

# **FROM BRIGADE TO SERVICE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN MODERN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

## **ABSTRACT**

Over the last ten years, local government modernisation and the growth of community safety agendas have called for change in the public sector at a local level. This has been typified by partnership work, improvement and inspection and community governance. The fire and rescue services, despite some initial cultural difficulties, have worked hard to adapt themselves to modern local government, for example through community fire safety work, which is presented as a case study. However, the culmination of the modernisation project, Comprehensive Area Assessment, does not favour the fire and rescue service, and to an extent excludes them from its formula. In this light, it seems that there is little incentive for the Fire Service to continue its modernising trajectory.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fire and rescue services (FRS) occupy a precarious position at the edge of local government. Since New Labour's election in 1997, a great deal of change, much of it focussed on improvement and inspection, has occurred in local government. This has had a number of impacts on fire and rescue services, simultaneously demanding that they participate in mainstream local government, without providing much material incentive. This paper considers three parallel strands of modernisation: in the first section, we look at the changing role of FRS as they have moved from traditional fire brigades to modern fire and rescue services, taking on new roles and changing their culture. In the second section, the mainstream of Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) is considered, alongside the drivers of inspection and improvement which were hoped to steer this process. In the third section, we look at the development of community safety and crime prevention, which is used as an example of how FRS have engaged at a local level. The fourth section, on the future of the FRS looks at the culmination of the modernisation process, looking at the implications for fire fighters and for fire and rescue services. The paper concludes by asking what place the FRS has in today's Modern Local Government.

The context for FRS modernisation is set within local government modernisation, described in a timeline, below. The Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000 put the principle tenets of new Labour's local government modernisation agenda firmly on

the statute books. These tenets included three key areas which have shaped local government and to an extent, fire service, policy in the intervening decade (Stewart 2003). Firstly, a shift to community leadership, whereby local authorities work more closely with their partners (including FRS) and with local communities. This is particularly evidenced through the development of the power to promote well being. Secondly, a focus on democratic renewal, in which a new 'relationship' was to be fostered between authorities and residents/voters. This is particularly evidenced through the implementation of new structures for local government, with an emphasis on scrutiny and accountability. And, thirdly, with the development of performance improvement through strategic regulation. This started with the transfer from compulsory competitive tendering to best value, and the expansion of best value from single service inspections to the all encompassing 'Corporate Governance' inspection.

Downe and Martin (2006) suggest that LGMA followed four distinct developmental phases, incorporating each of these tenets. They assert that the first phase was best value, the second, the duty to promote well being, the third the introduction of comprehensive performance assessment following the crisis in best value and fourthly the shift to community leadership encapsulated in local strategic partnerships, and formalised through Local Area Agreements (LAAs) (Downe, Martin 2006). The forthcoming shift to Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) perhaps signifies a fifth or final stage of this project.

The timeline, below, illustrates the chronology of the most recent phase of modernisation, linking LGMA, crime and disorder legislation, and the later Fire and Rescue Services Act 2003, which is described in more detail in the following section. However, it should be acknowledged that a number of attempts at reform have been made over the decades since World War Two, including the *Service for the 60s* report (Wrack, Gall 2008) and 1970's Holroyd Report (Ewen 1999).

Table 1: FRS Policy Timeline

## BRIGADE TO SERVICE

A key component of the LGMA has been to ensure that all local government partners modernised alongside local authorities themselves (Downe, Martin 2006). In this section, we look at the changing role of FRS as they have moved from traditional fire

brigades to modern fire and rescue services, taking on new roles and changing their culture. As with mainstream local government, this has not happened overnight, rather it has been the result of negotiation, resistance and piecemeal change at both local and strategic levels. These changes are examined in this section with regard to FRS, and in the next section with regard to local government. They are also represented chronologically on the timeline presented in the introduction. A key part of modernisation was to move away from the militaristic style 'brigade', originating in the navy and recruiting disproportionately from the armed services (Baigent 2001), towards a more outward focused 'service'. The old brigade structure had come to be seen as anachronistic (Bain 2002), culturally immobile and unrepresentative of the communities that they served. It was hoped that modernisation would address this, creating modern working arrangements, engagement with local communities and a more preventive focus, and although not every FRS across the country rebranded from 'brigade' to 'service', the general shift in terminology is emblematic of New Labour's modernisation process (Ewen 2004)

The process of fire service modernisation can be seen to have started in 1995, when the Audit Commission published a report questioning value for money in FRS (Audit Commission 1995). This report acknowledged the excellent work done by FRS in saving lives from fire, but acknowledged that there were several significant shortcomings in the service, including limiting and inflexible conditions of service, static risk categorisation and lack of attention to fire prevention. For example, local fire authorities were funded according to the number of house fires they had attended in the previous year, a funding mechanism which clearly penalised brigades conducting effective fire prevention work. Subsequent reports made similar findings, dealing particularly with the modernisation process (Cap Gemini Ernst and Young 2002) and with recruitment / retention and diversity issues (Home Office 2000, Home Office 1999) but with little associated change (Bain 2002).

Finally, in 2002, the Bain Report was published – indisputably the key document in the modernisation of the fire service. It acknowledged the 'high value which the public places in the fire service' (page 9) whilst stressing the need for the service to improve and modernise in order to provide a better public service. The Review called for a new policy context for the FRS for the UK, with high level support in government filtering down to strong managerial support at individual service level (Bain 2002). Alongside this, it was proposed that a more proactive approach would be introduced, with emphasis put on community fire safety and fire prevention approaches. This

should be delivered through a revitalised service that deployed resources (both personnel and equipment) according to need, rather than according to the post war arrangements. The Review suggests that this should be accompanied by regionalisation, a move that was at the time unpopular. This change remains unimplemented to date, demonstrating perhaps an ongoing resistance to more input from central government, and is reminiscent of previous resistance to regionalisation (Ewen 2004)

The modern service would have a more diverse staff structure, with operational staff particularly drawn from the local community and including more women, in the hope that this would both provide a more 'modern' workforce and challenge the prevailing culture (Baigent 2001) The introduction of new HR systems and dedicated HR managers from outside the service was to support this. Personnel would move from 'rank to role' with a new pay structure based around the revised personal development system (IPDS). For the first time, managers could be drawn from outside the service (a move which is still neither universally accepted or popular), and the relationship between retained and whole time fire fighters revisited. This included the potential for whole time fire fighters to undertake retained roles under the dual duty system. The review acknowledged that much of this change would take careful implementation, but reminded readers that the overall aim of the recommendations was to 'save lives' (page vi).

Perhaps understandably, the review was not received well in all quarters, and late in 2002, the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) called the first national strike for a generation. Although the strike was ostensibly about pay and conditions, rather than overtly regarding the Bain Review, the proposed changes to conditions proposed by the Review were not met favourably by the FBU, who saw the Review as a 'distraction' (FBU 2002), preferring instead the results from the research they had commissioned themselves (Cap Gemini Ernst and Young 2002, Fire Brigades' Union 2002). Further, a number of the existing conditions of service, and the alternatives proposed by the FBU, were perceived in the Review as being hostile to modernisation. Bain (2002) suggests that management structures were seen in some quarters as providing an 'alibi' for managers seeking to avoid change, and that Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI), and the Fire Service College, reinforced that culture rather than challenged it. As such, the duties of HMFSI were handed over to the Audit Commission in 2004, and to the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, located with the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Diversity was seen as key to FRS modernisation and a number of further studies looked specifically at diversity in the fire service (Baigent 2001, Home Office 1999), challenging the 'fire service culture' with its emphasis on 'fitting in' and 'not tolerating diversity' (Bain, 2002, page 75). These are included on the timeline in the introduction so that they can be viewed chronologically alongside other aspects of modernisation. *Equality and Fairness* (1999) was the first of a series of thematic reviews conducted by HMFSI. This report was critical of much of the FRS, particularly with regard to the management of equality and diversity. It found discrimination and bullying prevalent almost universally with a strong culture within the service which perpetuated this. This was found to be the case across all organisations with responsibilities to the FRS. A fundamental aspect of this was seen to be the watch culture, which was perceived as being more like a 'family than a team' (page 20). This culture was challenged in the first three National Frameworks (Communities and Local Government 2004), with the proposal to be more of a team than a family. However, in a potential reflection of the prevailing strength of watch culture, this challenge has been dropped from the 2008 National Framework (Communities and Local Government 2008).

At this time, fewer than 2% of all operational personnel were either female or from minority ethnic backgrounds and *Equality and Fairness* found that many female and/or BME staff had been subject to harassment. Further, where harassment was challenged, management of the process was inadequate. Graduate recruits also numbered around 2%, again, far below community averages. This potentially reflects the poor view of 'clean' work (office work, management or community fire safety) in the fire service (Childs, Morris et al. 2004), but also the view that the public have of the fire service as not being a suitable career for graduates. Whilst ambitious targets were set for the recruitment of female and BME fire fighters, these are unlikely to be met (Communities and Local Government 2004). Indeed, the target for the recruitment of female fire fighters has been significantly scaled down in the intervening years (Communities and Local Government 2008) suggesting perhaps a more deep seated need for cultural change within the fire service, but also, as with graduate recruitment, amongst the general public from whom fire fighters are recruited. For example, where FRS have attempted to introduce specific recruitment initiatives, these have been met with hostility from the general public. Further, *Equality and Fairness* also discussed the prevalence of homophobia in FRS, concluding – shockingly - that FRS were not really ready to begin to tackle this issue.

Despite some high profile positive actions by a small number of FRS, this situation prevails (Ward, Winstanley 2006).

Modernisation is about more than diversity, however, and much of the scope of the Bain Report – with the notable exception of regionalisation – was incorporated into the 2003 white paper, and the following 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004). The Act served to put a number of prevention and rescue activities which many FRS already undertook (attending road traffic accidents, dealing with flooding and other natural disasters, responding to terrorist incidents) on a statutory footing, so that they could be held accountable for these services, but also adequately resourced to deal with them. Similarly, community fire safety work was also made statutory, in the hope that this shift to preventive working would encapsulate all that was modern about the fire service – partnership working, community outreach, proactivity and diversity. However, there is still some reluctance to engage in community fire safety at much of the grass roots level (Audit Commission 2004b) as well as reticence from the public who believe that prevention comes at the expense of response capability.

Alongside the White Paper and the Act, other changes in local government (as shown in the timeline) ensured that the role of FRS became more centrally positioned in relation to mainstream local government: the Police Reform Act, 2002, made FRS statutory partners in CDRPs, and the Anti Social Behaviour Act, 2003, reinforced this position by legislating against a number of fire related behaviours (including setting off fire works in a public place and making hoax calls). Finally, the 2004 Act also gave FRS the right to call themselves 'Fire and Rescue Services', reiterating the expansion of their role to prevention and rescue, and, it was hoped moving them away from the militaristic, closed watch culture, imagined in the word 'brigade'. Interestingly, however, a number of FRS, most notably London, still refer to themselves as 'brigades'.

Progress towards modernisation was measured stringently by the Audit Commission in the period following the Fire Service White Paper, and two reports were published to this effect (Audit Commission 2004b, Audit Commission 2004a). The Audit Commission looked for improvement across the board, including not just the realisation of modernisation but also the 'direction of travel' towards modernisation. The first report found that the majority of FRS were improving, and that the greatest improvement was to be found in those FRS that had strong leadership from their

elected members (in the Fire Authority). However, it also found that improvement was slowest in the areas of overtime, duty systems and part time working (page 10). The second report, conducted and published six months after the first found continuing progress, but not at the rate the Audit Commission might have hoped for (page 6), demonstrating, again, that FRS were perhaps finding modernisation a challenge.

## MODERN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The processes that FRS had undertaken in the name of modernisation closely followed the trajectory set by central government for local government, with the intention of granting a number of freedoms from bureaucratic scrutiny for local government. In this section, we consider the mainstream of Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA), alongside the drivers of inspection and improvement which were intended to steer this process. Although it was hoped that the relationship between central and local government would be relaxed through LGMA, in reality, central government still has considerable power over local (Laffin, 2008), through the measures of inspection and the ongoing process of change. This reflects the position that local government has come to occupy in relation to local public sector partners (FRS, police forces, primary care trusts, probation services etc). This section also examines how this has come about and how FRS have been affected by mainstream LGMA.

One of the pillars of LGMA has been inspection (Davis, Downe et al. 2004). Inspection is the mechanism through which improvement and modernisation are tested, and reported back both to the authority and to the public. Initially, this came in the form of best value, which introduced single service inspections to all local authorities. This resulted in a dazzling array of minutely specific inspections, including town clocks, public lavatories and even best value implementation. This put the Audit Commission (who were responsible for the inspection regime) under pressure to deliver many inspections, without seeming to drive improvement (Davis, Downe et al. 2004) and so, over time, the Audit Commission moved towards a more inclusive system, with fewer, larger inspections. Fire authorities, the democratically accountable arm of each FRS, became best value authorities alongside local authorities in 1999 (see the timeline).

A further white paper in 2001, entitled *Strong Local Leadership, Quality Local Government* introduced the next stage in LGMA: Comprehensive Performance

Assessment (CPA). This differed from its predecessors (Compulsory Competitive Tendering under the Conservative administration, best value after 1999) chiefly in drawing together a portfolio of evidence from external bodies, in addition to the inspection process conducted by the Audit Commission, and was more overtly improvement driven (Downe, Martin 2006). As with best value inspections, each authority was judged both on its current performance, and on its capacity for improvement. CPA was introduced initially to single tier authorities, but by 2003, all single and two tier authorities had been inspected (or 'assessed' as the language would suggest) in this way. A further aspect of the modernisation agenda was to bring all local government under comparable inspection arrangements, and so CPA for FRS was introduced through the Fire and Rescue Services Act, 2003. However, as Downe and Martin (2006) suggest, this was not necessarily straightforward: functional organisation in Whitehall departments meant that responsibility for local government partners, such as the FRS and police, lay in different places to the responsibility for LGMA (page 471), with resulting tensions between central government departments; between central and local government; and, between local partners.

A further tenet of LGMA was concerned with community leadership or governance (Sullivan 2006), which sought to place local authorities in a position to provide strategic leadership and encourage collaboration with local partners. This reflected other changes to the way in which local government was operating, for example through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships introduced in the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, which were extended through the Police Reform Act, 2003, to also include fire authorities. Not only did this bring a number of partnership authorities under the umbrella of local government, it also brought the policy strand of crime prevention to the forefront of local government operations – Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, for example, forcing local authorities to consider the crime prevention implications of each and every council policy and decision. The role of FRS within these partnerships is discussed in greater detail below.

In what could be seen as the culmination of the LGMA, work is now underway to align inspection with structure. As such, the most recent development has been to converge LAAs with CPA, resulting in Comprehensive Area Assessment, announced in late 2007, and due to commence in 2009. This new regime presents LSPs with a set of just under two hundred indicators, from which they can select the ones most meaningful to them. Again, there are particular implications to the fire service in this

process, who having struggled to adapt to partnership working, are now being excluded by these indicators. This will be discussed in more detail below.

## CRIME PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY (FIRE) SAFETY

The LGMA was not the only policy shift occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s, however. Another major raft of legislation concerned crime and, particularly, disorder. To an extent, these directives formed a part of the LGMA, introducing partnership working where links had been tenuous in the past, and providing crime prevention and youth disorder as a policy objective that all of local government would need to tackle. However, crime prevention is not only an example of joined up government, it is also an example of how FRS have engaged with LGMA, and potentially, not benefited from doing so. In this section, we look at the development of community safety and crime prevention, which is used as an example of how FRS have engaged at a local level. Legislation relating to community safety work is included in the timeline, alongside the national context.

The shift to partnership working in community safety followed a growing acknowledgement that the police, with their inevitable enforcement focus, were insufficiently resourced and experienced to deliver crime prevention. Organisations such as Crime Concern and Nacro lobbied for better coordination, and worked at a grass roots level to promote joint working. The 1998 Act formalised much of this work, putting CDRPs on a statutory footing, and making local authorities and police partners in crime prevention. Further, Section 17 of the Act made local authorities take the crime and disorder implications of any of their decisions into consideration. Youth Offending Teams were instituted, comprised of officers from a range of different agencies responsible for coordinating responses to young people's offending. Most sensationally, ASBOs (Anti Social Behaviour Orders) were introduced – placing low level criminality at the heart of government policy (von Hirsch, Simister 2006), where it has remained ever since. The rhetoric of disorder took over many social policy debates (Crawford, 1999), and as more organisations joined CDRPs, so their agendas became increasingly crime prevention oriented. An associated concern with disorder developed amongst the general public, fuelled in no small part by the tabloid media, but exacerbated by the involvement of ever more agencies. As different and diverse agencies became involved in tackling ASB, they could be seen, to some extent as responsible for its perceived proliferation – or at least for failing to 'solve' it. Including FRS in CDRPs and in crime prevention work

also implicates them in the growth of ASB and, again, in failing to resolve local problems.

Much of this concern about disorder emerged from concern on the right about a burgeoning moral underclass, characterised by illegitimacy, unemployment and crime (Murray, Lister et al. 1996) and on the left about growing social exclusion (Levitas, 2006), resulting in neighbourhood based interventions such as Neighbourhood Renewal. The moral tone of these debates gave rise to the suggestion that communities were, through their own internal decrepitude, responsible for crime which occurred within them. Attendant problems of failing schools, health inequality and inadequate housing were no longer questions of social, but criminal, justice. Generic social policy issues were no longer worth resolving of their own accord, but rather because they gave rise to crime and criminal tendencies. This is what Crawford (1999) comes to call the 'criminalisation of social policy', which, as we examine below, has certain implications for the FRS.

The move to partnership working, including community safety partnerships, was (and remains) challenging to many, both in local government and in the police. Culturally, there are great differences in many aspects of these organisations and getting representatives to share information and allow each other to participate equally has been problematic (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006, Sullivan, Sweeting et al. 2005). At a more strategic level, the work of encouraging inward facing organisations to cooperate and develop a more external outlook (Stewart 2003) has been challenging, not least for fire and rescue services, many of whom are concerned about their perceived contribution to partnerships due to low financial input and stretched commitments to a number of LSPs (Audit Commission 2008).

In 2002, the Police Reform Act developed and extended the work begun by the Crime and Disorder Act, extending statutory authority status to Fire and Rescue Authorities, and Primary Care Trusts. Other partnerships have also come into prominence in the interim, including Children and Young People's Partnerships, delivering the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Growing partnership commitments have challenged FRS across the country, particularly in areas where a single FRS covers multiple local authorities.

Expanding the role of partnership, and the number of agencies integral to those partnerships, has been an important part of the modernisation agenda. More

recently, local strategic partnerships (LSPs) have come to prominence, despite their non statutory status, and have now subsumed other partnerships (including Children and Young People's Partnerships and CDRPs). There has been an associated shift at this level from agencies within partnerships being service providers to partnerships themselves taking a commissioning approach. Further, where the police, for example, were equal partners in CDRPs, the local authority remains responsible for the LSP – rendering them no longer partnerships of equals. This is an issue particularly for the other partners, such as FRS, and parallels the centre / local relationships (Gillanders 2007) that the LGMA was supposed to replace. Further, the principal mechanism for LSP operation has been through the Local Area Agreement, piloted in a small number of authorities in 2005, and now implemented across the board. LAAs bring together local authority agencies to simplify funding, allowing them to pool resources and allocate funds as appropriate. This is in recognition of the diverse nature of local authority areas, and the different ways in which they conduct their business. Key to selling the process to local government were the concepts of flexibility and accountability (Communities and Local Government 2007), but these have not materialised in practice (Laffin 2008).

Prior to their formal inclusion in CDRPs in 2002, FRS were already involved with initiatives such as community fire safety, which traditionally involved school visits alongside targeting adults with smoke alarms, chip pan amnesties and electric blanket testing, most of which were piecemeal and local intervention, well intended but lacking strategic focus, but which date back to their inclusion in Constabularies in the interwar years (Ewen 2004) In more recent years, they have become increasingly concerned with youth interventions (Arson Control Forum 2004, Arson Control Forum 2006), which themselves started to take a more crime prevention approach. Further, the ASB Act, 2003, had made crimes of various fire related activities, including the public use of fireworks and making hoax calls. Following from Crawford's (1999) assertions of the 'criminalisation of social policy', this has led, to an extent, to a 'criminalisation of the fire service', as their core business has increasingly been influenced by rhetoric around disorder and directed by available funding. In 2008, funding from central government for Home Fire Safety Visits, the flagship of community fire safety, came to an end, and although most FRS will continue to provide the service, it is possible that progressively more resources will be aimed at preventing fire setting behaviour in young people. This is especially the case given the requirements within CAA for partnership approaches to issues such as ASB, which have been embraced by far more authorities than those relating to generic fire

safety (Improvement and Development Agency, 2008). This suggests that FRS have to some extent also been subsumed by the shift to crime prevention and community safety, potentially at the expense of generic fire prevention and community fire prevention.

This shift is not necessarily negative: the concentration on community safety, and the involvement of FRS in CDRPs has positioned them well for further partnership work, such as through the rapidly developing LSPs. However, FRS are a late inclusion to many partnerships with their statutory incorporation a full five years after police forces and local councils. Although in some areas they have assimilated well (for example with FRS staff chairing CDRPs), FRS have had to work hard to adopt more cooperative ways of working in partnerships where dynamics and relationships may have become well established prior to FRS involvement. This area is somewhat under-researched, with the majority of LGMA literature focussing on community / authority relations (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006) or central / local relations (Gillanders 2007, Laffin 2008), rather than considering relations between the local authority and their other public sector partners. However, that in itself is perhaps evidence of the lack of status experienced by partners in the process of LGMA, as reflected by the Audit Commission (2008).

Further, there may also be particular cultural styles within FRS that make this involvement particularly difficult: the 'closed culture' (Home Office 2000, Bain 2002) of the fire service is likely to be just as impermeable from the outside as from within, and at a strategic as at an operational level. However, little of the FRS modernisation agenda has been concerned with outward relations as debates about inwardness have mostly concerned the watch culture (Audit Commission 2004a), which describes the replication of homogenous, male working class cultures throughout the service, with an emphasis on 'fitting in' (Baigent, 2001). Similarly, debates about the potential for local authorities to develop these styles of working have focussed more on centre – local relations than on those between local government and its partners (Sullivan, Downe et al. 2006, Gillanders 2007, Laffin 2008), an issue complicated for FRS by their inclusion, prior to local government reorganisation, as part of County Councils.

As such, modernisation as a process has had a considerable impact on the fire service, and many FRS have worked hard, in most instances, and despite some difficulties to adapt to this. However, progress has not been entirely unproblematic,

nor is the process complete, and as some FRS are still reluctant to engage fully (Audit Commission 2008), there is still some work to go. In the concluding section, we will discuss the potential for further modernisation in the light of these difficulties, asking to what extent the work of the FRS is rewarded through the ongoing modernisation process.

## THE FUTURE FOR THE MODERN FIRE SERVICE

The culmination of the partnership agenda will come in 2009 as CPA is superseded by CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment. CAA will look at a wide range of local government functions, taking a holistic view of how the LSP, and its members, function. In this section, we will look at this culmination of the modernisation process, and assess some of the implications for fire and rescue services. It is argued by the Audit Commission that CAA is a more ‘realistic’ way of assessing public sector performance, as this is how the end user, the resident, experiences the services (Audit Commission 2008). This in itself is not unproblematic, and a growing number of critiques exist (Coulson 2009). Demonstrating that the medium is indeed the message, CAA will be delivered by a partnership of inspectorates, and will cover a wide range of service areas with a ‘quality of life’ focus. This includes the Audit Commission (which incorporated HMFSI in 2004); the Commission for Social Care Inspection, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted). CAA will also provide an impetus for further improvement as authorities will be rated on their capacity for improvement (as with previous regimes) in addition to their current performance.

CAA will work by assessing areas against a set of 198 nationally agreed indicators, which were published in April 2008. (Communities and Local Government 2008b). Only two of these have direct relevance to FRS: ‘Arson incidents’ (indicator 33) and ‘Number of primary fires and related fatalities and non fatal casualties’ (indicator 49) (Improvement and Development Agency 2008). Unfortunately, these two indicators are potentially problematic. Although arson is something the fire service do collect data on, it is not always possible to attribute a deliberate cause to a fire. Further, the fire service currently collate information on deliberate primary fires (where there is damage to property) separately to secondary fires (where the damage is, for example, to rubbish). Arson is also a police matter, not solely an FRS one, and as such FRS do not have sole ownership of this indicator, nor is its improvement an entirely fire matter. The second indicator, relating to numbers of primary fires, also

fails to distinguish between accidental and deliberate fires, and as such, also includes an element of the first indicator. This could be seen as reinforcing the 'criminalisation' of the FRS, discussed above as the only measures on which FRS are assessed are crime prevention or criminal ones, marking a completeness to this process. Furthermore, the uptake of these indicators has been low, with only sixteen and thirteen authorities, respectively, incorporating them into their CAA. This compares to over a hundred authorities choosing indicators about teenage pregnancies, affordable homes and carbon emissions – an interesting reflection of popular concerns in the early twenty-first century.

There are other indicators to which FRS could contribute, such as 'People killed in road traffic accidents' (indicator 47, selected by over forty local authorities), and which also contribute to fire safety, but it remains to be seen whether partnerships will approach these shared indicators in the true spirit of partnership. The sidelining of FRS in the CAA process suggests that, despite working hard to acclimatise to partnership working, FRS do not seem to be being rewarded by inclusion at the centre of modern local government. The criminalisation of fire service policy serves to reinforce this, compounded by the probability that local authorities have overwhelmingly selected indicators relating to ASB for their CAAs.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the process of fire service modernisation, against the backdrop of the general LGMA, looking specifically at FRS involvement in community safety partnerships as a case study. We suggest that fire services across the country have worked hard over a decade of LGMA to become included in modern local government through modernisation, inspection and improvement. However, and in a reflection of ongoing centre / local relations, modern local government has not reciprocated by including FRS on equal terms in partnerships. As such, The incentive for further involvement and engagement by FRS seems somewhat to be lacking, especially at a time when some in the fire service are still questioning the need for modernisation, the speed of its progress and the nature of its implementation (Labour Research Department 2008).

The engagement of the fire and rescue services with crime prevention seems also to have come full circle, from their interwar inclusion in constabularies to their current position where FRS are not just espousing crime prevention messages, but being almost entirely subsumed by them. This situation should perhaps be revisited if FRS

are expected to maintain their position as Fire and Rescue Services, rather than returned to being subsections of police forces or adjuncts to local authorities, within modern local government.

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