



PROMISES OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE GOVERNANCE REFORMS OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

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IRSPM 2024 "Hybrid futures for public governance and management"
Tampere, Finland, 16-18 April 2024

ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE REFORMS

Governance reforms often intend to be solutions to the problems of governance and include various 'promises' in terms of greater public accountability (Dubnick and Yang 2011).

Public management reforms have created **multiple and overlapping**, rather than simple and individual **forms of accountability** within the public sector over the recent decades (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Koppell 2005).

Romzek and Dubnick (1987) proposed the original typology of accountability: Bureaucratic accountability, Political accountability, Legal accountability and Professional accountability. Bovens (2007) found vertical, horizontal and diagonal accountability relationships.

The key to investigating accountability as result of governance reforms is understanding **what kind of accountability is perceived to be appropriate by different actors** (Romzek 2000).

*ACCOUNTABILITY IN
FIRE AND RESCUE
SERVICES IN
ENGLAND*

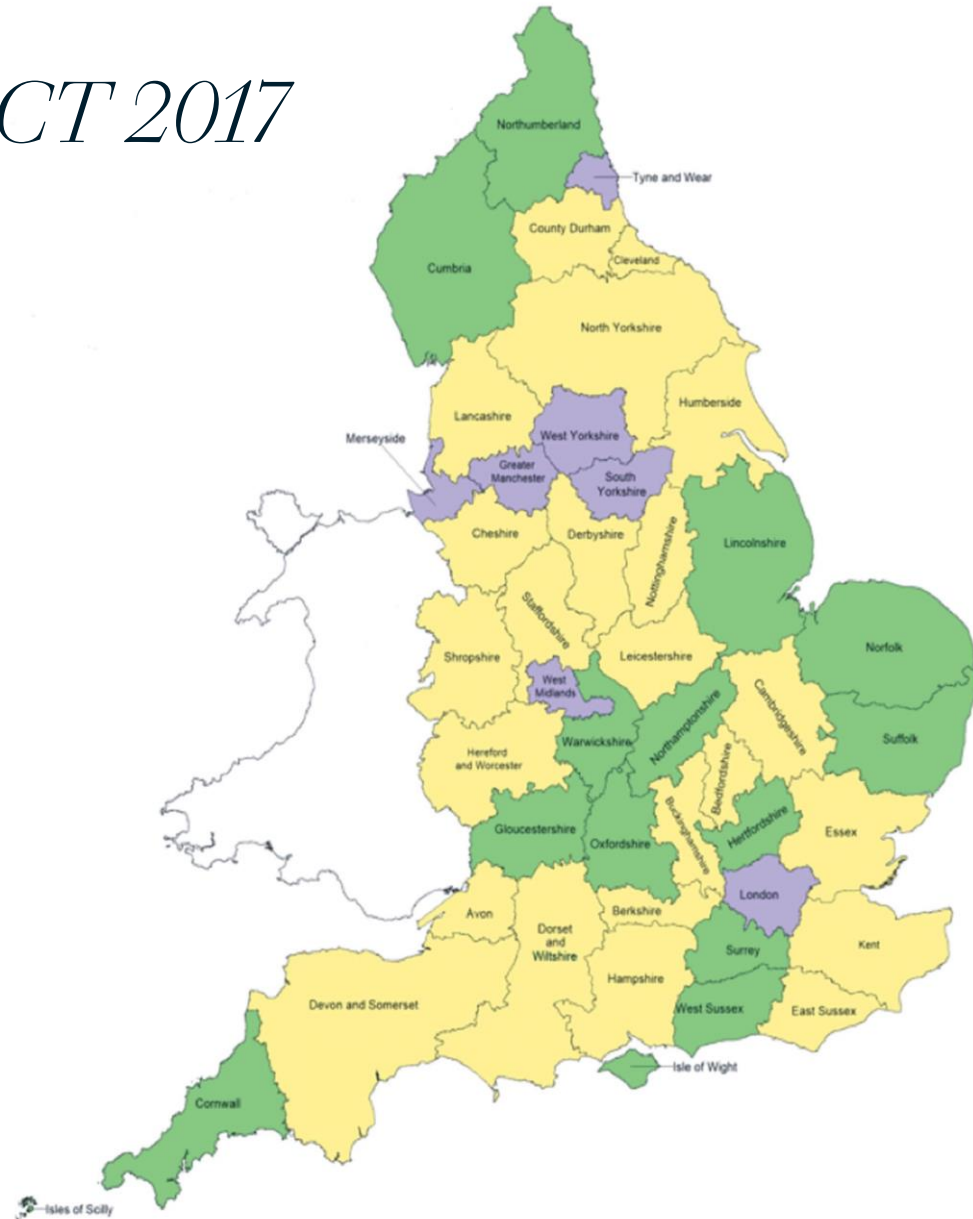
The desire to create **more accountable public services** through existing or new governance structures has been apparent across many public services in England (Murphy et al. 2019) as well as worldwide (Romzek 2000).

Local accountability of Fire and Rescue Services in England **has lacked rigour** in many places (NAO 2015, PAC 2016, May 2016).

In response to these perceived accountability deficiencies within the fire sector, **the UK's Policing and Crime Act 2017** introduced a range of new governance reforms across emergency services,

POLICING AND CRIME ACT 2017

- Prior to the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services in England were all part of local government arrangements, and traditionally answerable to their Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), made up of local councilors
- Since 2017, an alternative governance model to improve accountability in practice (Policing and Crime Act 2017)
 - Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have been able to make a case to assume responsibility for the governance of Fire and Rescue Services within their force areas and become **Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs)**
 - Creation of a **new inspectorate** - HMICFRS (for all fire services)
 - Strengthened **focus on collaborative working** across emergency services partners (for all fire services)
- A patchwork of governance arrangements throughout England



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

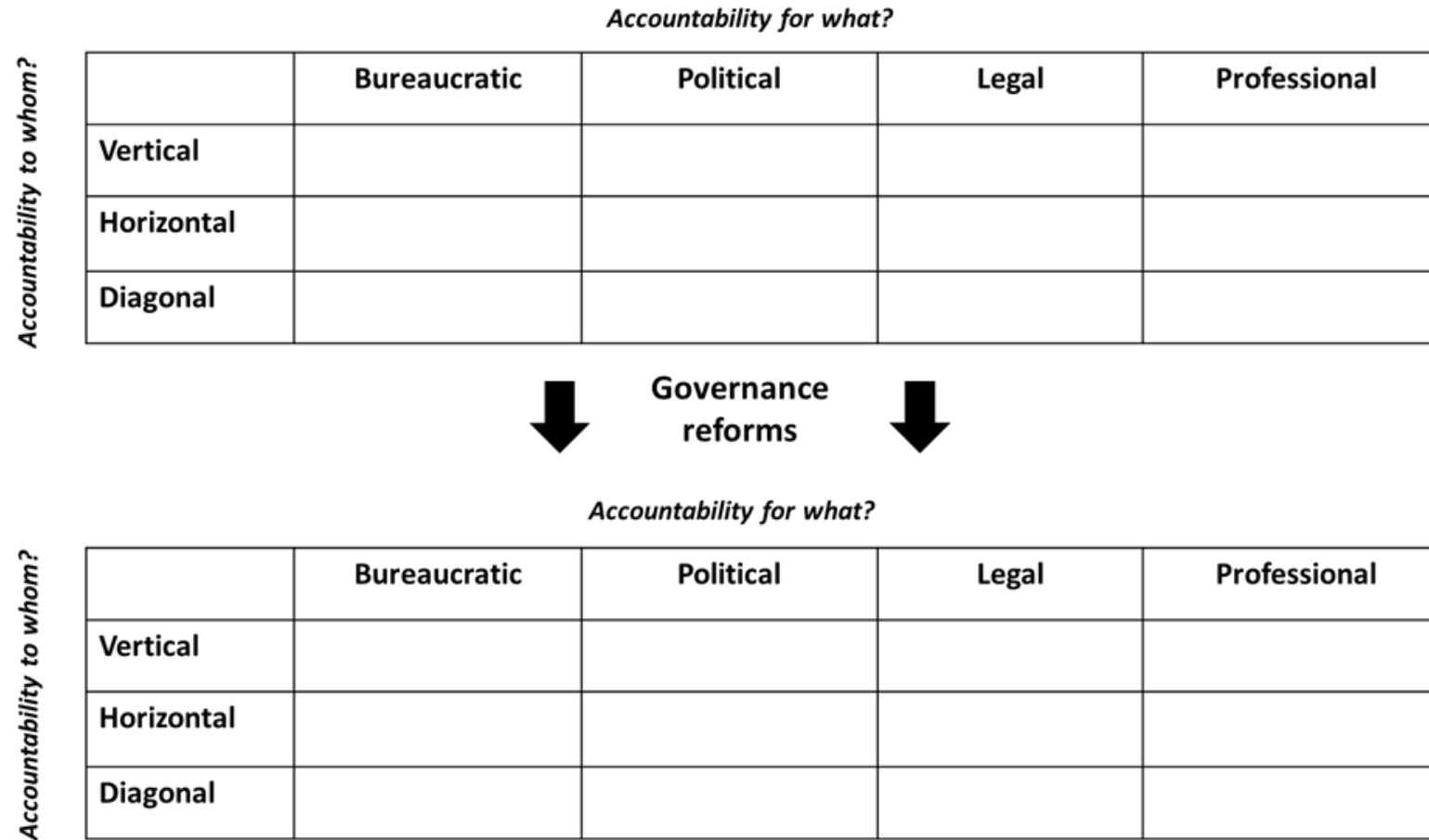
1. What governance reforms did the UK government seek to achieve through the Policing and Crime Act 2017?

2. How do Fire and Rescue Services in England understand accountability as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 governance reforms?

METHODS

Qualitative approach	Understanding the concepts from the individuals' viewpoints (Bevir 2009)
Primary data collection (March 2020 to June 2021)	Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability: 6 out of 44 services in England (3 traditional fire and rescue authority services and 3 new PFCC governance services) Methods: - 35 semi-structured interviews with senior management (CFOs, deputy CFOs, Assistant CFOs, Directors of Assurance, Directors of Finance, Directors of Prevention and Protection) - 3 interviews and 5 focus groups with firefighters (3-5 participants),
Secondary data collection (since 2017)	The UK government's envisaged outcome of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms Methods: - UK legislation relating to the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and ministerial speeches
Data analysis	Thematic coding. Original typology of accountabilities by Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and Bovens (2007) used as a theoretical lens.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Adapted from Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and Bovens (2007)

BUREAUCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

	Before the 2017 Act		After the 2017 Act		
	Government's perception	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	Government	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	FRS (PFCC-governed) understandings
Vertical	Limited scrutiny provided by local FRAs	Limited scrutiny provided by local FRAs	Extensive overview and scrutiny mechanisms of PFCCs	Moderate overview and scrutiny mechanisms of reformed FRAs	Extensive overview and scrutiny mechanisms of PFCCs
Horizontal	Limited accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services	Limited accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services	Extensive accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services	Limited accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services	Moderate accountability relationship when collaborating with police Limited accountability relationship when collaborating with ambulance services
Diagonal	Moderate accountability towards inspection bodies or peer organisations	Limited accountability towards inspection bodies or peer organisations	Extensive bureaucratic scrutiny on services focused on performance	Extensive bureaucratic scrutiny on services focused on performance	Extensive bureaucratic scrutiny on services focused on performance

POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

	Before the 2017 Act		After the 2017 Act		
	Government's perception	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	Government's vision	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	FRS (PFCC-governed) understandings
Vertical	Limited ability to dismiss FRA members, Limited level of connections with local communities	Limited ability to dismiss FRA members, Moderate level of connections with local communities	Extensive ability to dismiss the PFCC Extensive level of connections with local communities	Moderate ability to dismiss FRA members, including the PCC, Moderate level of connections with local communities	Extensive ability to dismiss the PFCC Limited level of connections with local communities
Horizontal	Limited level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies	Moderate level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies	Extensive level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies	Moderate level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies	Extensive level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies
Diagonal	Moderate level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making	Moderate level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making	Moderate level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs/PFCCs' decision-making	Moderate level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making	Extensive level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on PFCCs' decision-making

LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

	Before the 2017 Act		After the 2017 Act		
	Government's perception	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	Government's vision	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	FRS (PFCC-governed) understandings
Vertical	Moderate accountability through compliance with legislation	Moderate accountability through compliance with legislation	Extensive accountability through compliance with legislation	Moderate accountability through compliance with legislation	Extensive accountability through compliance with legislation
Horizontal	Moderate accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services	Limited accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services	Extensive accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services	Limited accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services	Moderate accountability between fire and police, Limited accountability between fire and ambulance services
Diagonal	Moderate accountability under external inspections/sector-led improvement	Limited accountability under external inspections/sector-led improvement	Extensive accountability under external inspections	Extensive accountability under external inspections	Extensive accountability under external inspections

PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

	Before the 2017 Act		After the 2017 Act		
	Government's perception	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	Government's vision	FRS (FRA-governed) understandings	FRS (PFCC-governed) understandings
Vertical	Moderate accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training	Moderate accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training	Extensive accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training	Extensive accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training	Extensive accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training
Horizontal	Moderate accountability to other emergency services, Moderate professional accountability through peer challenges	Moderate accountability to other emergency services, Limited professional accountability through peer challenges	Extensive accountability to the police, Extensive accountability to ambulance services	Moderate accountability to the police, Moderate accountability to ambulance services	Extensive accountability to the police, Moderate accountability to ambulance services
Diagonal	Limited accountability towards the inspectorate	Limited accountability towards the inspectorate	Extensive accountability towards the inspectorate	Extensive accountability towards the inspectorate	Extensive accountability towards the inspectorate

DISCUSSION

Fire and Rescue Services' **accountability largely strengthened as result of the 2017 reforms**, albeit with varying degrees of bureaucratic, political, legal, and professional accountabilities in vertical, horizontal and diagonal dimensions.

However, **Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability largely differed from the government's expected outcome of the reforms.**

The government primarily intended to **improve political accountability** of Fire and Rescue Services by establishing the PFCC governance model. However, the political accountability of PFCCs **has not been as influential** as anticipated, with only five Fire and Rescue Services have transferred to the PFCC governance model.

Contrary to the government's intentions, the duty to collaborate with other emergency services has also had **limited impact on professional and bureaucratic accountability.**

The establishment of the inspectorate **has had the biggest influence on accountability** out of all the accountability mechanisms imposed on Fire and Rescue Services.

SUMMARY

The nature of accountability depends not only on governance arrangements but also on **perceptions of the involved actors.**

Therefore, it is important to understand how accountability is perceived as appropriate by different actors before introducing new governance reforms (Romzek 2000).

The UK government has recently acknowledged that **the fire sector still requires further reforms** as it is not yet content with Fire and Rescue Services' accountability (Home Office 2022, 2023).

This acknowledges that the 2017 reforms have not delivered the desired accountability improvements and more reforms to improve accountability are proposed.



*THANK YOU,
ANY COMMENTS,
QUESTIONS?*

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