

# Fire and Rescue Services: Leadership and Management Perspectives

## Chapter 1 Introduction

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This book is the third of a series on the management of the three 'blue light' emergency services i.e. Police Ambulance and Fire and Rescue Services. Following this brief introduction, it explores some of the contemporary issues in the leadership and management of the fire service in the context of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This has been a period of major changes in the management of the emergency services in general and the Fire and Rescue Service in particular. As we write, it also appears to be giving way to a new era for Fire and Rescue Services, at least in England. The leadership of local services is effectively being transferred through the 2016 Crime and Policing Bill, to directly elected Mayors or to Police and Crime Commissioners. This seems therefore like an appropriate time to take stock of the last 20 years.

The book is not, however, meant to be a management handbook for fire professionals. It does not cover many of the things that are integral to the Fire Service and to firefighters. For example, it does not deal with fire or chemical engineering or with the science and manufacturing of resistant materials. It does not stray into the psychological challenges of stress, anxiety and trauma, which are unfortunately inevitable consequences of some of the situations firefighters often find themselves in. Similarly, it does not deal with equipment, machinery, and appliances or with operating standards and procedures. All of these, we believe are already much better catered for by other authors and publications.

Despite an extensive and voluminous professional press, Fire and Rescue Services, are not well served by the academic literature relating to public management or public leadership. The fragmentary nature of emergency services research together with the strong theory-practice divide was one of the reasons for the recent establishment of the *International Journal of Emergency Services*. Fire Services have a rich history that has attracted industrial relations scholars but less interest from public management scholars.

This is very surprising to the editors. Two of the things that make studying the Fire and Rescue Services so attractive are the services long attachment and strong adherence to evidence based policy making, and the dichotomous challenge of managing the service when it is in 'response' mode, and managing it when it is promoting, public protection, prevention and fire safety within homes, workplaces and communities. Although the culture of the service has not always recognised this dual responsibility or recognised the equal importance of these complementary roles, they do call for quite different combinations of leadership and managerial skills.

Good leaders and competent managers need both sets of these skills. This is increasingly being recognised across all of the emergency services. The ever-increasing complexity of the incidents and emergencies that the three services are being called to respond to, also adds to the imperative for greater inter-operability and closer collaboration between the emergency services and their personnel.

The adherence to evidence based policy making and robust justifications for changes in standards and practice is one of the characteristics that could usefully be adopted in other public services. There is no doubt that if things go wrong, the ultimate possibility of a coroners' court or a judicial review, interested in facts, evidence and apportioning responsibility has been a strong historical influence on the fire service. However restating the need for evidence based policy is a comforting factor for public servants like ourselves when the government are proposing to bring more politics into the leadership of the service.

Our final chapter looks a bit more into this particular crystal ball, ably abetted and prepared by Professor Kane's account of part of its' antecedents in Chapter 6.

The remaining parts of this chapter will describe the contents of the chapters leading up to our look to the future, after which we will, briefly set out the origins and antecedents of the British fire service and its development up to the end of the 20th Century.

The next three chapters trace the chronological story of the fire services. In **Chapter 2** we look at one of the most turbulent periods in the history of Local Government in England and Fire Services in particular. This saw ‘an unprecedented attempt by central government to transform the politics and performance of English local government’ with the result being ‘a decade of unprecedented change, which had profound implications for the governance of local communities and management of local services (Downe and Martin, 2007).

Chapter 2 recounts one of the most interesting but surprisingly confusing stories of the labour governments’ period from 1997 to 2005. The governments’ initial ‘modernisation’ agenda was generally welcomed by other public services. However much needed and acknowledged changes in the Fire Services were slower to materialise and firmly resisted. As we will see from chapter 3, by the time labour left office in 2010, the Fire Service had become positively and pro-actively engaged in the service improvement agenda and was focussing on prevention, protection and collaborative working across public services. Chapter 2 focusses on the complex and fascinating earlier period of 1997-2005, which was dominated by the national strike and problems with industrial relations.

In **Chapter 3**, we examine the experience and performance of the, newly renamed ‘Fire and Rescue’ Services in the period 2005-2010. This period extended across the final ‘New Labour’ administration of Tony Blair and the period from 2007 when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister. Unlike the previous turbulent years, this was a period of consolidation and relative stability. Issues of performance management, service improvement, collaboration and prevention and protection increasingly came to be the services priority.

In **Chapter 4** Murphy and Ferry examine the experience in the period 2010-2015. Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats led the first coalition government of modern times. Radical change for public services was back on the agenda and the Fire and Rescue Services was no exception. National economic policy resulted in ever-longer restrictions on public expenditure and an era of austerity, originally envisaged as being for two years, in reality dominated public service delivery throughout the 5 year administration (and beyond). The experience of the service under the coalition government is the focus of more detailed analysis and discussion in the following chapters. This chapter provides an overview of the years 2010-2015, to allow these discussions to be appreciated within the overall management development and experiences of the service during the coalition years.

By the time of the election in May 2010, performance management and service improvement were still a high priority but the 2008 recession and significant reductions in public expenditure were dominating local and national politics. As James Downe and his colleagues recall in **chapter 5**, the incoming government promoted ‘localism’ and a ‘sector-led approach’ to performance improvement in the fire and rescue services. It was also looking to make swinging reductions to the finances of all local services and virtually demolishing the ‘improvement’ infrastructure developed by the previous administrations.

The abolition of the Audit Commission, which conducted the Best Value, and Comprehensive Assessment regimes, allowed, or in reality required, the sector to take more responsibility for their own regulation and performance. This chapter evaluates the effectiveness of the ‘operational assessment and fire peer challenge’ which became the key element of the sector’s new approach to performance improvement.

Another area that the coalition government was not satisfied with was the nature and extent of collaboration or interoperability between the Emergency Services. **Chapter 6** outlines the findings of research by Parry, Kane, Martin, and Bandyopadhyay (2015) commissioned by the government. This

report examined the extant landscape of collaboration and suggested ideas and options for future service re-design and rationalisation. In this chapter, one of the authors of the report, Eddie Kane, outlines their key findings, considers the impact of the new service design proposals and examines some of the issues and options for realising its benefits.

After a brief introduction and a look at to a range of conceptual considerations that provide a context for discussing FRS accountability Julian Clarke, in **Chapter 7** raises a question common to all democratic politics namely what kind of accountability are we promoting? Accountability to local populations emerged as a fully formed but vaguely defined duty for FRS in the latest 2012 National Framework. Clarke tracks back to find the source of this duty and looks at the emergence of accountability as a central feature of local governance. But one of the central problems of prioritizing public services, whether in an era of austerity or of plenty, is the divide between expert allocation of scarce resources and a range of localised 'community' interests which may or may not be consistent with each other. The second part of the chapter discusses this issue and alternative accountability mechanisms.

Anne Eyre in **Chapter 8**, explores the phenomenon of heroism in the context of behavioural responses to disaster. Hero's and heroism is probably more associate with firefighters and firefighting than any other profession. Drawing on social scientific, media and health and safety Anne reflects on the impact and consequences of being labelled a 'hero'. She then considers the implications of heroism for the emergency services arising from recent cultural and legal developments within the UK. The chapter calls for a more informed understanding and debate about the meaning and implications of heroism particularly in emergencies and disasters.

In **Chapter 9**, the first of three to look in more detail at HRM issues, Anita Pickerden addresses the issue of increasing numbers of older firefighters which, for the purposes of this chapter, covers those who may retire at an age beyond the traditional retirement age of 50. In the past, the firefighters pension arrangements made it uneconomical for firefighters to continue working for more than 30 years. The abolition of the Default Retirement Age in 2011, and gender equalisation, have paved the way for the proposed pension changes. The proposed changes were strongly opposed by the Fire Brigades Union, who feared that older firefighters would not be physically fit enough to perform their duties, thereby putting their service and the safety of the public at risk. Politics aside, it is clear that the Fire & Rescue Services will be faced with an ageing workforce over the next few years, and many of those employees will be firefighters. Anita poses the question!

As earlier chapters demonstrate, the UK government has made a concerted effort to modernise the way in which fire services are managed and staffed. In **Chapter 10**, Rhys Andrews and Rachel Ashworth consider the introduction of new duties around fire prevention, reformed pay structures, the integrated development programme for fire service personnel and a renewed emphasis on positive working conditions. One important element of this agenda for change has been an emphasis on increased representation of women and minority ethnic people amongst fire service employees. Reform of human resource management (HRM) practices, were, regarded as a key policy tool in the drive to make fire brigades more representative of, and responsive to, the communities that they serve. HRM reform was largely undertaken through the introduction of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), which sought to reduce the ambiguity around the roles of all fire service staff at every stage in their professional development, from entry to retirement. Crucially, the IPDS was introduced to ensure career progression was linked to ability rather than rank and hierarchical position.

In our second chapter on contemporary HRM issues (**Chapter 11**), Julian Clarke looks at equality, diversity and multi-culturalism in Fire and Rescue services and how the service has responded to serving the increasingly diverse nature of local communities. He examines the way in which the FRS have attempted to develop and manage improved relationships with minority groups following the publication of the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 (Home Office 1999) and the inclusion of the Human Rights Act into UK legislation. In an era of declining resources, instant mass communication, 24 hour news and the burgeoning influence of social media; FRS have been required to

adapt the way they relate to their public and local communities. He illustrates his exploration with national and local case studies drawn from various attempts by FRS to both engage more closely and to broaden the range of services and activities they offer to the public.

In **Chapter 12** Catherin Farrell focuses on the under-researched area of governance in the fire and rescue service. The fire and rescue authority (FRA) is currently the governing body or board for the vast majority of fire and rescue services (FRS) and their role in terms of its governance has largely been neglected by academics. Very little is known about how governance operates in practice within fire and rescue authorities. With the advent of Police and Crime Commissioners, this may well change and this chapter seeks to bring the topic area under much-needed greater scrutiny.

The final two chapters in the main part of this book are concerned with the organisation of Fire and Rescue Services in places other than in England. **Chapter 13** by Lynda Taylor and Pete Murphy explores how and why the Scottish fire and rescue services have evolved since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 and more specifically since 2010, when the purpose, legislation, structure, objectives, and performance of fire services all started to diverge from their English equivalents. Although Scotland, is still partially regulated by UK-wide legislation such as the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), the country enacts its own legislation on the delivery of most public services, including fire and rescue. Scotland was not subject to the Fire and Rescue Service Act of 2004 but had its own (very similar) Fire and Rescue Services Act of 2005. The more recent Police and Fire Reform Act (2012), culminated in the establishment of both a single national Fire and Rescue Service for Scotland and new Fire and Rescue Framework in 2013 and an updated one 2016 following the service restructuring.

The fire and rescue service in Sweden is primarily regulated by the civil protection act and the civil protection regulation which is primarily concerned with protection of the public against accidents. As Stefan Svensson, explains in **Chapter 14**, the legislation is designed to provide reasonable protection against accidents to people, property and the environment throughout the country taking into account local conditions. The national government cannot make any decisions about the level of protection locally. The legislation is a framework, which includes basic values and principles and to a lesser extent some detail about what should be done and how this should be accomplished but these arrangements have to be agreed with the local self-governing system

In our final chapter we describe and discuss some of the changes and proposals that have emerged in 2016, and look briefly to the future. The change of Prime Minister occasioned by the result of the referendum on membership of the EU has accelerated the passage of the 2016 Crime and Policing Bill with its proposals for Police and Crime Commissioners to take direct responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services. The legislation also proposes to establish an independent inspectorate, new national standards and a new and more transparent accountability framework. However, the details and the implementation of these proposals will be a subject for future authors. The end of 2016 provides us as an appropriate place to close our narrative.

## **A (very) brief history of the development of fire services from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>.**

Although most of the individual fire services and brigades have their own local biographers, the academic historical literature of the British Fire services is largely undeveloped (Ewen, 2010). The industrial revolution and the commercial needs of the late 18th and early 19th centuries led to the municipalisation and creation of a paid fire service in the UK. As Shane Ewen explains in his history of the British Fire Service, the ‘Great Fire’ of Edinburgh in 1824 and the appointment of James Braidwood as Master of Fire-engines, led to significant structural and functional improvements in the city’s firefighting capacity and ultimately to the creation of the first truly organised paid fire service.

Braidwood also instigated the four principals of effective firefighting, which he later disseminated through the publication of his first manual ‘On the Construction of Fire Engines and Apparatus, the Training of Firemen and the Method of proceeding in Cases of Fire’ in 1830 (Braidwood 1830). These four

principles, which became known as the 'Edinburgh model', would generally be recognisable by the service today. The principles were:

- centralised control of the service,
- standardized appliances and equipment,
- identification of the source of a fire and tackling it at source if possible, and
- deployment of a disciplined, well trained and regularly drilled body of firemen.

Following a series of uncontrollable and devastating fires across London in the early 1820s and the publication of his manual, Braidwood himself was appointed as the first Superintendent of the London Fire Engine Establishment in 1832 just in time to watch the House of Parliament burn down in 1834. Both had a critical impact and accelerated the creation, development and municipalisation of organised fire services in all the major industrial cities and towns in the UK.

In the decades that followed, the idea of the fireman as a working class hero doing his dangerous duties in difficult circumstances became synonymous with the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, both in the UK and further afield.

The latter part of this period also saw the rise of the Chief Fire Officer and his personal influence, the continued professionalization of the service; the networking of services across the country and the collective organisation of both senior officers and other staff. In effect the 'transformation of the fire service from a disparate collection of fire brigades into a cohesive profession at the turn of the twentieth century' (Ewen, 2010, p.9).

The two final phases of formative development unsurprisingly came around the periods of the great war and its aftermath, and immediately before and during the early part of the second world war.

During the first period, the strong public service ethos of the service was driven by the chief fire officers themselves and strongly promoted from within by all ranks of the service. Similarly historical associations and the fact that the service had to negotiate with the Home Office also encouraged the influence and the adoption of a 'service' model with many similarities to the model developing in the police. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Fire Services had become "an integrated part of the fabric of local government".

The devastation of the London Blitz led to the temporary creation of a National Fire Service between 1941 and 1947. There was a steep learning curve for the new service, as war-time firefighting required much more strategic deployment of resources, inter-brigade co-operation and more sophisticated risk assessment. Fire Services in the major cities could not deal with every single blaze and they were continually liable to bombs falling on them in the course of their duty.

The war-time experience also led to the creation of the pre-2004 traditional Fire Services. These have their origin in the 1947 Fire Service Act, which made provisions to 'transfer fire-fighting functions from the National Fire Service, established during the war years, to fire brigades maintained by the councils of counties' (Fire Services Act 1947, p.1). The war also meant that women entered the service for the first time albeit as war-time auxiliaries.

Throughout these phases of its development, leadership and management of the service was dominated by the traditional model of public administration that was to prevail through much of the early and middle parts of the 20th century. The traditional model of public administration emerged in the UK in the middle of the 19th century and was greatly influenced by the writings of Woodrow Wilson in the United States and by Max Weber who set out the theory of bureaucracy in Europe. To these were added the scientific management principles of F.W. Taylor and the fundamental principles of public service policy, principle-agent theory and public service delivery. These were established and universally applied to Fire and Rescue as well as to the remainder of the public services at both national and local levels.

In 1974, there was a comprehensive reorganisation of local government in England and Wales (outside of London). A uniform two-tier structure was introduced, abolishing the previous single-tier arrangements in counties and county boroughs. Several of the historic counties disappeared, new counties were created, and there were widespread boundary changes. Both the territorial police services<sup>1</sup> and fire services changed their boundaries to coincide with the new administrative areas and six of the new counties, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Tyne & Wear, West Midlands, and West and South Yorkshire, became metropolitan counties. Although the geography may have changed the legislative underpinning; the operational practises and the culture of the services remained largely intact.

Even more surprisingly, this remained the case throughout most of the years of the Thatcher and Major governments from 1979 to 1997. While local government and its key major services endured successive waves of significant changes to legislation, objectives, financing, governance, and operating environments, not least because of the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering across both blue and white collar services, Fire and Rescue Services appeared relatively immune to most of these influences. Throughout the period from the second world war through to 2001, responsibility for fire services rested with the Home Office. Frank Burchill, review into the machinery for determining the conditions of service in the sector, quoted in Chapter 2 was not an exaggeration.

*“There has been an almost total lack of real political engagement in the fire services since the last firefighter’s strike in 1977. The 1947 Act is hopelessly outdated. Local Authority employers of fire brigades have, in general, shown a lack of leadership and purpose especially when acting together to negotiate pay and conditions. The Fire Brigades Union, while professing its enthusiasm for change, has shown no real commitment to making it happen from the centre and in many parts of the has mounted sustained and energetic opposition to change. The senior management of the Fire Service has shown a collective lack of leadership.”*

(Burchill 2000, p.3)

## References

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## Notes

In addition to the 42 territorial police forces (often known as constabularies), there are a number of specialist forces, such as the British Transport Police, the harbour and ports police, the National Crime Agency and the Serious Fraud Office, they did not change their boundaries at this time.