (Station Manager and above) to firefighters (Watch Manager and below). After the service cuts imposed by LSP5, LFB's senior officer to firefighter ratio is half of the national average for English fire and rescue services (4.8 per cent of London staff are senior officers compared with a rate of 9.5 per cent nationally). Similarly, the ratio of support staff to operational staff is lean in London compared with other English fire and rescue services (15.5 per cent in London versus 27.9 per cent nationally, while noting the different sizes of brigades). LSP5 served to make these ratios even leaner than they had been previously, by protecting frontline firefighters as far as possible at the expense of support staff and senior officers. Indeed, it would seem safe to conclude on the back of the national comparisons that any future budget reductions could not be managed by reducing senior officer numbers or cutting support staff, certainly not to any significant degree.

Outcomes in the community—prevention, fatalities and attendances

The effects of such large service cuts have been partially mitigated by the reduction of the number of fires and fire deaths in London in recent years. Year-on-year figures for fire deaths can be volatile — and, notably, they rose in 2015 — however the ten-year average has been falling from 75 in 2006 to 47 in 2015, as shown in Figure 2 below.

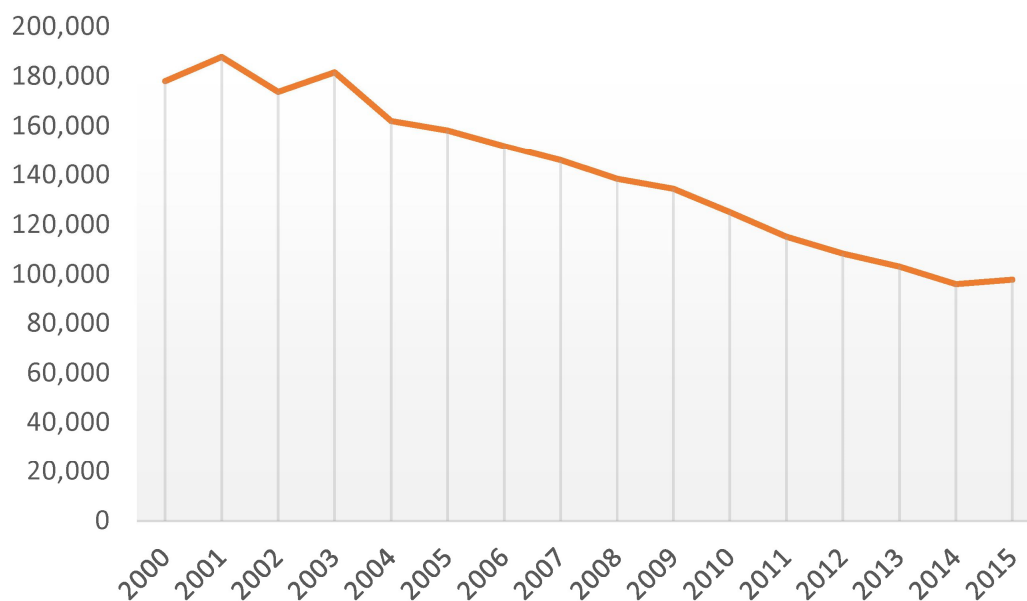
Figure 2—Fire fatalities in London since 2002



The long term trend for fires in London is also down, with the city seeing a reduction from 48,554 attendances to fires in 2000 to 20,922 in 2015—a 57 per cent reduction. However, LFB did attend more fires in 2015 than in 2014 partially due to the hot summer — a seasonal impact that LFB cannot control but must be prepared for.

False alarms still account for the majority of fire appliance mobilisations, though these have come down since the introduction of charging mechanisms in 2014 (an LSP5 proposal), from 60,628 in 2010 to 47,545 in 2015. Special services have reduced from 45,423 mobilisations in 2000 to 29,365 in 2015.

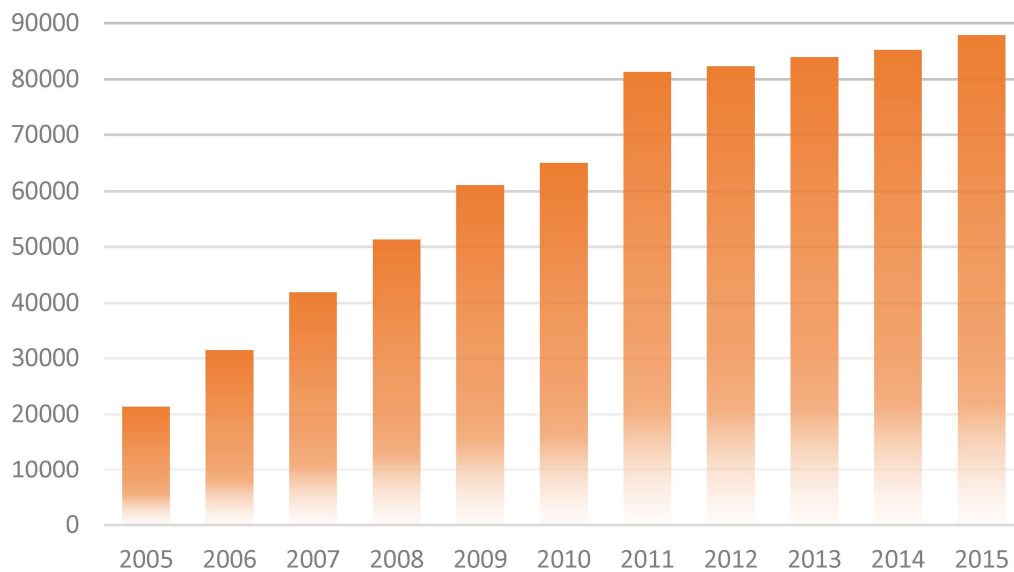
Figure 3—Total number of incidents attended in London since 2000



The reasons for these reductions are many and complex, including changes in society such as there being fewer smokers, fewer chip pans in homes and better fire resistant furniture. A critical contribution made by the LFB to the reduction in fires has been a far greater focus on community safety work, such as Home Fire Safety Visits, during which firefighters deliver fire safety advice to vulnerable groups and communities.

Figure 4 below shows that whilst the rate of increase in the number of Home Fire Safety Visits being performed annually has slowed, the total amount delivered continues to increase in London year-on-year.

Figure 4—Number of Home Fire Safety Visits performed annually since 2005



Impact on attendance times

The most controversial aspects of LSP5 were the closure of fire stations and the reduction in fire appliances.

The stations closed by the LFB were: Belsize, Bow, Clerkenwell, Downham, Kingsland, Knightsbridge, Silvertown, Southwark, Woolwich and Westminster. The sale of those stations (except Clerkenwell and Southwark which remain unsold) have generated capital receipts of £54.6 million, which have been reinvested into the fire appliance fleet and firefighter equipment, and also the development of a third training centre.

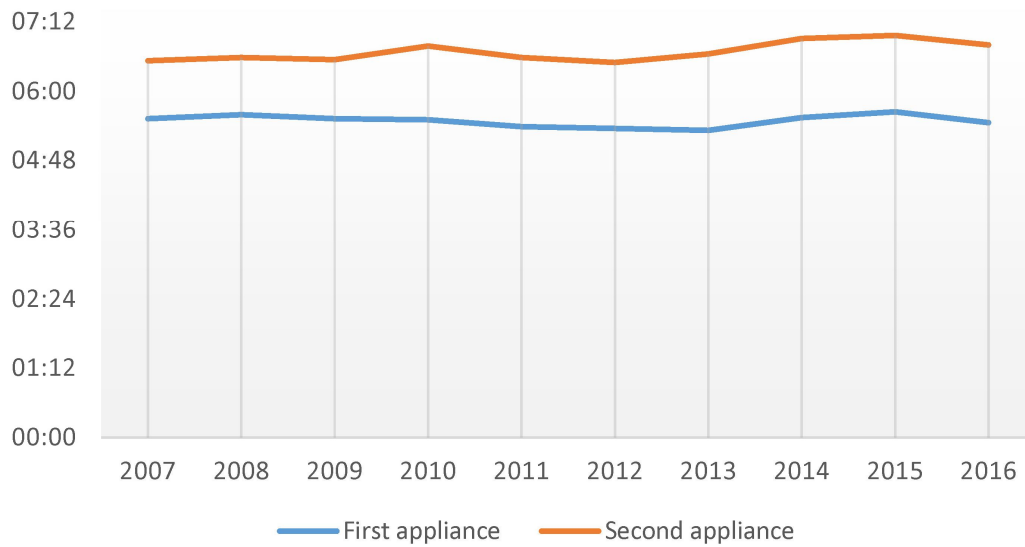
The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is clear that fire station closures and appliance reductions have contributed to longer response times in the capital. They have cited a study by Dr Benjamin Taylor of Lancaster University, who observed:

"In some areas before the closures, the average response time for the first fire engine was well under five minutes whereas, following the closures, the London Fire Brigade is only able to respond to around 50% of calls in these areas within its six minute target."

It should be noted that the LFB's performance target is to achieve an *average* attendance time for first appliances of six minutes, meaning that up to 50 per cent of attendances may be over six minutes within those standards—but the substantive point remains.

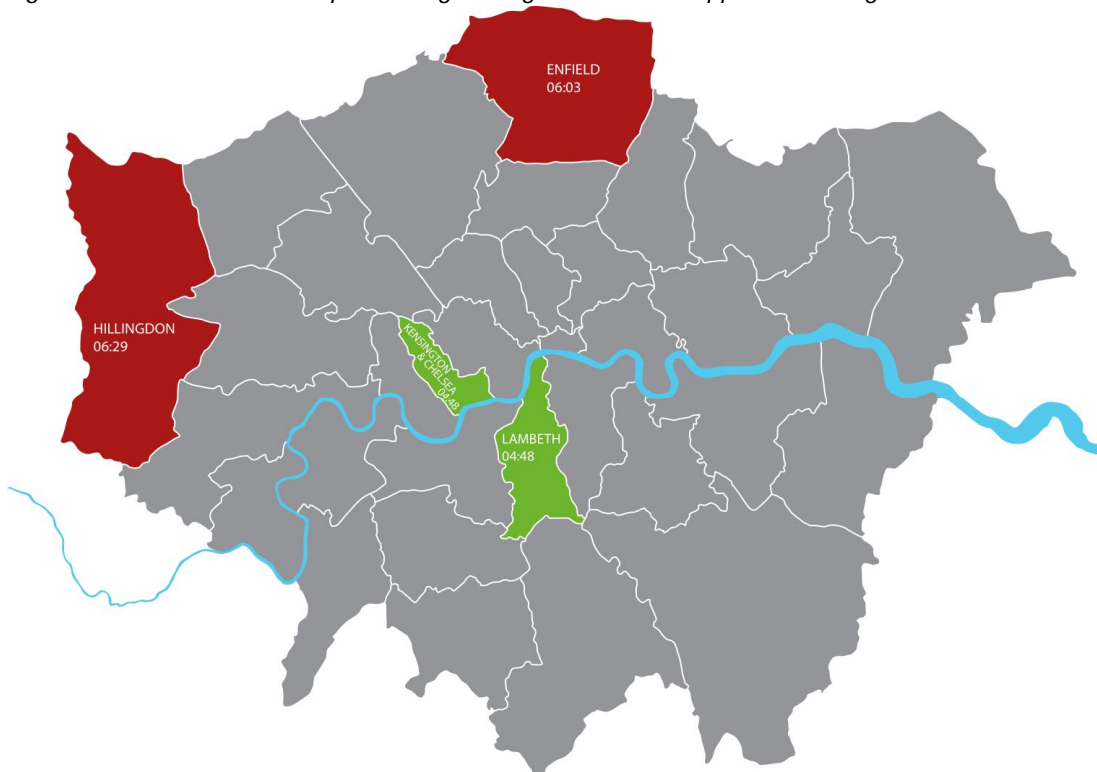
Analyses by the LFB since 2013 show that while London-wide average attendance times for the first pumping appliance have risen as a result of these closures, that time has reduced in the latest part year's figures. Whilst national comparisons are difficult due to different data collection methodologies, LFB maintains attendance times which are 0.5 minutes and 0.6 minutes faster than West Midlands and Greater Manchester respectively.

Figure 5—first and second appliance attendance times in minutes:seconds since 2007



The standard of achieving an average attendance time of six minutes for the first appliance is now achieved in almost every borough based on the 2016 data, with two outer London boroughs not performing to that standard—Hillingdon with an average attendance time of 06:29 and Enfield with 06:03. At the other end of the scale, inner London boroughs Lambeth and Kensington and Chelsea both achieve 04:48.

Figure 6—The best and worst performing boroughs for first fire appliance average attendance times



The London-wide average for second appliance attendances in 2015/16 was 06:56—well within the eight-minute standard. Two boroughs (Havering and Hillingdon) did not meet that standard.

In 2015/16, 90 per cent of all incidents (86 per cent of all fires) had only one or two appliances attending and did not need further appliances to resolve them. 59 per cent

of the incidents that were attended by a three or more appliances in 2015/16 were false alarms. The LFB does not set a third appliance attendance standard. However, with a London-wide average attendance time of 08:23 in 2015/16, performance is well within the 10-minute benchmark used in the LSP5 consultation.

Averaging at borough-level can mask a different underlying picture and the LFB's performance looks less positive if the attendance time averages are studied at ward-level rather than borough-level — in particular where a fire station has been closed in a ward and attendance times have consequently risen. 37 per cent of wards (242 wards) are now not meeting the average attendance time standard for a first appliance — an increase of 26 wards since 2011/12, before LSP5 was agreed. The number of wards not meeting second appliance standards has grown from 140 to 151 over the same period.

Whether considering performance at a borough level or a ward level; the disparity between inner London and outer London attendance times, while noting their different risk profiles; the lack of attendance times for FRUs and aerial appliances (which are complicated by the existence of four discrete categories of aerial appliance); or the attendance times of appliances, there is a driver for the LFB to consider how best to allocate and categorise its frontline and specialist appliances and personnel. This may include considering increasing the numbers of firefighters at stations with more than one appliance, simplifying the aerial appliance fleet, re-examining alternate crewing proposals, and setting targets for specialist appliance attendance times.

Historical context

To place LFB's performance in context, it is useful to understand the role played by the national standards for fire appliance attendance times which were abolished by central government in 2004, but which would have driven the management of resources historically. Those standards, which were only for fires, focused on damage to property, rather than threat to life, and required LFB to manage its resources within four fire risk categories for localities, from 'A risk' that required three appliances at the scene — the first two within five minutes and the third within eight minutes—to 'D risk' that required one appliance at the scene within 'about' 20 minutes. Within these standards, 74 per cent of London was classified as 'C risk': one appliance required at the scene within about eight to 10 minutes. Today's performance demonstrates that LFB performs well, even after LSP5, when compared with past expectations.

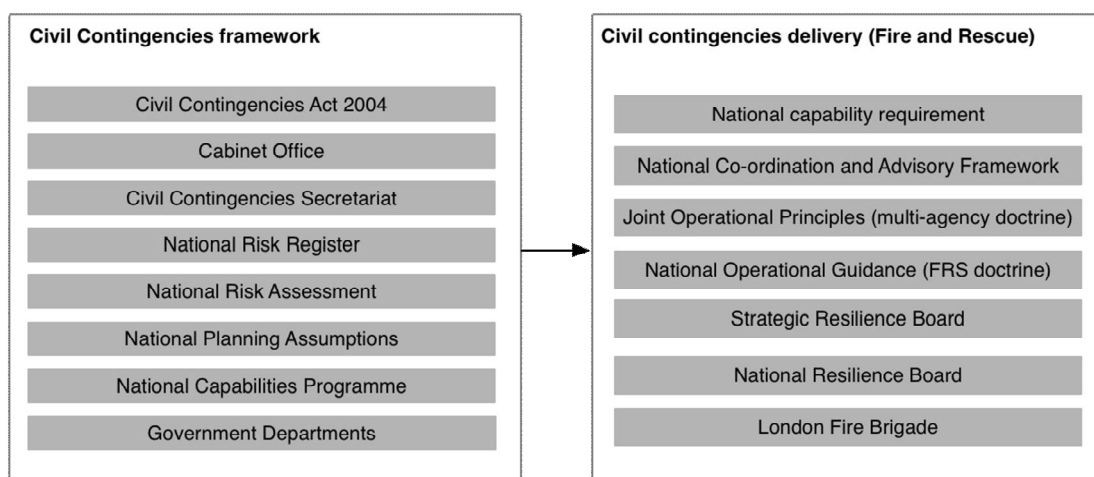
SECOND TERM OF REFERENCE: To consider the ability for the LFB to effectively manage civil contingencies as defined by the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act

Legislative context

The Civil Contingencies Framework established by the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act is managed by the Cabinet Office, which owns the levers and has the mandate to manage cross-departmental programmes and national resilience capabilities, such as those delivered by the LFB.

Risks to national security are identified on the National Risk Register (NRR) and evaluated by the National Risk Assessment (NRA). The NRA records the scale, duration and impact of identified risks and the National Resilience Planning Assumptions (NRPAs) set out the consequences of those risks, should they be realised. The National Resilience Capabilities Programme (NRCP) establishes capabilities to manage outcomes of realised risks.

Figure 8—The governance and delivery of civil contingencies capabilities



Under the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act, LFB is a Category 1 responder, which is defined by the Civil Protection Lexicon as *“a person or body listed in Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Civil Contingencies Act. These bodies are likely to be at the core of the response to most emergencies. As such, they are subject to the full range of civil protection duties in the Act.”*

Three of the main civil contingency threats for LFB to manage are flood rescue, and terrorist attacks including MTFAs and Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear (CBRN) attacks. The management of these types of major incidents demands different capabilities, such as water rescue teams and boats for flood rescue; the ability to cope with up to three terrorist incidents at the same time resulting in hundreds of dead or injured civilians (for an MTFA, for example); or having a sufficient number of trained and equipped firefighters to detect, monitor and lead mass decontamination for a CBRN event.

The resources required to be deployed on specialist activities are comparatively small, and comprise training facilities, firefighters with specialist skillsets, and specifically equipped FRUs.

LFB's specialist capacity bore its share of the cuts under the Johnson Mayoralty with the number of FRUs cut from 16 to 14 and the number of FRU posts per FRU cut from five to four.

The role of Fire Rescue Units in managing major incidents

FRUs form an important part of LFB's management of complex and protracted incidents of all types, not simply those very rare civil contingencies events. Each of the three types of FRU provides a unique capability alongside a core set of specialist skills to manage difficult access issues, heavy cutting requirements and extended duration breathing apparatus capabilities.

There are five *Technical Rescue* FRUs in London providing LFB's Urban Search And Rescue capability (USAR), rope rescue and water rescue capabilities (including carrying a boat). They respond to major building collapse, rescue from difficult structures, and rescue from the Thames and other waterways. Examples of where they have been used include the 7/7 bombings, the Apollo Theatre collapse, the Greenpeace protest involving protestors climbing The Shard and aiding the police in the search for the murdered teenager Alice Grosse, where LFB crews located the body in difficult-to-access water. They also made up the team of international responders LFB sent to the Nepal earthquake.

There are five *Hazardous Material* (HazMat) FRUs in London, which are also equipped to respond to water and animal rescue incidents. They deploy frequently in support of police 'white powder' incidents and to serious chemical spillages and in the last year, these have included attendances critical infrastructure including Heathrow Airport, a COMAH site (sites subject to Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations) and tube and rail stations. Along with the technical rescue FRUs they provided the specialist rescue response to major flooding both in and outside London in recent years, with teams deploying across the capital as well as far as Cumbria, Yorkshire and the East Coast.

There are four *Technical Skills* FRUs carrying a specialist rope rescue capability. They respond in particular to the increasing number of incidents involving people threatening to jump from high structures, as well as 'urban explorers'. Attendances in the last year include to protesters on Jeremy Corbyn's roof, the live rescue of someone attempting suicide from the Archway bridge and a number of rescues from central London cranes and Thames' bridges. They also support working at height for other LFB units and partner agencies.

Specialist FRU crews would be central to the management of a major terrorist attack on the capital and there are opportunities to enhance their role still further, for example by introducing the role of specialist MTFA responder to these units. A national agreement between central government and the FBU regarding firefighter roles in delivering such capabilities would be an enabler for such opportunities.

THIRD TERM OF REFERENCE: To consider what, if any, additional resources required by the LFB to undertake its work effectively now and in the future

LFB's overall performance after the cuts during the Johnson Mayoralty has seen slightly degraded attendance times and a marginally reduced capacity to manage a major terrorist attack on the capital. As outlined in the financial context section of this review, the budget projections inherited from the previous Mayoralty have left a budget gap over the period of the next London Safety Plan (LSP6) of £23.5 million.

LFB has built these reductions into its budget planning, and will need to approach LSP6 ambitiously and innovatively if it is to deliver such savings without delivering frontline reductions of the scale seen under the Johnson Mayoralty.

Whilst there are opportunities to consider the profile of the three-year funding settlement (2017 to 2020) to accommodate the plans delivered by LSP6, currently there is no persuasive case for increasing LFB's resources over and above meeting natural cost inflation. In the current public spending climate, these pressures are best addressed by making better use of existing resources and ensuring that proposals and strategies are mindful of the public's priorities—as suggested by the Government's three pillars of fire and rescue service reform: efficiency and collaboration; accountability and transparency; and workforce reform.

Efficiency and collaboration

The LFB is prioritising its work with other emergency services, in London the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and LAS and nationally other fire and rescue services to ensure that it delivers best value for the taxpayer.

There are initiatives in London already, including a co-responding pilot with the LAS, some examples of sharing space at fire stations with other emergency services, and discussions about the potential for a shared control centre with the LAS. A Bluelight Collaboration Programme is examining how to exploit such opportunities.

Even without collaboration with other organisations, there are initiatives that the LFB could explore — or extend — to ensure that it is using its resources optimally. These might include 'geographic mobilisation'; for example, relocating appliances to other fire stations to meet demand or risk; and 'alternate crewing', which LFB defines as *'where the crew are available to operate more than one vehicle ... [and] only one of the vehicles can be mobilised at a time, as there are not enough crew members to operate all the available vehicles'*.

Accountability and transparency

The Policing and Crime Bill is establishing a new governance framework for fire and rescue nationally, with discrete structures for London. Those structures will provide for more direct and transparent political control of the LFB by the Mayor, and greater accountability for a new statutory London Fire Commissioner with the appropriate powers to deliver fire and rescue services across the capital.

Workforce reform

The Government has stressed the importance of a more diverse workforce in fire and rescue services, as well as the need to work in partnership to deliver national resilience capabilities. LFB's recently issued inclusion strategy sets a new standard for inclusion, and by working with the GLA Group and committing resources to support the Mayor's inclusion framework, the LFB should be well placed to deliver on its goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion 1

Reductions in Government grant led to the Johnson Mayoralty making significant cuts to LFB frontline resources. The data available up to now suggests that although the cuts have not led to a significant deterioration in the main aspects of LFB performance, there has been some increase in attendance times for appliances over a period of time, but it is too early to form a definitive judgement.

LFB's performance against its key target of average first appliance response time remains adequate across London, albeit with two boroughs falling outside of that target. Target response times are not set by ward although it is worth noting that response times at a ward level have worsened slightly as a result of the cuts.

Recommendation 1

There is currently no persuasive case to increase LFB's budget by diverting resources from elsewhere in the GLA Group or increasing the precept. Perhaps more importantly, **there should be no additional reductions to LFB's budget** that would worsen the £23.5 million budget gap inherited from Mayor Johnson. The **fire station closures, reductions in fire appliances and cuts to firefighter numbers introduced by LSP5 should be embedded by LFB.**

Recommendation 2

The LFB and the Mayoralty should continue to monitor performance data closely, to be ready to mitigate any unacceptable negative impacts arising from cuts in frontline resources made by Mayor Johnson and to address any changes in demand. Among other things, monitoring could be focused on adverse trends in fire deaths, the ability of the LFB to attend multiple incidents and FRU attendance times.

Conclusion 2

LFB modelling indicates that, even under the current number and location of fire stations and number of appliances, improvements could be made to second appliance response times.

Recommendation 3

As part of its LSP6 preparatory work, LFB should **present options to LFEPA Members and to the Mayoralty setting out how second appliances at some stations could be rehoused at different stations** to maximise performance for second appliance target response times, providing enhanced fire cover for Londoners.

Conclusion 3

Geographic mobilisation represents a potentially significant opportunity for LFB to continue to develop working practices which might serve to enhance fire cover for Londoners.

Recommendation 4

As part of its LSP6 preparatory work, LFB should **assess the feasibility of extending risk-based geographic mobilisation, with consideration of London's changing 24-hour risk profiles, and also how alternate crewing options might be modelled** and make recommendations accordingly to LFEPA Members and to the Mayoralty.

Conclusion 4

While most of LFB's frontline operations are covered by target response times, aerial appliances and FRUs are not. This is inconsistent, particularly given the important role specialist equipment and firefighters play in LFB's work — and specifically its counter-terrorism work.

Recommendation 5

The London Fire Commissioner to **propose target response times for aerial appliances and FRUs** for consideration and agreement by LFEPA Members and the Mayoralty.

Conclusion 5

In an era of constrained resources and emerging threats, it is more important than ever that budget headroom is found for priority areas such as counter-terrorism work. Recent underspends in the LFB budget and opportunities for a proportionate reconfiguration of frontline resources, should be channelled in two directions: the expansion of FRU capacity and exploring the rationalisation of the four types of aerial appliances currently in operation down to one all-purpose appliance so as to improve efficiency and flexibility.

FRUs need to continue to be well placed, to tackle high-impact major incidents such as the marauding terrorist attacks witnessed in Mumbai and Paris. To guarantee the future functioning of an expanded FRU capacity, the funds identified for redeployment should be ring-fenced in future budgets.

Recommendation 6

The London Fire Commissioner to **set out proposals for existing funds to be channelled into expanding FRU capacity** for consideration and agreement by LFEPA Members and the Mayoralty. The **funds should be ring-fenced for that purpose** going forward.

Anthony Mayer, 7 October 2016