The implications of governance changes on understandings of accountability:

The case of Fire and Rescue Services in England

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Abstract:

Reforms to the governance of public services invariably promise improved accountability, yet relatively few studies have examined their impact empirically. This thesis shows how a range of reforms to Fire and Rescue Services in England affected understandings of accountability within the sector, and draws on these empirical findings to develop a new conceptualisation of how different accountabilities relate to each other in public services. In particular, it argues that governance reforms tend to focus on certain types of accountability (specifically bureaucratic, political, legal, or professional), while often de-emphasising or accentuating others, and this changes the balance of different types of accountabilities within an organisation.

Empirically, the thesis focuses on a range of reforms introduced by the UK Government's Policing and Crime Act 2017, which sought to address alleged accountability deficiencies within the fire sector. These included the introduction of an alternative governance model, in which Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), locally directly-elected politicians overseeing local police forces, could take on responsibilities for the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and become Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs). The 2017 Act also recreated an external inspectorate for Fire and Rescue Services and encouraged greater collaboration between the emergency services. Adopting a qualitative case study approach to examine both accountability *to whom* and accountability *for what*, the study examines six English Fire and Rescue Services, three of which adopted the PFCC governance model and three of which did not, and shows *how* and *why* accountability changed as result of the reforms. It concludes with multiple recommendations to improve governance and accountability in Fire and Rescue for the individual services, for the sector and for the government.

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Abbreviations:

ACFO – Assistant Chief Fire Officer

CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment

CFO – Chief Fire Officer

CFOA - Chief Fire Officers Association

CPA – Comprehensive Performance Assessment

DCFO – Deputy Chief Fire Officer

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

FRA – Fire and Rescue Authority

FBU – Fire Brigades Union

HMFSI – Her/His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate

HMICFRS – Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

IRMP – Integrated Risk Management Plan

JESIP - Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme/Principles

LAA – Local Area Agreement

LGA – Local Government Association

LSP – Local Strategic Partnership

NFCC – National Fire Chiefs Council

NPM – New Public Management

PEEL – Police Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Legitimacy

PCC – Police and Crime Commissioner

PFCC – Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

TPA – Traditional Public Administration

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Murphy, P., Wankhade, P. and **Lakoma, K.,** 2020. The strategic and operational landscape of emergency services in the UK. *International Journal of Emergency Services*, 9 (1), pp. 69-88.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

Over recent decades, public services have experienced a stream of public management reforms. The delivery of public services has developed from a Traditional Public Administration (TPA) approach, through New Public Management (NPM) reforms, to more recent post-NPM reforms (Osborne 2006). Proponents of the two most recent rounds of reform have characterised them as the solution to the problems of previous governance arrangements and outlined various 'promises' that they would bring in terms of improved accountability (Dubnick and Yang 2011).

Accountability in the public sector concerns the relationships between public managers, politicians, and citizens (Mulgan 2000a). As part of these arrangements, public services take responsibility for their actions and report on them to key stakeholders. However, critics have argued that accountability mechanisms are inadequate, and this has led to further waves of reform (Murphy *et al.* 2019a). At the same time, the expectations around accountability have shifted, from focusing primarily on its democratic constitutional and judicial foundations, to explore both performance accountability (Aucoin and Heintzman 2000) and collective accountability (Bovens 2007). These reforms have therefore created multiple and overlapping, rather than simple and individual forms of accountability within the public sector.

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.* 2019a) as well as worldwide (Romzek 2000). The local accountability of Fire and Rescue Services in England has been widely criticised (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, including a new alternative governance model for Fire and Rescue Services (Policing and Crime Act 2017 (c. 1-4)). The 2017 legislation encouraged and enabled, but did not mandate, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England, who are single, locally, and directly-elected politicians overseeing local police forces, to take on responsibilities for the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and become Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs). Their responsibility was extended on the basis of the assumed

benefits from PCCs overseeing police forces (May 2016), which were established throughout England and Wales in 2012.

Prior to the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services in England were all part of local government arrangements, and traditionally answerable to their FRA, which was part of one or more of the local councils that governed their administrative area. The only two exceptions were the London Fire Brigade that was answerable to the Mayor of London rather than the London Boroughs, and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Services, with the Mayor of Greater Manchester responsible for their governance. A long-standing 'stakeholder' model of a local FRA, made up of local councillors accountable to local communities, predominated as the governing body for the vast majority of Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (Farrell 2018). Nonetheless, after decades of operating with a single model of governance, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has given Fire and Rescue Services, outside London and Greater Manchester, the opportunity to be governed by a directly-elected individual responsible for both police and Fire and Rescue Services.

In addition to the PFCC governance model, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced other changes affecting the fire and rescue organisational landscape. It created an external inspectorate for Fire and Rescue Services in England (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)) and strengthened the service's focus on collaborative working across emergency services. The introduction of a single-person governing body, together with other governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, have been consistently portrayed by the UK government as a way of improving Fire and Rescue Services' governance and increasing their accountability to citizens (May 2016, Lewis 2017).

1.2. Aims of the thesis

This thesis investigates how the reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 have affected understandings of accountability within the fire sector. As such, it explores how actors perceive accountability, in what is generally acknowledged as an under-researched public service, namely Fire and Rescue Service in England (Wankhade and Murphy 2012, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). The aim of this study is therefore to compare Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the governance

changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, by focusing on the differences between accountability in the new PFCC-governance model services, in the traditional FRA-governance model services, and in the latter after it was refined by the 2017 Act.

The accountability literature suggests that organisations enact their accountability primarily in relation to their governance structures (March and Olsen 1983). By investigating the case of governance changes in Fire and Rescue Services in England, this thesis demonstrates how the way public services are governed affects their accountabilities and their understandings of accountabilities. Most notably, it explores four different types of accountability: bureaucratic, political, legal, and professional (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Examining situations where governance structures are in flux can reveal how governance structures or institutions shape actors' understandings of accountability. This should uncover how accountability understandings change depending on the way public services are governed.

1.3.   Research gap

The nature and form of accountability in the public sector has been changing, and has been portrayed as extremely complex, as public service delivery has experienced a seemingly constant stream of public management reforms (Bovens *et al.* 2014, Murphy *et al.* 2019a). These reforms have led to new forms of governance and multiple forms of accountability (Erkkilä 2007). As a result of the reforms, public services have been held accountable by an increased number of institutions and standards (Denhardt and Denhardt 2015) and have been tangled in a web of different types and forms of accountability (Piatak *et al.* 2018, Lee 2022).

So far, relatively few studies have examined the impact of governance reforms on different types of accountabilities in public sector settings (Byrkjeflot *et al.* 2014, Grubnic and Cooper 2019, Hansen *et al.* 2019). Byrkjeflot *et al.* (2014) examined accountability in welfare, hospitals and migration; Grubnic and Cooper (2019) investigated accountability in local health and social care, whereas Hansen *et al.* (2019) reviewed accountability in the higher education sector. They all found changes in accountability demands following governance reforms, which resulted in greater complexity and multiplicity of accountability types.

However, little is known about governance reforms in the context of emergency services. Emergency services management has not received much academic attention (Wankhade

and Murphy 2012). Previous studies tended to focus on police reforms (Lister and Rowe 2015, Murphy *et al.* 2017) rather than the other two blue light services - ambulance and fire services. This study addresses this gap by examining the impact of governance reforms on accountability in Fire and Rescue Services in England. More specifically, it investigates how the reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 have affected understandings of accountability within the fire sector. Although previous studies have examined the impact of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, these have focused on the prospects for future integrated governance systems in emergency services (Ashworth 2019), and the implications for policy development, service delivery, and public assurance (Murphy *et al.* 2019a, 2020a). Despite the Act's explicit intention to improve accountability in Fire and Rescue Services, no previous studies have examined it empirically from this perspective.

Accountability is a complex phenomenon that has not been clearly defined in the public administration research (Sinclair 1995, Mulgan 2000b). Given the complexity of accountability in the literature, and the number of alternative perspectives, this study aims to understand the concept from Fire and Rescue Services' perspectives. This project adopts an exploratory approach as it looks into the holistic understanding of the phenomenon of accountability based on various individuals' perceptions to understand how governance structures shape actors' understandings of accountability.

1.4.   Importance and contribution

This study demonstrates that changing the nature of governance arrangements has significant implications for accountability. By contrasting the situations in PFCC-led and FRA-led Fire and Rescue Services, it highlights how different governance arrangements influence the relationships that organisations and individuals are involved in. Most notably, it shows that governance reforms often result in a complicated and overlapping set of different accountabilities in public services. Although it is difficult to measure the concept of accountability (because quantitative measures do not reflect the complexity of governance arrangements within public services), this thesis, nonetheless, shows how governance reforms can shift the focus of accountability from one type to another, and that a change in one type of accountability has implications for other types.

Based on a synthesis of Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) and Bovens' (2007) accountability typologies, this thesis contributes to the public administration literature by suggesting a new approach to analysing accountability understandings in public services as result of governance reforms. It argues that accountability is often perceived in terms of two dimensions– *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability) - and uses both to explain the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis also builds on Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) accountability typology and extends it by understanding the reasons behind how and why accountability in public services may change as result of governance reforms and why government might seek to introduce these reforms in first place. It argues that governments either extend or reduce control over public services, and/or increase or decrease the service's autonomy (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Romzek 2000), often in response to perceived accountability issues. These changes result in shifts from one type of accountability to another one. As such, they ultimately change the balance of different types of accountabilities within an organisation, which may have profound effects on understandings of accountability of the actors involved.

1.5.   Research question and research objectives

This thesis poses an overarching research question, together with six research objectives. The overarching research question that this study aims to answer is:

How and why might governance changes affect understandings of accountability in public services?

The research objectives that help to address the overarching research question are as follows:

Research Objective 1: To examine the background and context of the governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. (Chapter 3 – Background and context)

Research Objective 2: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability. (Chapter 5 - Bureaucratic accountability)

Research Objective 3: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability. (Chapter 6 - Political accountability)

Research Objective 4: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability. (Chapter 7 - Legal accountability)

Research Objective 5: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability. (Chapter 8 - Professional accountability)

Research Objective 6: To examine how and why governance reforms affect accountability dynamics within public services. (Chapter 9 – Discussion)

Research objectives are addressed in separate chapters.

1.6.   Methodology and methods

A multiple case study research strategy was adopted to address the research question. Overall, six local Fire and Rescue Services were studied in depth, as this study explored the differences between three cases where a new PFCC model of governance was adopted, and three cases of services that continued to rely on the (post-2017) FRA model of governance. This aim of this study is to compare Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, while focusing on the differences between accountability in the PFCC-governance model services and in the FRA-governance model services.

Given the complexity of both governance and accountability concepts in the literature, this study is concerned with understanding the concept of accountability from the individuals' viewpoints of both senior management and front-line staff, and therefore builds on the notion of 'felt accountability' (Overman and Schillemans 2022). A realist approach is taken to understand various perceptions of external reality that need to be triangulated to obtain a clearer picture of the complexities that are extant (Perry *et al.* 1999). The study draws on empirical findings, including 38 interviews and 5 focus groups with senior management and front-line staff within the six English Fire and Rescue Services (see Appendix 1), to triangulate the individuals' perceptions of accountability and better understand how the

governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 might have influenced the understandings of accountability under both governance models.

1.7.   Structure of the thesis

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 gives an overview and a review of the literature on governance and accountability in the context of public management reforms. It establishes the scholarly significance of the research problem by identifying what is known and what research has already been carried out in this area. Chapter 3 then goes on to examine the research context, namely the governance and accountability arrangements in English Fire and Rescue Services. Chapter 4 details the methodological approach adopted, the methods used and the ethical considerations relating to the study. The findings in chapters 5 to 8 explore the four types of accountabilities, identified by Romzek and Dubnick (1987), namely bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability and professional accountability, in relation to Bovens' (2007) vertical, horizontal and diagonal directions of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services, prior to and following the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Chapter 9 then discusses the key findings in the light of what is already known in the literature and identifies the theoretical and practical implications for Fire and Rescue Services and wider public management. Finally, Chapter 10 brings together the main conclusions and recommendations, and sets out the contribution this thesis makes to scholarship, whilst also acknowledging its limitations. It concludes by proposing some further potential areas for academic research and practice inquiry.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter considers a range of literatures that investigate and analyse the concepts of governance and accountability, particularly in the context of public management reforms.

The first section begins with a discussion on what governance is and what the main applications of governance are. It then goes on to discuss the fundamental shift from traditional government and hierarchical forms of control, towards governance, in which the state works together with a wider range of public, private, and voluntary actors.

The second section explores the concept of accountability. It sets out the main theories of accountability along with various accountability dimensions and types that have been identified in the literature. In addition, it examines accountability in relation to public management reforms. It focuses on the historical development of the 'tripartite regime model' of public management reform of TPA, through NPM to post-NPM reforms (Osborne 2010, p. 2). It discusses the impact of the reforms and the complexity of accountability relationships in the public sector.

Figure 1: Literature map

Source: Author

2.2. Governance

The word governance was first used in the 1970s by Harlan Cleveland who argued that: "*What the people want is less government and more governance*" (Frederickson 2005). This idea was central to public administration reforms in subsequent decades and has led to a rich discourse on government and governance. Government has been characterised conceptually by the structures and functions of public institutions, whereas the term governance has a wider, more inclusive meaning that emphasises the process of governing (Kettl 2015). Hence, government is an element of governance, rather than an alternative to governance (Rosenau *et al.* 1992, Osborne and Gaebler 1992, Stoker 1998). This section of the thesis explores the broader term - governance.

2.2.1. Evolution of the concept of governance

The term governance was little used in the literature prior to the 1980s. At first, the term corporate governance came to prominence as a descriptor of the conditions that influenced the way private corporations operated. In the early 1980s, it became the subject of worldwide debates, especially in the United States. In the 1990s, domestic and international scandals involving major private corporations resulted in official recommendations on how corporate governance should be tightened up by accounting bodies (Bovaird 2005). In the UK public sector, the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life was established in response to the unethical behaviour of some MPs. This committee sought to set up a code of conduct and standards for all politicians (national and local) to be applied to all public officials, commonly known as the Nolan Principles (Committee on Standards in Public Life 1995).

The first significant academic discussions and influential analyses of governance in the public sector emerged during the 1990s (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, Kooiman 1993, Rhodes 1994). Since then, the notion of governance has become a well-established concept in a variety of contexts, literatures, and disciplines. Governance has consequently been portrayed as a bridge between many disciplines such as economics, political science, business, law, public administration, sociology, geography, international relations, organisational theory, and history. It has become one of the most often used terms in social sciences research worldwide.

Initially, public governance (governance in public sector settings) was considered as a combination of classic Weberian-style bureaucracy based on hierarchy, rules, and law, and representative democracy (Lynn 2001). However, more recently a shift has occurred in the interpretations of public governance due to a number of factors, including financial deficits, economic stagnation, globalisation, citizens' disenchantment with the promises from the state and increased horizontalization of the state (Frederickson *et al.* 2015). Traditional forms of hierarchical governance came to be viewed as being too formalistic, exclusive, and conservative to respond to these challenges. Governments across the Western world responded by introducing a range of reforms to make administrative practice less hierarchical and more decentralised, with greater involvement of non-state actors in policymaking and implementation. Nevertheless, the recent responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and bank bailouts have shown that states can always step in when necessary, and act hierarchically, even if they are structured differently (Mizrahi *et al.* 2021).

Governance in the public sector continues to be enthusiastically debated among academics and practitioners. The notion of governance has become multifaceted and a number of questions regarding public governance remain to be addressed. For example, we need to understand how new processes of governance function in the public sector, and how they differ from traditional hierarchical forms of governance. By establishing what we mean by governance, we will understand how to encourage better service delivery and improved accountability in the public sector. The following section elucidates some of these issues as encountered in existing research.

2.2.2. Definition

The discussions and definitions of governance, and its implications for accountability, gained prominence around the end of the last century as result of public service reforms of the 1980s and the 1990s (see section 2.3.7.). Subsequently, academic research into governance has been perceived as a growth industry (Klijn 2008) and even a 'magic concept' (Pollitt and Hupe 2011) because of its broad scope, flexibility, and a central role in the delivery of government reforms.

Much of the literature does not define 'governance', on the assumption that is commonly understood (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). This is certainly true in the case of using governance as a synonym for either public administration or public management.

Interestingly, some note that governance is untranslatable into many European languages (Offe 2009).

Governance defies having a single clear definition, yet it is often treated as such. In the field of public administration, the idea of governance has been conceptualised in different ways, adopting narrower or wider definitions of the term. Much of the literature provides various definitions of governance and there is still little consensus about what governance actually means (Table 1). The most prominent definitions, however, tend to share the following characteristics:

- rules and laws,
- collective interactions,
- networks of institutions,
- stakeholders' involvement,
- control,
- democracy,
- problem-solving.

Interestingly, all these definitions emphasise the fact that governance is inherently political (Lynn *et al*. 2001) because of interactions between formal and informal stakeholders with different interests.

More recently, the focus of the various definitions has been gradually shifting from that of control, rules, and laws in the 1990s and early 2000s, to that of collective or multi-actor interactions in the 21st century (Table 1). This represents a change in governance debates over the decades, which demonstrates that traditional forms of hierarchical government and accountability based on control, rules, and laws have been supplemented or partially supplanted by enhanced interactions between stakeholders based on trust, reciprocity, and transparency. Specifically, governance suggests that political decisions and policy implementation are no longer the sole preserve of elected representatives and public officials – if indeed they ever were. Instead, non-state actors, along with public servants and politicians from other policy sectors, and at different levels of governance, are also involved in decision-making through more informal mechanisms. This has major implications for traditional understandings of public accountability, which suggest that voters can hold those individuals who are responsible for public services to account through the ballot box. Instead, some more recent research suggests that increased

horizontalization and decentralisation in the public sector, has diluted accountability among multiple actors involved in decision-making and consequently created uncertainty, complexity, and confusion in the public sector (Papadopolulos 2003, Haveri 2006, Piatak *et al.* 2018)**.**

Table 1: Definitions of governance

Source: Adapted from Franck (1992), Peters (1995), Rhodes (1997), Stoker (1998), Kooiman (1999), Rosenau (2000), Lynn *et al.* (2001), Bovaird and Löffler (2003), Torfing *et al.* (2012)

Focus/characteristics	Definition	Author
Rules and laws	"Systems of rule, as the purposive activities of any collectively, that sustain mechanisms designed to ensure its safety, prosperity, coherence, stability and continuance"	Rosenau (2000, p. 171)
	"Regimes of laws, rules, judicial decisions, and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe, and enable the provision of publicly supported goods and services"	Lynn *et al.* (2001, p. 7)
Collective interactions, networks of institutions, stakeholders' involvement	"The process of steering society and the economy through collective action and in accordance with common goals."	Torfing *et al.* (2012, p. 14)
	"Self-organising, inter-organisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state."	Rhodes (1997, p. 15)
	"The ways in which stakeholders interact with each other in order to influence the outcomes of public policies."	Bovaird and Löffler (2003, p. 316)
Control	"Institutions designed to exercise collective control and influence."	Peters (1995, p. 3)
	"The formal institutions of the state and their monopoly of legitimate coercive power"	Stoker (1998, p. 17)
Democracy	"Legitimacy measured by international rules and processes"	Franck (1992, p. 50)
Problem-solving	"Solving problems and creating opportunities and the structural and processual conditions aimed at doing so."	Kooiman (1999, p. 69)

Given the apparent difficulty in defining governance, Bovaird and Löffler (2003) argue that each definition of governance has to be context-specific; therefore, it is likely to vary between stakeholders and between countries. In the same vein, Graham *et al.* (2003) suggest that the concept of governance can be applied in various contexts – global, national, institutional, and community. However, a key problem with Bovaird and Löffler's explanation is that their solution might lead to even more descriptions of governance than before.

2.2.3. Applications of governance in the literature

The literature highlights a number of applications of governance that represent the rich range of theories, concepts, and ideas associated with the concept. Rhodes (1996), for example distinguishes six uses of governance:

- The minimal state,
- Corporate governance,
- The New Public Management,
- 'Good governance',
- A socio-cybernetic system,
- Self-organizing networks.

Other authors have followed Rhodes and updated the list with their own uses of governance:

- Network governance (Klijn 2008, Provan and Kenis 2008),
- Multi-level governance (Bache 2012),
- Collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson *et al.* 2012, Bianchi *et al.* 2021),
- Interactive governance (Torfing *et al*. 2012; Sørensen and Torfing 2018).

What follows is an explanation of the uses of governance that are relevant to this thesis.

The minimal state

This term refers to the ideological preference which promotes less government and less public intervention ("shrinking the state") at both national and local levels. Rhodes (1996) explains the origins of the minimal state interpretation of governance by saying that it was introduced alongside privatisation and cuts in the civil service. The minimal state view of governance favours the use of markets and quasi markets to deliver public services, although in practice, particularly in the UK, public ownership in this model has often been replaced with regulation, as the preferred form of public intervention.

New Public Management

Even though New Public Management (NPM) does not include the word governance in its name and is not used with a qualifying prefix, it relates to recent governance reforms. From

the early 1980s, new forms of governing have been introduced, such as privatisation, contracting out, systematic performance measurement, and benchmarking (Torfing and Triantafillou 2013). These reforms have incorporated commercial practices and concepts from private sector management into the public sector. More detailed account of NPM reforms is presented in the section 2.3.7.

'Good governance'

'Good governance' has been associated with economic, political, and administrative dimensions of governance which are significant to the efficiency of markets and governments, and therefore to economic development. The concept has been propagated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union for more advanced economies in order to provide governments with comparable measures of the public sector's economic performance and, more latterly, its resilience to potential shocks or disasters. However, academics and practitioners have been raising concerns that there is a need for further systematic approaches to the evaluation of the quality of public governance at both organisational and nation state levels (Bovaird and Löffler 2003). This issue is addressed in more detail in section 2.2.10.

Network governance

Another use of governance identified by Rhodes (1996), refers to governance networks that are self-organising and autonomous. Self-organising networks, in the same way as the minimal state, generally resist government coordination and intervention, and are also not controlled by any other single actor.

The use of networks as a new mode of governance has received much attention over the last two decades. While some argue that NPM is still thriving (Hyndman and Lapsley 2016), others claim that new governance models based on networks have become more important (Bianchi *et al.* 2021). The literature demonstrates that self-organising networks are not a hybrid form of markets and hierarchies, instead they serve as an alternative mode of governing, which spans the boundaries of the public, private and voluntary sectors. As hierarchical models have gradually lost some of their explanatory power, scholars have increasingly used network governance interpretations to try to understand increasingly complex, dynamic, and diverse societal phenomena (Kooiman 1993, Haveri 2006).

A closer look at the recent literature on network governance, however, reveals that a new wave of hybridisation of governance structures and practices has combined hierarchical, market, and network governance arrangements (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012, Skelcher and Smith 2015). For example, multi-level governance (Marks 1993, Kersbergen and Waarden 2004, Papadopoulos 2010), collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008, Klijn *et al*. 2010, Bianchi *et al.* 2021), and interactive governance (Torfing *et al.* 2012) combine various network governance arrangements and aim to address fragmentation and silo working in public services accountability, and collectively create public value. Multi-level governance refers to governance in which continuous negotiations and tasks are carried out at multiple government levels, such as international, European, national, regional, or local (Marks 1993, Kersbergen and Waarden 2004, Papadopoulos 2010). Collaborative governance also overlaps with network governance, as it occurs in a "common forum" of stakeholders (Ansell 2012, p. 500), such as public agencies and non-state actors, and often involves community members, who are all co-designing the policies and ultimately contributing to the framing of public value (Bianchi *et al.* 2021). Interactive governance is based on deliberation and collaboration in networks of interdependent actors, with the aim to address various societal problems, such as climate change and poverty, often called wicked issues or problems (Kooiman *et al.* 2008).

Even though understandings of governance in the above examples may differ, most of them appear to share some common features. In general, they tend to be pluricentric approaches based on relations between interdependent actors. However, they may pose some risks and uncertainties related to accountability. Accordingly, these emerging governance examples offer an alternative approach to unicentric structures of top-down government. The development of these uses of governance has shown that uneven governance structures are present in current settings, and they vary from country to country, and from policy area to policy area. Considerably more work needs to be done to determine the effect of these new approaches on different areas related to governance, as well as on accountability.

2.2.4. Governance and geographic location

Scholars around the world may understand and apply the concept of governance in different ways. For example, governance has been perceived as a different concept in Europe and in the United States. The European (Northern and Western Europe) perspective

of governance refers to ideas of 'new governance' (i.e., involvement of society), whereas Pierre and Peters (2000) argue that in the United States governance retains its original steering and control notions.

The reason why there is a discrepancy between the different conceptualisations of governance stems from European roots of the preeminent role of government in the welfare state and the importance of interest groups in societies (Kooiman 1993). Hence, a more dynamic debate on governance has been taking place in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, than in North America (Peters and Pierre 1998). However, it is worth mentioning that the Central and Eastern European perspective significantly differ from that of Western Europe due to their transition experiences (Drechsler 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to note that national administrative tradition is not the only factor that affects reform choices, and there are a number of other factors, such as culture and legal considerations, that determine the way administrative reforms may develop (Painter and Peters 2010).

In summary, the current debate around various forms of governance indicates that governance is a complex mechanism that is often accompanied by political issues. Given the difficulty in understanding governance, it is important to acknowledge that governance is context-specific and therefore may (or may not) be applicable in various situations in different ways. In addition, the debate about governance reflects the fact that important changes have and are taking place in terms of new processes of governing. The following section will focus on fundamental governance theories and show that these have been researched from a wide range of theoretical positions.

2.2.5. Governance theories - the imperatives of changes in the public sector

As already mentioned, there is no single governance theory, rather, there are many overlapping theoretical perspectives and debates. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the understanding of governance, and its implications for accountability, changes according to the theory in which they are used (Bevir 2009). What follows is an account of the most common governance theories and their characteristics.

In the 1970s, changes in economic thinking considerably affected the view of bureaucracy in the public sector. Some economists claimed that governments restrict economic growth and freedom, and less involvement of governments can improve economic efficiency

(Niskanen 1971). As a response, new neoliberal theories have emerged – public choice theory, rational choice theory, and principal-agent theory.

Public choice theory combines the field of economics with political science. The theory is concerned with the application of economic tools to political and social decision-making (Buchanan 2003, Mueller 1989). A central tenet of public choice theory is the idea of self-serving agents, such as politicians or bureaucrats, whose behaviour promotes their self-interest at the expense of the public interest (Bailey 1993). Public choice methodology is based upon the analysis of models that can help understand agents' incentive structures (Eriksson 2016). In relation to governance, public choice theory helps in understanding how organisations operate, because it is based on the principle that individuals will always act in pursuit of their own goals, rather than those of the collective. It therefore critiques bureaucracy and promotes market and competition mechanisms to try and align individual interests with those of the organisation, and thus achieve greater efficiency. In simple terms, public choice prefers a minimal role for government and a maximum role for the market.

Rational choice theory has been employed to explain the changing form and nature of contemporary governance. Rational choice theorists assume that social outcomes can be explained by the aggregation of individuals' social behaviour, which is the result of individual decisions that are right for them. As with public choice theory, therefore, rational choice theorists stress that individuals, such as politicians and bureaucrats, act in accordance with their preferences, rather than the public interest. Rational choice assumes that all social phenomena can be explained by reference to the micro-level of rational activity of an individual (Bevir 2009).

Another key economic theory is **principal-agent theory** (or agency theory). It was initially established for the private sector in order to explain the discrepancies between the objectives of managers (profits) and shareholders (long-term growth, high dividends) (Jensen and Meckling 1976). The theory is intended to investigate incentive structures for managers, so they can act in the stakeholders' interest (e.g., by establishing non-executive boards of directors). In the public sector setting, principal-agent theory is challenging to apply because of the lack of incentives on both sides. The key delivery solution proposed by principal-agent theory is to promote competition and performance measurement for public sector organisations, so the agency relationships and incentives in the private sector

can be applied to the public sector. However, such an approach often leads to multiple and conflicting principals (Mayston 1993). A more detailed overview of the theory itself and the problems associated with it are presented in the section 2.3.2.1.

The reforms of the 1980s cannot easily be separated from **new institutionalism**. Whereas neoclassical economists promote NPM and marketisation as the response to the crisis of an over-loaded bureaucracy, new institutionalists support networks and joined-up governance (Bevir 2006) and extend our understanding of 'institutions'. 'Old' institutionalism studied the formal institutions of government with a particular focus on rules and procedures (Schmidt 2006). New institutionalists extend our understanding of 'institution' to encompass not only organisations and public bodies but also informal, socially enforced rules and norms (Bevir 2006).

Governance theories help in understanding the changes in the contemporary world. Even though they have different purposes and offer different disciplinary perspectives, they still provide an analytical tool to examine increasingly complex and dynamic societies. Most of them provide a critique of bureaucratic government and reflect a perception of a shift towards networks. These theories validate a widespread belief in the state's increased dependence on other institutions.

2.2.6. Government, governance, and management

One reason why governance has been such a prominent concept in the social sciences is that it suggests that government has shifted away from acting alone, and/or solely in a hierarchical manner (Stoker 1998, Newman 2001, Levi-Faur 2012). The focus has shifted from formal institutions towards less formal processes of governance. The following section explores the differences between government, governance, and management.

Government is characterised by structure and function of a formal authority and public institutions (Kettl 2015). It is highly organised and coordinated (Bailey 1993). The literature demonstrates that governance is a broader and a more inclusive term than government (Milward and Provan 2000). In contrast to government, governance is not characterised by uniformity and standardisation, instead it is about multiple ways in which services can be delivered (Bailey 1993). Its main aim is to maximise the chance of the organisation's goals being achieved, while taking into account obligations towards all stakeholders at the same time (Good Governance Institute 2019).

Maximising the chances of achieving organisational goals can potentially be mistaken with another concept - management. Kooiman *et al.* (2008) distinguish between the concept of management and governance. They stress the fact that governance, in the same way as the relationship between governance and government, is more inclusive than management. Governance tends to add more value than management because it considers long-term societal and environmental developments, trends, and processes (Kooiman *et al.* 2008, Good Governance Institute 2019). Management is about overseeing day to day operations of an organisation, whereas governance is responsible for setting organisation's strategy.

2.2.7. State and society

The traditional bureaucratic Weberian model (see section 2.3.7) indicates a separation between society and state, and an imposition of law and regulation (Pierre and Peters 2000). This type of a relationship illustrates *the pluralist model* of government and society, in which the government is relatively autonomous and is little involved with interest groups directly (Dahl 2005).

However, as previously stated, the focus of governance has recently shifted due to different conditions and expectations. Consequently, formal state control has shifted towards more flexible and informal exchange between state and society (Kettl 2011). This type of a relationship illustrates *the network model*, which gives society greater influence than the pluralist model and it assumes a closer linkage between state and society.

This suggest that the government's role in governance is a variable and not a constant. This is to say that governance models can be state-centric, society-centric, or can fall between the two. On the one hand, state-centric models of governance indicate that the public demands control from government. On the other hand, society-centric models refer to the public's resistance to control from government and more participatory styles of governing.

Some scholars acknowledge the potential for an extreme scenario of "governance without government" (Rosenau *et al.* 1992, Rhodes 1996, Peters and Pierre 1998). In the literature, the notion of "governance without government" generally refers to networks, partnerships, and markets, which are non-governmental means of government, and lesser involvement of the central government (Peters and Pierre 1998). "Governance without government" indicates that activities previously backed by formal authority should be backed by shared goals (Rhodes 1996, p. 657). This extreme scenario assumes that it is

possible to provide control to society with little or no direct involvement of formal authorities. By way of illustration, Rhodes (1996) has argued that self-organising networks represent a form of governing without government.

The literature suggests that the government's role in advanced Western economies shifts towards co-regulation, co-steering, co-production, and other forms of governance that involve interactions between government and society, or key stakeholders within society (Kooiman 1993). Pierre and Peters (2000) believe the reason why this shift has taken place is due to the weaker exercise of control from the state. The decreasing resource base of the post-recession Western states and accelerating globalisation of markets have also contributed to weaker state control over society (Pierre and Peters 2000). However, the extreme scenario of "governance without government" has been criticised in the literature (e.g., Lynn and Robichau 2013) as it is less likely to occur due to the importance of formal authorities influencing the arenas within which the interactions may be occurring.

The implications for accountability of the notion of "governance without government" mean that democratic elections are meaningless and democratic accountability does not exist, because elected officials have no control over public spending and policy. Indeed, there is a risk that policies reflect individual interests over public interests, and non-governmental networks result in complex webs of accountability relationships that make it difficult for the public to remedy this situation. However, some involvement of society in decision-making (for instance, through consultations or expert input into decision-making) is usually necessary to develop better and more legitimate policy that the public will support and adhere to, because it is more likely to further the public interest and ensure democratic accountability (Bingham *et al.* 2005). This suggests that governments face a difficult balancing act between directing policy themselves and engaging with society, and the balance can also vary depending on the policy issue (Pierre and Peters 2000).

Given the fact that government has become less involved in governance, some have argued that this means that the state is also less involved. However, Levi-Faur (2012) stresses that a shift away from government does not equate with a shift away from the state, because the state is broader than government. The state still plays an important role, but it may face new challenges due to reconfigurations in state power (Newman 2001). Today, the state governs public services through steering, coordinating, and influencing, rather than by exercising traditional direct forms of authority and control (Denhardt and Denhardt

2000, Levi-Faur 2012), but as Pierre and Peters (2000) suggest, both state and society are key in creating governance.

2.2.8. Directionals shifts

As far as the relationship between state and society is concerned, recent academic attention has focused on the increasing number of new governing forms. Much of the literature on governance has emphasised a number of directional governance shifts that serve as underpinning knowledge in explaining the new governing forms. The main shifts of administrative practice have been classified in two different directions: vertical (upward and downward) and horizontal (Table 2)

Table 2: Vertical and horizontal governance shifts

Source: Adapted from Kersbergen and Waarden (2004), Erkkilä (2007), Levi-Faur (2012)

	Administrative practice	Examples
Vertical shifts		
a) Upward shifts	The shifts from national to international, transnational, and intergovernmental institutions.	United Nations. Shift from the 27 member states to the European Union.
b) Downward shifts	The shifts from national and international organisations to sub-national, regional and/or local institutions.	EU subsidiarity principles, Devolution to Scotland and Wales, UK regulation when in the EU.
Horizontal shifts	These shifts generally occur from public organisations to private and civil spheres of authority. From legislative powers to judiciary, from public to semi-public organisations, and from public state agencies to private businesses.	Privatization, Outsourcing, Agencification.

Table 2 indicates that the focus of administrative practice has moved towards less hierarchical and more decentralised forms of public governance (Elliott *et al.* 2022). These examples of governance shifts do not encompass all changes occurring in the new processes of governing. There are other various combinations of vertical and horizontal shifts, such as from national public standardisation institutions to international or private organisations (for example, the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundations that promote Financial Reporting Standards around the world). It is important to understand that all governance shifts embrace complex networks of international,

national, and sub-national actors, which can be public, semi-public, or private, in more or less hierarchical and network-based relationships.

The literature has shown new vertical levels and horizontal arenas tend to have profound impacts on accountability and the effectiveness of decision-making (Erkkilä 2007). The hierarchical model of government has been receiving much attention on providing clear lines of accountability for citizens (Hirst 2000). One problem with new forms of governance is the potential accountability deficit (Schillemans 2011, Mulgan 2014a). Collectivities, such as international institutions and non-governmental organisations, appear to be less accountable for their actions (Rosenau 2000). Likewise, Rhodes (2000, p. 61) argues that "networks are not accountable to the state: they are self-organising" as they increasingly include non-state actors involved in flexible and decentralised horizontal arrangements. Horizontal governance arrangements are largely autonomous and often non-formalised, which means that they control themselves and are responsible for their actions. Actors that are involved in network governance arrangements are in horizontal accountability relationships, which means that they are broadly equal to one another and are involved at a similar level of decision-making. In these situations, it becomes more difficult for voters and elected representatives to hold organisations that are involved in network governance arrangements to account for poor performance or financial mismanagement, because decision-making powers are shared, and public officials are not able exercise direct control over operations (Papadopoulos 2003, 2007).

In addition, as Scharpf (1988) notes, decision-making systems that involve multiple actors may be less effective, because they have a high number of potential veto players, and it can be difficult to reach a consensus. However, Torfing *et al.* (2012) contradict these claims by demonstrating that new forms of governance tend to be more effective and democratic at the same time as they enhance regular citizen participation and deliberation in public governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2017) and empower the citizens to confront the ruling political elites (Sørensen and Torfing 2018).

This section has reviewed the meaning of governance and its association with state and society. It has also shown that the concept of governance has constantly been evolving from vertical forms of authority towards more horizontal models of governing. Some authors have been questioning whether the observed shifts and changes around them actually redefine governance or only constitute symbolic changes in its meaning

(Kersbergen and Waarden 2004). Nevertheless, these shifts have proved to have significant consequences for public service delivery. As discussed above, when decision-making is shared among multiple actors, it becomes challenging to establish who is accountable to whom and for what (Bevir 2009). Increased horizontalization seems to have hindered clear lines of accountability, which contributed to accountability deficits in the new forms of governance (Schillemans 2011). Therefore, there is a need for new forms of control that can be deployed in new complex governance settings, such as performance indicators, contracts, targets, and service standards. However, it is important to recall the fact that there are still plenty of areas in which governments retain their role as formal authority. What this means is that new governing forms have supplemented the traditional formal authority forms of power, they have not superseded them.

The following part of this thesis moves on to explain the changes in governance in the United Kingdom. It describes the main social movements from the 1980s, when the state was accused of excessively controlling society, then it goes on to discuss the changes that have been put in place to prevent or mitigate this happening.

2.2.9. Governance in the UK

As the country that developed the traditional 'Westminster model' of governance, characterised by parliamentary sovereignty, strong cabinet government, unitary state, and a doctrine of ministerial responsibility (Stoker 1998), many have argued that the UK state was excessively intervening and controlling (Pierre and Peters 2000, Skelcher 2000). Nonetheless, the UK's governance system has evolved considerably in recent decades away from this hierarchical model, and has embraced both devolution to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and (for a long period) membership of the European Union. It was also one of the first countries to embrace the ideas behind NPM from the 1980s onwards.

NPM reforms introduced private sector models into the of running public services. *'The hollowing out of the state'* has been used to illustrate the changes brought in by NPM reforms in the UK in the 1980s and the 1990s (Peters 1994, Rhodes 1994, Pierre and Peters 2000). '*The hollowing out of the state*' reflected the UK government's programme of privatisation and the 'hiving off' or outsourcing of central and local government functions to outside agencies, and transfers from UK institutions to European Union institutions (Rhodes 1994). Essentially, the term '*the hollowing out of the state'* has been used to relate

to any situation where government relies on agencies outside of the central or local state in order to jointly deliver public services (Milward and Provan 2000). Margaret Thatcher, the UK Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, called for less state and more market involvement, and the deregulation and dismantling of public bureaucracies. The British experience was later characterised as being at the vanguard of NPM reforms which subsequently took hold in other countries through the increased contribution of voluntary organisations, public-private partnerships, and contracting-out of public service delivery (Stoker 1998).

The introduction of the NPM-inspired reforms was very contentious at the time and resulted in fierce disputes. '*The hollowing out of the state*' and NPM reforms have been strongly criticised by the public as illegitimate, particularly at the local authority level (Stoker 1998), and criticisms around the unaccountable and illegitimate nature of quangos, non-departmental public bodies, and bureaucrats have surfaced beyond the local government level (Stoker 1998).

Rhodes (1996) has identified three main problems arising from '*the hollowing out of the state*': fragmentation, steering, and accountability. Firstly, fragmentation of service delivery systems has resulted in reduced control over, and accountability for policy implementation. Secondly, '*hollowing out*' affected the 'steering' or leadership of complex organisations, having decentralised service delivery whilst having centralised financial control, making leadership and management more difficult (Skelcher 2000). Finally, as previously stated, accountability has been eroded due to hybridisation, the emergence of new special-purpose bodies and the falsehood of equating transparency with public accountability (Hood and Heald 2006, Murphy *et al.* 2019a). Despite considerable criticism of '*the hollowing out of the state*', some defenders have argued that the state has not been '*hollowed out*', instead it has only merged with non-state and non-public bodies (Hirst 2000).

Over the past decades, the UK has also experienced other governance changes. At the turn of the century, the Westminster Parliament devolved powers to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to move it closer to citizens (Bogdanor 1999). After the policy of austerity-localism was introduced from 2010 onwards (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012, Lowndes and Gardner 2016), the government continued a parallel process of devolution to regional and local levels in England. This has involved budget cuts as well as changes to democratic

institutions, for example the introduction of directly-elected individuals (such as directly-elected 'metro mayors' and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)). Directly-elected metro mayors are leaders of combined authorities, which are made up of neighbouring local authorities that cover a sub-region or city-region. PCCs, which replaced Police Authorities in 2012, are directly-elected individuals responsible for local police forces. The single-person governance models have been implemented to enhance decision-making and improve democratic accountability to citizens (Fenwick *et al.* 2006, Lister and Rowe 2015).

These governance changes were supposed to enhance local accountability, as they enabled the public to directly hold the elected individuals to account through elections and referendums (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012, Lowndes and Gardner 2016). However, more local referendums and public consultations in the UK have rejected the single-person governance idea than have favoured it (Sandford 2022, Eckersley and Lakoma 2022), and there are no PCCs or directly-elected Mayors in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Some studies suggest that the public have often no clear understanding of the directly-elected individuals' roles and responsibilities (Murphy *et al.* 2017, Ferry and Sandford 2022). Given that a large share of the public do not understand the role of PCCs, it implies that they might not be aware how they can effectively hold them to account. This study contributes to the research on directly-elected individuals and investigates the impact of the development and extension of the PCC model into the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) governance model on accountability.

2.2.10. Good governance in the public sector

As previously explained, good governance has been argued to be an essential element of sound economic policies (World Bank 1992). Public sector organisations are subject to a number of standards and codes of good governance, which help to achieve intended outcomes with best practice. A prominent example was produced by IFAC and CIPFA:

> *"The aim of Good Governance in the Public Sector is to encourage better service delivery and improved accountability by establishing a benchmark for aspects of good governance in the public sector. It is intended to apply to all entities that comprise the public sector".*

> (IFAC/CIPFA 2014, p. 7)

In the UK public sector, the first code on public governance standards was published in 2004 by the Office for Public Management (OPM) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (OPM and CIPFA 2004). The code was published because of growing evidence that an increasing number of governors and boards were having difficulties in fulfilling their responsibilities (Steele and Parston 2003). The main aim of the document was to provide a framework on good governance across the public sector institutions to help governors understand their roles. The code builds on the Nolan Principles of public life (Committee on Standards in Public Life 1995) that are supposed to underpin the behaviour of all public office holders in the UK: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. The code comprises six core principles:

- focus on the organisation's purpose and outcomes for citizens and service users,
- effective performance,
- promoting values,
- taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk,
- effective capacity and capability of the governing body, and
- making accountability to stakeholders real.

However, over the past two decades, the expectations and conditions of increasingly complex, dynamic, and diverse society have changed (Haveri 2006). For this reason, CIPFA and the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) came together to develop an updated version of the framework on good governance in the public sector (IFAC and CIPFA 2014). In contrast to the 2004 code, the 2014 framework was designed for an international audience. The document comprises seven principles of good governance in the public sector (Figure 2). The new code is novel in that it embraces a focus on sustainability and on public financial management, and argues that understanding the ways in which governance in the public sector operates is essential for the long-term development of economies, societies, and the environment.
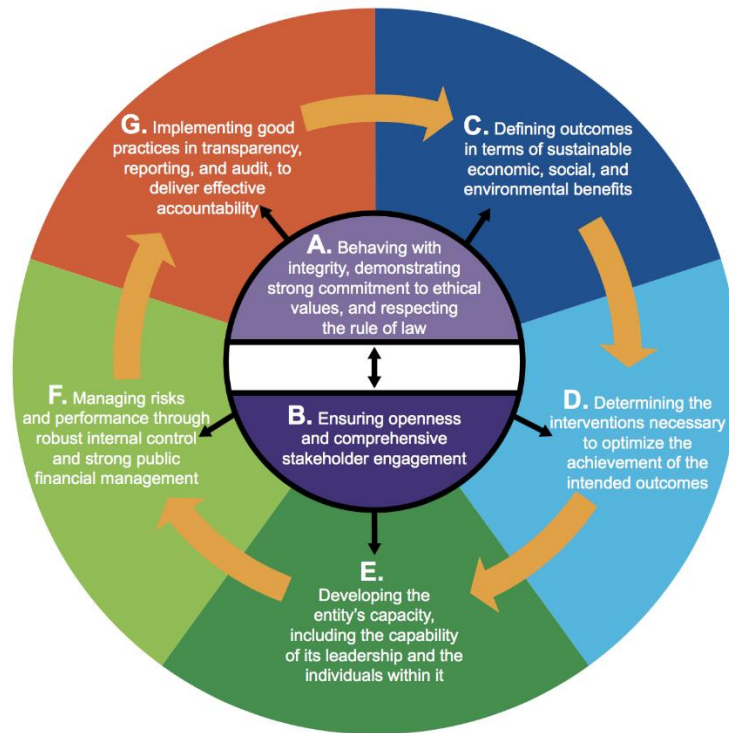
Figure 2: Relationships between the Principles for Good Governance in the Public Sector

Source: IFAC and CIPFA (2014)

The standards and codes provide recommendations on effective governance that are characteristics of better governed public sector institutions. According to the frameworks (OPM and CIPFA 2004, IFAC and CIPFA 2014, Good Governance Institute 2019), good governance equates with good performance, ethical decisions, effective control, and accountability to stakeholders. However, it is striking that most sets of standards appear to be open to individual interpretations. In other words, they do not impose conditions on services, instead, they only suggest the best approach to public service delivery. Therefore, it is vital for public services to acknowledge the recommendations and effectively utilise them in practice. The choice of a particular form of governance is seen as critical as it has a significant impact on service delivery. Furthermore, it is essential to consider new trends and challenges, along with lessons learned from other public organisations, as new factors emerge that influence the standards of good governance. This means that a regular review of organisation's governance is essential for all public sector organisations because it enables them to keep up to date with new developments in an increasingly changing world.

This section has reviewed the literature on governance in public sector settings. What we know, thus far, is that the concept of governance is still evolving as result of structural, NPM and post-NPM reforms. The introduction of complex governance models was intended to

improve accountability (Dubnick and Yang 2011). In practice, structural changes have brought increased horizontalization and decentralisation into the English public sector, with shared decision-making and accountability diluted among multiple actors. The emergence of these new governance structures and practices introduced by NPM and post-NPM reforms is as yet largely unexplored. Although many studies examined the relationship between NPM reforms and accountability (e.g., Goddard 2005), not many investigated the impact of elected heads of a specific service or organisation on accountability. The impact of different ways of how public services are governed and delivered requires more scholarly attention to understand how it might affect accountability.

The second half of this chapter will unpack the key concepts of accountability in the context of governance and public management reforms.

2.3. Accountability

This section sets out the main theories, applications and types of accountability. It discusses the impact of governance changes on accountability relationships within public sector settings. Finally, it examines accountability in relation to public management reforms based upon TPA, NPM and post-NPM.

2.3.1. From accounting to accountability

Historically, the concept of accountability has Anglo-Norman roots (Bovens 2007), and its etymological origins can be traced to ancient and biblical times (Dubnick 2002). However, a more modern concept of accountability was formed after the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, when William I required property owners in his realm to render *a count of* their holdings (Dubnick 2002). This new regulation was ruled over England in the 12th century. Since then, the word accountability has been closely associated with accounting in its traditional sense of bookkeeping. However, it received little attention in more recent times before 1980.

Since the 1980s, a shift from the conventional bookkeeping function into much wider forms of accountability has been evident. This resulted in an increased academic interest in the use of the concept of accountability in the late 20th century. The first academic journal to include accountability in its title, the Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal, was

established in 1988. However, accountability has since become a common concept not least in the academic and practice literature. The re-emergence of a public accountability discourse has been closely related to the introduction of NPM under the Thatcher government in the UK and the reforms aimed at reinventing government under the Clinton-Gore administration in the United States (Bovens 2005, Page 2006). The shift in interest towards accountability has also been evident in Europe, although, the nature, scope, and speed of the transformation differ among European countries (Steccolini 2019).

Despite increased academic attention, there is a lack of clarity around what accountability means. This is exacerbated by the fact that exact equivalent of accountability does not exist in most European languages (Dubnick 2002, Mulgan 2000b, Bovens 2005). For example, French, Spanish, German and Polish do not distinguish between responsibility and accountability (Harlow 2002). The result is that numerous terms are used to describe accountability, the most common of which is responsibility and terms closely related to accounting. There is also no agreed definition in the English language academic literature on what constitutes accountability, which has caused terminological confusion in recent years (Mulgan 2000b, Behn 2001, Bovens 2005, Dubnick 2005). This lack of clarity might be partially due to alternative international approaches taken towards studying accountability, which depend on different administrative traditions and academic perceptions. Nonetheless, much of the available research on accountability tends to focus only on the meaning of the concept itself (Koppell 2005). This has been explored by Sinclair (1995) who stresses that accountability is a chameleon-like concept which has various meanings to different people and changes its meaning depending on the context.

Researchers investigating the concept of accountability have attempted to explain it from their own geographical perspectives: American (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Behn 2001, Koppell 2005), British (Hood 2010, Murphy *et al.* 2019a), Dutch (Schillemans 2008, Bovens 2007, Aleksovska and Schillemans 2022), and Australian (Sinclair 1995, Mulgan 2003). As a result, numerous accountability definitions have built upon one another as many scholars produced their own interpretations of accountability. The result is that theoretical research on the changing nature of accountability proves to be an ever-expanding phenomenon (Mulgan 2000b).

While the focus of existing theoretical research in the field of accountability has been widely examined, less attention has been given to empirical accountability literature. This

represents a knowledge gap that needs to be filled in order to provide more systematic, comparative and cumulative analysis (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Sinclair 1995, Brandsma and Schillemans 2012, Bovens 2010, Ferry *et al*. 2019).

2.3.2. Theories of accountability

Accountability can be simply interpreted using principal-agent theory. However, there are also two complementary approaches to accountability in the literature, namely accountability as answerability and accountability as managing expectations that are both based on the principal-agent theory (Acar *et al.* 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2012). They largely stem from the Friedrich-Finer debate from the 1940s (Jackson 2009). Herman Finer, from the London School of Economics, stressed that accountability is based on maintaining external (exogenous) control, whereas Carl Friedrich from Harvard believed that self-control and soft internal (endogenous) values of accountability are sufficient to hold officials to account. This classic debate also demonstrates differences in the nomenclature of accountability within academic discussions. More recently, a new concept of felt accountability has also gained traction in public administration literature. This stresses that accountability is only meaningful when those who are being held to account, recognise the implications of potential sanctions, and change their behaviour accordingly (Schillemans *et al.* 2021, Overman and Schillemans 2022). A more detailed account of principal-agent theory, the two complementary approaches, and felt accountability is given in the following sections.

2.3.2.1. Principal-agent theory and the influence on accountability

In TPA literature, the presence of a principal-agent relationship is at the centre of many accountability definitions. Principal-agent theory is based on the idea of a bilateral relationship between the agent and the principal who can hold the agent to account for its behaviour and activity (Mayston 1993, Mulgan 2000b, Bovens 2010).

The principal-agent relationship provides the foundation for the two approaches. Whilst accountability as *answerability* entails a single principal-agent relationship, accountability as *managing expectations* involves one agent confronted with multiple principals with diverse expectations (Acar *et al.* 2008). Although the latter case denotes a more complex relationships than the former, it demonstrates that both are still characterised as principal-

agent relationships, and the two approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive of each other (Willems and Van Dooren 2011, 2012).

The principal-agent framework is often presented as a model of conflict between the two parties in a contractual situation, with a one-dimensional focus on formal control and sanctions (Acar *et al.* 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2011). Conflict emerges when interests to be served by the agent are not identical to the principal's interest (Philp 2009). The primary purpose of accountability in this mode is to prevent agency drift through managing information asymmetry and moral hazards between the agent and the principal (Schillemans and Busuioc 2014).

Although the traditional principal-agent model has been widely adopted, an increasing number of studies have suggested that it is becoming less useful for understanding the nature of the present complex public governance arrangements due to inherent limitations (Mulgan 2000b, Willems and van Dooren 2011). One general criticism of the principal-agent framework is that it is too inflexible and formalistic due to its emphasis on hierarchical control and formal sanctions (Willems and Van Dooren 2012). Steccolini (2019) contends that principal-agent theory cannot capture all complex behaviours in today's public sector arena. Therefore, it may no longer be suitable in an environment of multiple accountability relationships, if it ever was.

2.3.2.2. Accountability as answerability

Accountability as answerability is a traditional hierarchical approach which is also based upon the principal-agent theory. In simple terms, an individual is obliged to take responsibility for their actions and report to the principal (Sinclair 1995). In other words, it is a formal institutional arrangement in which an actor can be held accountable by a forum (Bovens 2010). Mulgan (2000b) identifies a number of features of accountability as answerability:

- *externality* (the account is given to a person outside the person being held accountable),
- *it involves social interaction and exchanges* (one side seeks explanation and retrieving a situation, while the other side responds and accepts sanctions*),*
- *it implies rights of authority* (one side has a moral authority over the body being held accountable).

Nonetheless, scholars have argued that this approach is relatively limited. For example, Behn (2001) suggests that such formal definitions do not take sanctions sufficiently into account. Instead, answerability stresses the aspect of answering, explaining, and justifying actions. The primary challenge for accountability as answerability is therefore to explain how it shapes public officials' behaviour through incentives and sanctions.

2.3.2.3. Accountability as managing expectations.

Holding someone answerable suggests the existence of prior expectations, against which their actions can be compared (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Public administrators have to manage combinations of multiple, different, changing, and often conflicting expectations within and outside an organisation (Acar *et al.* 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2011). Koppell (2005) stresses that organisations trying to deal with conflicting expectations within a web of overlapping accountability relationships are more likely to be dysfunctional. Specifically, public organisations are obliged to serve multiple democratic, legal, professional, managerial, and civic principals with multiple goals, which can lead to goal conflict (Piatak *et al.* 2018, Waardenburg *et al.* 2020). Two prominent studies on accountability: the 1986 Challenger tragedy (Romzek and Dubnick 1987) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (Koppell 2005) support this view and demonstrate that satisfying multiple accountability demands can prove to be highly challenging.

Some scholars (e.g., Romzek and Dubnick 1987) suggest that the idea of accountability as managing expectations plays a greater role than the notion of answerability. In their view, accountability as answerability denotes narrow, direct, and primarily formalistic responses to demands generated by organisations. Bovens (2010) provides a distinction between the broader concept (accountability as a *virtue*) and the narrower concept (accountability as a *mechanism*). By drawing on the two concepts of accountability, Bovens (2010) suggested that the broader concept is perceived as a set of normative standards for the evaluations of public officials, whereas the latter idea is used to define a more formal institutional arrangement in which an actor can be held accountable by a forum. Thus, accountability as a *virtue* (based on self-control and soft internal values) can be understood as an endogenous type of accountability, and accountability as a *mechanism* (based on maintaining external control) can be perceived as an exogenous type. This view is supported by Dubnick (2005) who argues that answerability is limited due to its emphasis

on the external authority, whilst disregarding internal personal values, which serve as an additional mechanism of accountability. The reason why accountability as managing diverse expectations broadens the fundamental notion of answerability lies behind the idea of the constant process of anticipation, identification and definition of expectations which ultimately leads to certain actions. This view is supported by Acar *et al.* (2008) who argue that managing expectations demonstrates a more realistic picture of organisations in their present complex governance settings.

Other scholars have attempted to combine both definitions of accountability rather than draw distinctions between them. For example, Willems and Van Dooren (2011) define accountability in contemporary public governance as a process that occurs when public agents are confronted with regulating and monitoring bodies (principals) having conflicting expectations (performance, democratic and constitutional) in different public forums. Similarly, Christensen and Lægreid (2017) contend that there are no standards without a mechanism and no mechanisms without standards. More recently, a new concept of felt accountability, focusing on the individual's expected accountability, has been identified in the literature (Schillemans *et al.* 2021, Overman and Schillemans 2022). Originally developed in psychology, felt accountability attempts to combine answerability mechanism with the expected accountability at an individual level. It uses a bottom-up perspective of focusing on individuals rather than top-down approach of accountability of organisations. This study supports these views and combines both answerability and managing expectations approaches to understand perceptions of accountability from individuals' viewpoints.

2.3.3. The dimensions of accountability

Previous research demonstrates that accountability has been difficult to define. A number of studies have investigated the multiple definitions of accountability because of its lack of conceptual clarity. A comprehensive study in this area is the work of Koppell (2005) who highlighted inadequacies in previous accountability research (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Behn 2001) to establish the following five distinct conceptions of accountability: **responsibility, controllability, responsiveness, transparency, and liability.** Koppell (2005) argues that accountability is all these dimensions combined together. However, more recently, **dialogue** has also been distinguished as an extension of accountability (Mulgan 2000b, Roberts 2002, Murphy *et al.* 2019b). Dialogue was not included in Koppell's original

classification but has subsequently been accepted as a dimension of accountability by other scholars. The subsections below examine each of these dimensions in detail.

Table 3: Dimensions of accountability

Source: Author

Dimension	Literature
Responsibility	Mulgan (2000b), Dubnick (2005), Koppell (2005)
Controllability	Mulgan (2000b), Aucoin and Heintzman (2000), Scott (2000), Harlow (2002), Erkkilä (2007), Bovens (2007)
Responsiveness	Mulgan (2000b), Koppell (2005), Damgaard and Lewis (2014)
Transparency	Von Furstenberg (2001), Prat (2005), Fox (2007), Hood (2010), Bauhr and Nasiritousi (2012), Meijer (2014), Mulgan (2014b), Ferry and Eckersley (2015), Ferry *et al.* (2015), Mabillard and Zumofen (2017), Glennon *et al.* (2019)
Liability	Koppell (2005)
Dialogue	Mulgan (2000b), Roberts (2002), Murphy *et al.* (2019b)

Responsibility

Mulgan (2000b) claims that accountability was formerly understood as a part of responsibility. However, the position has now reversed with accountability outweighing responsibility in terms of scope and significance (Dubnick 2005). Accountability involves taking responsibility for one's own actions. However, it additionally includes being held accountable (for example through reporting) by the forum/individuals.

Responsibility acknowledges internal aspects, which pertain to internal values and behavioural norms. However, it also revolves around formal laws, rules and norms that are set by legislators (Koppell 2005). Responsibility is therefore interpreted more in relation to accountability *as a virtue* rather than formal accountability mechanisms, which require an individual to report to the principal.

Controllability

Previous research has established that the dominant accountability discourse revolves around the dimension of controllability (Koppell 2005). To date, many accountability definitions include an element of control. For example, Aucoin and Heintzman (2000) claim that the control function of accountability is at the heart of democratic accountability.

A large body of literature has investigated the relationship between accountability and controllability. Mulgan argues that "accountability is a vital mechanism of control" (2000b, p. 563). Erkkilä (2007) contends that the definition of accountability took over from the controllability term. Previous studies have applied a similar term to control, 'comptrol', in

relation to hierarchical means of control (Erkkilä 2007). Interestingly, the head of the National Audit Office (NAO), which is the supreme audit authority for the UK, and who is responsible for supervising the quality of public reporting and accounting is called 'Comptroller and Auditor General', as are his equivalents in India, Ireland, Bangladesh, and the United States (Dewar and Funnell 2017).

However, some scholars have attempted to draw fine lines between controllability and accountability. Scott (2000) and Harlow (2002) argue that process of accountability as an oversight is retrospective by nature (*ex-post*), whilst controllability refers to proactive involvement in decision-making (*ex-ante*). An alternative distinction can be found in Bovens' study (2007), which argues that controllability as a concept is broader than accountability, because it includes both retrospective and proactive mechanisms of directive behaviour.

Responsiveness

Another dimension of accountability, responsiveness, is relatively similar to controllability. However, whereas controllability implies a hierarchical approach, responsiveness suggests a more horizontal relationship (Koppell 2005). Mulgan (2000b) argues that responsiveness refers to the broader public servants' compliance with internal and external demands, whilst controllability emphasises external pressures. He suggests that an organisation's attention should be focused on the preferences and the needs of the individuals. In other words, an organisation is responsive if it meets the needs of the individuals that it is serving. This feature is reflected in the customer-oriented approach introduced by the NPM reforms. Glennon *et al.* (2019) argue that accountability must embrace prospective and retrospective forms of accountability, identifying some of the most crucial tools and techniques for each. Prospective accountability tools include plans, strategies inspections for improvement, and policies, whereas retrospective techniques involve audits, inspections for compliance and self-assessments. However, according to Damgaard and Lewis (2014), meeting the needs of individuals might actually blur the idea of accountability because needs are not a homogenous block. Serving individuals' interests may improve a service, but it does not indicate that the service becomes more accountable to the wider public (Damgaard and Lewis 2014).

Transparency

Over the past decades, there has been an increasing amount of literature on transparency. Transparency has been viewed as a critical pre-requisite of accountability (Koppell 2005, Hood and Heald 2006, Hood 2010). Consequently, accountability and transparency have been of growing importance in today's governance settings. They are often portrayed as the holy grail of good governance (Fox 2007, Hood and Heald 2006, Mabillard and Zumofen 2017). Prior research showed that both terms, in practice, are often mistakenly used as synonyms (Von Furstenberg 2001, Hood 2010, Mabillard and Zumofen 2017).

Undoubtedly, both transparency and accountability share a conceptual problem, they are not precisely defined in the literature, and therefore they appear to mean either the same or different things to different people (Fox 2007). Several definitions of transparency have been proposed. Some authors (e.g., Bauhr and Nasiritousi 2012) define transparency as the release of information, bringing it close to the notion of disclosure. Other definitions not only include disclosing information as part of the process, but they also highlight the observation of actions by the wider public (Meijer 2014). Koppell (2005) uses the term transparency to refer to the idea of an organization explaining or taking account for its actions, which brings it close to the definition of accountability.

There is also little consensus on how transparency differs from accountability. Despite the lack of terminological clarity, there is a strong relationship between transparency and accountability which remains under-explored in the literature. Relatively few scholars have recognised the relationship between the two concepts in their work (Fox 2007, Hood 2010, Meijer 2014, Ferry *et al.* 2015, Ferry and Eckersley 2015, Mabillard and Zumofen 2017). It has been generally argued that transparency does not generate as much impact on accountability as one might expect (Von Furstenberg 2001, Prat 2005, Fox 2007, Mulgan 2014b). However, others claim that it may diminish the need for accountability (Meijer 2014). Murphy *et al.* (2019a, p. 16) argue that transparency is essential but not sufficient for accountability, therefore they perceive accountability as a super-ordinate concept with transparency nested within it. Ferry and Eckersley (2015) argue that transparency can lead to increased accountability under particular circumstances, most notably when citizens can access and understand the data that have not been altered by politicians.

A particularly influential study in the transparency-accountability area is the work of Hood (2010) who distinguishes three potential relationships between the concepts using the

evocative phrases: 'Siamese twins', 'matching parts' and 'an awkward couple'. 'Siamese twins' means that transparency and accountability are not really distinguishable, therefore the concepts are as one. 'Matching parts' is understood as a separable and complementary relationship between the two concepts that work to facilitate good governance. Finally, 'an awkward couple' reflects potential tensions in the relationship between accountability and transparency. Ferry *et al.* (2015) and Ferry and Murphy (2018) support the 'awkward couple' relationship between accountability and transparency at the local level, as local authorities increasingly publish more raw data to improve their transparency, but this does not necessarily increase accountability to citizens and leads to a mismatch between accountability and transparency.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that transparency is an integral part of accountability. However, accountability is a wider concept than transparency. Transparency involves disseminating information and to some extent institutional answerability (Fox 2007, Mabillard and Zumofen 2017), whereas the accountability sphere additionally deals with the issue of potential sanctions.

Liability

Liability attaches culpability to transparency (Koppell 2005). With the exception of Koppell, few academics have examined this dimension closely, perhaps because liability as a dimension brings it close to the notion of accountability as answerability. According to Koppell (2005), liability refers to individuals and organisations facing consequences for their performance. Liability means that all entities should be held liable for their performance in the form of consequences, which might be positive or negative. Koppell (2005) illustrates this point by distinguishing positive consequences, such as rewards, added budget authority, increased discretion, and reduced monitoring, and negative consequences, such as setbacks, decreased budget authority, increased discretion, and increased monitoring. Liability therefore has the notion of answerability for one's own actions.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a dimension of accountability that was not included in Koppell's original classification. However, accountability scholars have distinguished dialogue as an extension

of accountability. Mulgan (2000b), Roberts (2002) and Murphy *et al.* (2019b) recognise dialogue as a process of mutual understanding, which emerges when parties treat each other with mutual respect, trust, and honesty. Therefore, dialogue is perceived to be crucially different from the traditional unequal accountability relationship of superior and subordinate, because it treats both parties as part of the same conversation. The parties are involved in an exchange of explanations and justifications. As noted by Roberts (2002), dialogue is crucial because it helps to overcome the paradoxes and pathologies of the mechanisms of accountability. Consequently, the idea of a more 'dialogic accountability' appears to be essential between multiple stakeholders.

This section has reviewed the five dimensions of accountability suggested by Koppell (2005) and considered dialogue as an additional dimension. Even though the majority of dimensions have been widely studied, their definitions and relationships with accountability are still difficult to grasp theoretically. Nonetheless, public services need to acknowledge all of these dimensions in their day-to-day operations. In practice, public services should be:

- responsible according to formal and informal codes of practice,
- controlled by external organisations and institutions,
- responsive to the needs of service users,
- transparent with their operational, performance and financial data,
- liable for facing consequences for their performance, and
- in a dialogic relationship with key stakeholders working in the same area.

2.3.4. Typologies of accountability

As stated earlier, public officials work in a web of multiple and often overlapping accountability relationships. Scholars have attempted to classify these accountability relationships. Romzek and Dubnick (1987) proposed the original typology of accountability based on two dimensions: 'source of agency control' and 'degree of control over agency actions', which has been widely adopted in accountability studies. They identified four types of accountabilities: **bureaucratic, legal, professional, and political**. Their accountability typology emphasises the nature of an organisation's accountability obligation - *'accountability for what'* (Romzek 2000). In terms of two dimensions, the source of control in the accountability relationship distinguishes between the

accountability being internal or external to the one being held accountable, whereas the degree of control might be high or low when the principal exercises control over the power holder (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). In 2000, Romzek refined their typology identifying: hierarchical, legal, professional, and political accountabilities based on 'source of expectations and/or control' and 'degree of autonomy'.

		Source of Agency Control	
		Internal	External
Degree of Control Over Agency Actions	High	**Bureaucratic**	**Legal**
	Low	**Professional**	**Political**

Figure 3: Accountability types identified by Romzek and Dubnick

Source: Romzek and Dubnick (1987)

Bureaucratic forms of accountability are widely used to manage expectations (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Some authors refer to bureaucratic accountability as administrative accountability (Bovens 2007, Willems and Van Dooren 2011), managerial accountability (Sinclair 1995), or hierarchical accountability (Page 2006). Under this model, there is a hierarchical relationship between a superior and a subordinate, in which the subordinate is accountable to the superior for the performance of delegated duties. There is a wide range of bodies acting as superiors who exercise financial and administrative scrutiny. They vary from external administrative or financial bodies to independent supervisory authorities, chartered accountants, inspector generals, and internal bodies (Bovens 2007). Bureaucratic accountability is therefore closely in line with the controllability dimension. Although the bureaucratic form of accountability might seem relatively simple, it does not take all stakeholders that are involved in the relationship into consideration. As it is primarily based on principal-agent theory, it focuses primarily on two parties and potentially neglects multiple accountability forums in an increasingly complex public services setting.

Whereas a bureaucratic system refers to hierarchical relationships based on supervisions, **legal accountability** systems (sometimes called judicial) involve relationships between two autonomous parties: an agency and a controlling party outside the agency (legislative

institutions). The outside actor is in a position to impose legal sanctions and assert obligations. Legal accountability is similar to the bureaucratic type of accountability, in that it involves the frequent application of control to a wide range of activities. However, the source of control in legal accountability relationships is external rather than internal to the organisation. Legal accountability is therefore closely aligned with the controllability dimension.

Professional accountability stresses the power and control in the hands of the skilled and expert members of a professional or an expert group who are accountable for their job to agent leaders. In contrast to bureaucratic accountability, in which the emphasis would be on close supervision, professional accountability relies on standards, values, technical knowledge, and expertise in an unsupervised context (Mulgan 2000). Therefore, as Romzek and Dubnick noted (1987), the professional accountability relationship is similar to that between a layperson and an expert. It is based on a principal-agent relationship with a knowledge asymmetry between the agents (Sharma 1997), with the layperson as an individual who has insufficient knowledge about how the expert should carry out their job. Professional accountability is akin to the responsiveness and responsibility dimensions. Professional bodies and qualifications, such as those that accountants, lawyers, and doctors obtain, demonstrate their belonging to the profession and are given sufficient autonomy to get their job done. However, if they fail to meet their professional expectations, the professional body can reprimand them disciplinarily.

Finally, the key emphasis under **political accountability systems** is on responsiveness. Political accountability refers to a relationship between an elected representative who is directly accountable to his or her constituents. The representative might be an individual politician, for example an MP, a local councillor, a portfolio holder, or a scrutiny chair, or representatives might embrace a group of politicians, for example a committee, sub-committee, or working party, which might or might not be politically balanced. If the elected representative(s) fails to be accountable to the constituents, they can be substituted in democratic elections (Erkkilä 2007). Bovens (2007) particularly stresses the importance of political accountability within democracies by referring to the political accountability in the UK, where civil servants are accountable to their ministers and ministers are accountable to the voters.

Over the recent years, scholars have, however, attempted to revise the original typology of accountability introduced by Romzek and Dubnick (1987). This is because some believed that the framework missed important types of accountabilities (Lindberg 2013, Bovens 2010). For example, Bovens (2010) argued that accountability as *a virtue*, that is perceived as a set of standards, is outside the domain of control identified by Romzek and Dubnick. Similarly, Lindberg (2013) attempted to explain the complexity of accountability relationships through formulating broader and distinct accountability typologies. Whereas Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) typology provides a basis for accountability classification based on two dimensions, Lindberg's typology (2013) helps distinguish 12 accountability relationships using three dimensions (source of control, strength of control, and direction of relationship). This more comprehensive classification of accountability subtypes by Lindberg (2013) broadens the traditional typology by including a new spatial dimension that enables us to distinguish between vertical (upward and downward) and horizontal accountabilities.

Some new types of accountability have also been identified by other scholars, including public accountability, personal accountability, social accountability and market accountability. Table 4 identifies the different types of accountability that have emerged in the literature in recent years. However, it is important to note that some of these types may not apply to this study or largely overlap with the accountability types identified by Romzek and Dubnick (1987).

A number of authors have recognised that **public (or civic) accountability** is a type of accountability system that is essential in democratic governance. Sinclair (1995) argues that public accountability provides a more informal system focused towards the wider public, rather than the political system. Essentially, it is understood as a relationship between public agencies who 'should feel obliged to' account for their performance to the public. It is therefore closely related to the notion of transparency. As noted by Willems and Van Dooren (2012), public accountability can, however, produce discourses that are critical of the state. In such circumstances, it involves the state answering these discourses through a number of mechanisms ranging from public reports to hearings (Sinclair 1995), which brings it close to the dialogic dimension of accountability.

Table 4: Classifications of accountability

Source: Author

Type of accountability	Authors	Relationship	Characteristics	Mechanisms	Accountability dimension
Bureaucratic (Administrative, Managerial, Hierarchical)	Romzek and Dubnick (1987), O'Laughlin (1990), Sinclair (1995), Page (2006), Bovens (2007), Willems and Van Dooren (2011), Lindberg (2013)	Superior – subordinate	Hierarchic, obedience to organisational directives, efficiency	Supervision, rules, regulations	**Controllability**
Legal (Judicial)	Romzek and Dubnick (1987), O'Laughlin (1990), Page (2006), Bovens (2007), Willems and Van Dooren (2011), Lindberg (2013)	Policy maker - implementer	Rule of law,	Courts, formal judicial trials, and procedures	**Controllability**
Professional	Romzek and Dubnick (1987), O'Laughlin (1990), Sinclair (1995), Page (2006), Bovens (2007), Lindberg (2013)	Layperson – expert	Expertise	Expert scrutiny, peer review, standards, values	**Responsiveness Responsibility**
Political	Romzek and Dubnick (1987), O'Laughlin (1990), Sinclair (1995), Page (2006), Bovens (2007), Willems and Van Dooren (2011), Lindberg (2013)	Constituent – elected representative	External, democratic	Voice, elections, budget control	**Responsiveness**
Public, civic*	Sinclair (1995), Willems and Van Dooren (2011)	State – public, citizens	Informal discourses	Public reporting, communication channels	**Transparency Dialogue**
Personal (Moral, Ethical) *	Sinclair (1995), Mulgan (2000b)	Organisation - Clients, citizens	Internal, code of ethics	Culture, ethics, values	**Responsibility**
Market*	Garn (2001), Page (2006), Willems and Van Dooren (2012)	Customer - provider	Performance	Exit	**Responsiveness**

* These types may not apply to this study or largely overlap with the accountability types identified by Romzek and Dubnick (1987)

In Sinclair's classification system (1995), **personal accountability** is also recognised as a form of accountability. This dimension of accountability is driven by adherence to internal ethical and moral values, such as respect for other individuals and human dignity, and for acting in the public interest (Erkkilä 2007). This is supported by Mulgan (2000b) who identifies personal responsibility, which refers to moral values such as honesty, integrity, and fairness. This brings it close to accountability as a *virtue* (Bovens 2010), which is based on self-control and soft internal values. Personal accountability is symptomatic of the administrative culture and is based on values and code of ethics, bringing it close to the professional type of accountability. Nonetheless, advocates of rational choice theory could argue that personal accountability does not exist in a public sector setting due to the individual and fixed preferences, instead of the public interest (Kaboolian 1998). This view is contradicted in the UK by the existence of the Nolan principles, and by similar public sector codes elsewhere, such as the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct enshrined in the Public Service Act 1999.

Willems and Van Dooren (2012) also distinguish **market accountability** in their typology or classification. In contrast to public accountability, market accountability is applicable to owners or shareholders who call the organisation's managers to account for its performance. The rise of this type of accountability has been influenced by NPM reforms affecting both public and private sectors. In terms of the public sector, market accountability introduced 'business-like' models and an increased focus on public services' performance. In simple terms, there are many publicly owned services and organisations that must operate in commercial or market environments. They are therefore accountable to both the public and the market. Examples include state owned corporations that operate in international markets, e.g., transport, power, or utility companies.

It is important to note that the different types of accountabilities may overlap in practice and are not always co-terminus or clear-cut. As Glennon *et al.* (2019) note, accountabilities are multiple and contingent, and therefore they lead to complex and multiple accountability relationships. The same principal can hold an agent accountable through multiple relationships, have multiple expectations, exert claims through multiple mechanisms, and use numerous incentives to shape the behaviour of the agent (Page 2006, Piatak *et al.* 2018).

With respect to this study, there are clear overlaps between some accountability types. For example, personal accountability overlaps with professional accountability, since it relies on adherence to standards, ethical and moral values such as mutual respect. Similarly, public (or civic) accountability overlaps with political accountability as it is an external form, in which public services are expected to be accountable to elected representatives and the public. In addition, because Fire and Rescue Services do not usually operate in commercial environments, market accountability is less relevant than in other contexts. With these issues in mind, and for the purposes of simplicity, this study utilises Romzek and Dubnick's classic typology into the conceptual framework for analysis.

2.3.5. Functions of accountability

The typologies of accountability have been extended in the literature by including prominent functions of accountability. They are generally classified as the **constitutional, democratic, and performance functions of accountability** (Aucoin and Heintzman 2000, Bovens *et al*. 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2012).

The constitutional function of accountability refers to prevention of unfairness and executive abuses (Bovens *et al*. 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2012). The public nature of account giving revolves around controlling public managers for misuse of public authority and other forms of inappropriate behaviour (e.g., corruption and nepotism). Behn (2001) defines this function of accountability as accountability for finances and fairness together.

Secondly, the **democratic function** provides voters with assurance and democratic means to monitor and control political representatives (Bovens *et al.* 2008). This function provides citizens with the inputs for judging the adherence to the law, and the effectiveness and efficiency of governance. It can also promote greater transparency and openness.

The third function of accountability is meant to **enhance performance** (Bovens *et al*. 2014). In other words, accountability should encourage and promote the learning capacity and capability in pursuit of constant improvement in governance (Aucoin and Heintzman 2000). This suggests that this function focuses on forward-looking and prospective accountability (Murphy *et al.* 2019a). More recently, the focus on external inspections and auditing processes emphasised the need for constant improvement and learning from previous experiences (OPSR 2003, Downe and Martin 2007). Lewis and Triantafillou (2012) stress that the learning capacity supplements performance rather than replaces it entirely. It also

involves higher costs of compliance than performance because of reliance on participation and dialogue between governance actors who seek to improve outcomes for the public.

All the above examples demonstrate that accountability is supposed to deter wrongdoing. Although the notion of accountability of bringing benefits has been the dominant one, the negative aspects of accountability have also been identified in the literature (Behn 2001, Mulgan 2003, Ferry *et al.* 2015, Mizrahi and Minchuk 2019). Firstly, accountability procedures and systems incur costs or burdens that may outweigh the benefits (Mayston 1993). For example, when the UK Coalition Government of 2010-2015 abolished both the performance measurement framework for holding English local government to account, the Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA), and closed its co-ordinator the Audit Commission, as it claimed that these institutions were costly and burdensome (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). Secondly, meeting accountability obligations might lead to excessive focus on rules (Behn 2001). This could be illustrated by preparing information for monitoring bodies, instead of focusing on core activities (this was the Coalition Government's justification for sector-led improvement replacing CAA and external inspection). Finally, aggressively holding people to account may lead to other dysfunctions of accountability, including gaming and distortion of targets and measures (Mizrahi and Minchuk 2019). All these examples demonstrate that accountability should not be blindly pursued for its own sake (Ferry *et al.* 2015).

Although the literature has identified three main functions of accountability, the main problem for public organisations in practice is the trade-off between all these functions (Behn 2001). In recent decades, expectations have shifted from democratic and constitutional functions of accountability towards the performance dimension of accountability. As result of NPM reforms, the performance function of accountability has been strengthened through the creation of various monitoring and regulating bodies focusing on economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of public organisations (Power 1997).

The result of the shift towards performance accountability is significant. The literature often refers to an '*accountability paradox*' rather than a healthy balance between performance and other functions of accountability (Jos and Tompkins 2004, Dubnick 2005). Numerous studies have attempted to explain the prevalence of the performance function over the democratic and constitutional perspectives of accountability. Holding individuals accountable for performance, while also holding them accountable for abuse of power and

democratic control creates an '*accountability dilemma*' (Behn 2001). In such situations, if the performance function gains importance, the other two functions may lose ground.

Aucoin and Heinzman (2000) recognise the inherent tension between accountability and performance as twin objectives of NPM reforms. Some argue that constitutional and democratic functions of accountability have been sacrificed in the name of performance in the public sector resulting in an accountability gap (Barberis 1998), whereas others state that by focusing on performance, a healthy balance can be found, and the other two perspectives could even be improved (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Several lines of evidence suggest that improving accountability does not necessarily or automatically improve performance (Aucoin and Heinzman 2000). A few studies have identified the potential counterproductive effect of accountability 'overloads' on the performance of public services (Halachmi 2014). One possible explanation for this might be the fact that excessive rules and regulations constrain public officials and consequently hinder decision making, which negatively affects operational performance (Mayston 1993). A key study investigating the relationship between accountability and performance is that of Dubnick (2005), in which he attempts to establish an accountability-performance framework. Dubnick argues that accountability diminishes organisational performance. He also suggests broadening the perspective in order to find external factors that might link accountability with performance. For example, Chan and Rosenbloom (2010) stress the importance of cultural and contextual factors influencing accountability. On the other hand, more recent research suggests that improving accountability might enhance performance. For example, a study by Macinati *et al.* (2022) demonstrates that when organisations implement more feedback mechanisms, they often benefit from greater accountability and improved employees' performance. Nonetheless, the relationship between accountability and performance remains under-examined, and demonstrates a gap that needs to be filled with more empirical research, confirming the why, where and when of the counterproductive impact of accountability on performance.

2.3.6. Impact of governance changes on accountability

A recent review of governance literature suggests that the focus of administrative practice has moved towards less hierarchical and more decentralised forms of governance (Elliott *et al.* 2022). Governance and management models based on collaboration and joint ways of working have increasingly been seen as more prominent modes of service delivery

(Bianchi *et al.* 2021). These changes raise important questions around the form and nature of new governance arrangements that have been growing in salience and their impact on understandings of accountability. This section explains how changing governance arrangements has significant implications for *'accountability to whom'*. Most notably, it discusses how governance reforms can change the directions of accountability relationships that involve public sector organisations.

2.3.6.1. Traditional hierarchical accountability

Traditional accountability relationships are grounded in a classic Weberian system of public administration. They perceive hierarchies as an appropriate means of accountability (Rhodes 1996, Strøm 2000). Strøm (2000) argues that traditional accountability relationships thrive best under a number of conditions. First, direct hierarchical (vertical) lines of command must be established between a superior and a subordinate. Second, the relationship has to be complemented by clear demands from the superior (Mulgan 2003). Finally, the demands have to run in the opposite direction. All these conditions have to be met to call a relationship 'hierarchical'. Management and formal audits are good illustrations of hierarchical accountability relationships.

However, over the past decades, traditional accountability relationships have been subject to transformations. The shift from government to governance has transformed the traditional hierarchical relationship between the state and the public to more complex relationships including horizontal and diagonal relationships (see section 2.2.8). NPM reforms have led to significant changes blurring traditional boundaries between the public and private sector, resulting in fragmentation, outsourcing and privatisation of public services (Schillemans 2011, Ferry *et al.* 2015, Elliott *et al.* 2022). Other shifts of power from the point of view of the state included decentralisation (more autonomous local government), subsidiarity, the internationalisation of organisations, and externalisation of government activities to private and non-governmental institutions (Erkkilä 2007).

In practice, the post-NPM public sector has to deal with dynamic, informal and non-institutionalised forms of accountability (Meijer 2007). Many scholars (Michels and Meijer 2008, Schillemans 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2012) claim that hierarchical accountability arrangements no longer appear to adequately fit with the new

administrative developments and therefore have had to be supplemented with new forms of accountability, most notably horizontal and diagonal accountabilities.

2.3.6.2. Horizontal accountability

Accountability operates in multiple directions. In contrast to hierarchical (vertical) accountability, horizontal accountability is a form of accountability between parties operating or collaborating in the same areas of interest (Michels and Meijer 2008). Typically, all parties are essentially equal to one another, and more negotiation and collaboration takes place under this direction of accountability. Actors involved in a horizontal accountability relationship get the opportunity to become actively involved at a similar level of decision-making, although, they do it without a clear hierarchical definition of authority (Willems and Van Dooren 2012). Horizontal accountability relationships emerged during NPM reforms. The labels of 'joined-up-government' and 'whole-of-government' represent these type of reforms (Hood 2005, Christensen and Lægreid 2007). However, horizontal accountability has changed its focus as result of post-NPM reforms to greater involvement of citizens in the co-creation of public services (Dudau *et al.* 2019).

The public partnership model serves as an example of the challenging multi-dimensional accountability relations. In this case, the partnership is accountable upwards to political sovereigns, whereas it is also accountable horizontally to other agencies (public or external service providers) and through elected local government, downwards to the public. An example of these multi-directional accountability partnerships were the Local Area Agreements (LAA) between central government and local areas facilitated through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) (abolished in 2010). In the case of LAAs, they were accountable upwards to central government (via the regional Government Offices and Whitehall) and horizontally to the local authority and local delivery partners, and downwards to the public.

One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether horizontal forms of accountability can adequately ensure control. Michels and Meijer (2008) have attempted to answer this question by stating a number of requirements that need to be met for a horizontal accountability relationship to be effective. They refer to transparent and clear responsibilities, well-defined parties, information supply, debate, and sanctioning options. On the other hand, Schillemans (2008, 2011) suggests that horizontal accountability offers

limited sanctioning options, whilst others (e.g., Meijer 2014) argue that it provides an absolute absence of formal sanctions. The reason for that is the horizontal arrangement in which actors cannot be easily removed by traditional accountability mechanisms, such as elections or the judicial system. Instead, the actors tend to be self-appointed, which implies that exit options are very limited (Mees and Driessen 2019). Social and professional forms of accountability serve as examples of horizontal accountability relationships, in which the relations are more informal and there might be no sanctions, or the sanctions might be softer or more indirect than in a traditional hierarchical accountability relationship.

2.3.6.3. Diagonal accountability

Diagonal accountability relationships are in-between hierarchical and horizontal forms of accountability. They were introduced through NPM reforms to try to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. As Schillemans (2008) observes, non-hierarchical accountability, which includes diagonal accountability, refers to a relationship in which there might be limited or no sanctions, however, the consequences still might be severe. Diagonal accountability relationships are examples of the relationships that operate 'in the shadow of hierarchy' (Bovens 2007, Schillemans 2008), with a two-step relation with a forum, in which a third party is independent from the agent and the principal. The third party is considered as a significant stakeholder to the hierarchical principal-agent relationship. In the first step, the third party, such as inspection bodies and audit institutions, is at one end of the accountability relationship, whereas public services are on the other end. In the second step, inspection bodies and audit institutions act as forums to report to the government and the public on the activities and performance of public services. The government usually does not enforce direct sanctions (other than in extreme circumstances, such as when the law has been broken), but consequences might still be severe for the inspected services (Schillemans 2008). The government's role is therefore to ensure the public service's legitimacy on behalf of citizens, who are made aware of the outcomes of inspection/auditing processes.

In practice, horizontal and diagonal forms of accountability act as extensions of traditional hierarchical accountability and operate 'in the shadow of hierarchy' (Schillemans 2008). They do not substitute hierarchical accountability, but instead serve as an addition to traditional forms of accountability (Schillemans 2008, Michels and Meijer 2008, Schillemans 2011, Kettl 2015).

2.3.7. Accountability and public service reforms

Organisations enact their accountability in relations with governance structures (March and Olsen 1983). Over the last century, public service delivery has developed from its TPA approach through NPM to post-NPM reforms (Table 5).

The traditional model of public administration remains the longest standing theory of public management (Entwistle 2022). Nevertheless, the last four decades have seen an ongoing dissemination and implementation of NPM reforms all around the world. More recently, a wave of post-NPM reforms have emerged. These reforms have variously been labelled as New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne 2006), New Political Governance (Aucoin 2012), neo-Weberian state (Drechsler 2005, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) or Digital-era governance (Dunleavy *et al*. 2006a, 2006b). However, NPG is the most appropriate perspective for this thesis out of all post-NPM perspectives (see section 2.3.7.4.). What follows is an account of public management reforms of TPA, through NPM and post-NPM reforms, as these are the most relevant reforms for this study.

Table 5: Comparison of the Public Management reforms and their impact on accountability

Source: Author's interpretation and adapted from Beetham (1987), Hood (1991), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017), Bingham *et al.* (2005), Osborne (2006), Christensen and Lægreid (2007), Torfing and Triantafillou (2013), Bryson *et al.* (2014)

	Public Administration	New Public Management	New Public Governance
Main Authors	Weber (1922), Wilson (1887), Beetham (1987), Taylor (1919)	Hood (1991), Ferlie *et al.* (1996), Pollitt (1990, 1995, 2000), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017)	Moore (1995), Bingham *et al.* (2005), Osborne (2006), Christensen and Laegreid (2007), Torfing and Triantafillou (2013)
Time frame	Late 19th century – 1970s	Late 1970s – 1990s	Late 1990s – 21st century
Theoretical roots	Hierarchy and Weberian forms of bureaucracy	Public choice theory, Rational choice theory, Principal-agent theory	Network theory, New institutionalism, Stewardship theory
Model of public service delivery	Administrative/ professional	Managerial	Co-production
Governance mechanism	Command, control, hierarchy, and rules	Targets and goals, market mechanisms	Governance elements and networks
Main focus of control	Inputs and intra-organisational processes	Intra-organisational focus and outputs	Inter-organisational processes and outcomes
Values	Efficiency	Efficiency and Effectiveness	Citizenship, Democracy
Organisational structure	Unified bureaucracies	Decentralisation of public organisations, Competitive markets	Collaborative networks, Inter-organisational governance
Conception of citizens interest	Constituents/voters	Customers/consumers	Co-producers
Democracy	Representative democracy	Neo-liberal democracy	Participatory democracy
Public accountability	Leaders steer and exercise oversight	Leaders set public goals and set targets, and hold managers to account for their delivery	Negotiated goal setting and oversight
Accountability dimension	Controllability	Responsiveness, Liability, Transparency	Responsibility, Dialogue, Transparency
Accountability type	Bureaucratic, Legal, Political	Managerial, Professional, Market, Personal	Professional, Public
Accountability function	Constitutional and democratic functions	Performance function	Collaborative and learning function
Accountability challenges	Hierarchical accountability lines	Mandatory hierarchical accountability, Voluntary horizontal accountability, Diagonal accountability, Individual accountability	Collective accountability but weakened horizontal accountability

2.3.7.1. Traditional Public Administration

The traditional model of public administration remains the longest standing theory of public management (Hughes 2012, Entwistle 2022). TPA developed in the latter part of the 19th century, reached its high point in the post-1945 era of the welfare state in the UK, and lasted until around the late 1970s (Osborne 2006).

TPA can be characterised as follows:

- Strict hierarchical model of bureaucracy (Beetham 1987, Peters 2001),
- Adherence to set rules, laws, and guidelines (Peters 2001),
- The politics-administration dichotomy (Wilson 1887, Waldo 1952, Svara 2008),
- The hegemony of bureaucrats in the service delivery system (Beetham 1987, Osborne 2006),
- Neutral and anonymous officials with a full-time, long-term career structure (Beetham 1987).

The hierarchical model of bureaucracy is the fundamental characteristic of TPA (Entwistle 2022). In the public sector setting, this is exemplified by hierarchical relationships between supervisors and their employees (within the administration), politicians and citizens, politicians and administration, and administration and citizens. Accountability is therefore a series of relationships based on hierarchical systems. For example, policy is set at the top and carried out through a series of offices, with each employee reporting hierarchically to a supervisor and held to account by that person. Adherence to fixed rules, laws, and guidelines is closely related to neutral and anonymous administrators as a feature of TPA. In other words, public employees under the TPA paradigm ought to act in the public interests and disregard their personal views.

Although TPA was promoted for most of the 20th century, its inadequacies became apparent in the late 1970s. It lost favour because of changes in demographics and disappointments with apparently ineffective governments. It became "sluggish, rigid, rule bound, centralized, insular, self-protective, and profoundly antidemocratic" (Lynn 2001, p. 5). As a result, the theory of TPA has been regarded as inadequate by many academics (e.g., Behn 1998, Denhardt and Denhardt 2000) principally for the following reasons.

Firstly, TPA has been associated with the argument that governance is defined by formal rules and hierarchical structures. The so-called 'red tape' literature criticises TPA for its

excessive focus on rules, which tend to be perceived differently by different actors (Kaufman 1977). For some they might be burdensome and a waste of time, while for others they are necessary. Despite TPA's emphasis on formal hierarchy and uniformity, it often leads to inconsistencies in service delivery.

Secondly, the most slippery concept in TPA appears to be a distinction between politics and administration (Svara 2008). One of the key characteristics of the traditional form of administration proposed by Woodrow Wilson (1887) is that politicians are responsible for policy making, whereas administrators are responsible for implementation. The main weakness with this argument is that in practice, politics and administration cannot always be separated from each other. Political decisions cannot be separated from the implementation stage, whereas administration can have political consequences (Behn 1998, Peters 2018).

Thirdly, the strict model of hierarchy has also been critiqued for being too rigid and less prone to innovation (Dunleavy and Hood 1994, Bommert 2010). The traditional form assumes that administrators are only responsible for following instructions from others and every question has a single, universally correct answer, which results in weakened innovation.

Even critics of TPA (e.g., Osborne and Gaebler (1992)) acknowledge that it provided a suitable approach for the conditions that lasted until the 1970s and the types of problems that governments sought to address. However, those conditions have been swept away and there are many more delivery strategies and alternate outcomes to address a wider array of societal issues. For example, there are alternative ways of public services delivery, with the integration of private sector, voluntary sector actors, and citizens, and significant advances in technology. TPA has been undermined by changing demographics, ineffective governments, and a number of other inadequacies (Peters 2001). In the traditional form, managers do not actively consider other alternate methods or strategies that could help politicians determining decisions in achieving different results. They may also abdicate responsibility for the results of a policy dictated by politicians.

TPA has been a major explanatory model of the past and under the specific conditions of the time (Entwistle 2022). However, in many circumstances, some TPA theories and practices have been regarded as outdated and obsolete, with public services delivered by state monopolies that were unresponsive to 'customer' demands and people unable to

hold these large bureaucracies accountable. Interestingly, Torfing *et al.* (2020) suggest that TPA has been seen as mostly positive in countries where bureaucracy is less developed, whereas in modern societies with already established bureaucratic structures, TPA has had a counterproductive effect. This is because the state has been acting alone and has been seen as no longer able to address many long-term societal problems, so-called 'wicked problems' (Head 2022). The world has 'moved on' and those conditions that were appropriate up to the 1970s, have now been largely superseded (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). However, it is worth noting that almost all public service reforms over the last twenty years have included improving accountability among their primary objectives (Dubnick and Yang 2011), and TPA has not disappeared, and its foundations are still embedded in some of today's public governance and accountability relationships.

2.3.7.2. New Public Management

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a new approach to management in the public sector emerged, which acted as a direct response to perceived inadequacies in TPA. The core argument was that public sector provision was inefficient and ineffective (Mishra 1984), which led to distrust in direct public service delivery (Aucoin 2013). Consequently, new tools, techniques and mechanisms emerged as drivers or facilitators for reforms, such as performance improvement and cost containment (Dawson and Dargie 2002).

NPM reforms helped to create the new reality. The emergence of rational choice theory and public choice theory (Niskanen 1971) was embraced by Ronald Reagan in the USA and by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, who introduced NPM reforms in their respective countries from 1979. The first academic contributions on NPM were released a decade after the reforms and over time an extensive literature has developed on the phenomenon of NPM. It has commonly been assumed that the UK has been a birthplace for NPM, because Hood – a British scholar of public administration - was the first to coin the term NPM (1991). However, NPM has not only been dominant in the UK. It has also been highly influential in other Anglophone countries including the USA, where two non-academics, Osborne and Gaebler (1992), advocated the need for government improvement by incorporating market-based changes to public service delivery.

Although NPM has been researched both in the UK and in the USA, the British and American variants of NPM have been perceived as relatively distinct from each other (Kettl 2000,

Borins 2002). The impact of NPM has, however, spread far beyond the Anglo-American origin since the 1980s, driven by globalisation and international organisations (Christensen and Lægreid 2013). Consequently, similar developments emerged in different parts of the globe, such as New Zealand, Australia, and Western Europe (Hood 1991, Dunleavy and Hood 1994, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017), which, as McKevitt and Wringley (1998) observe, are all regions that have a strong tradition of a large-state-controlled public sector.

Despite the spread of reforms all around the world, not every country has adopted the same form of NPM. The reforms have been implemented at a different pace and with a varied level of intensity across the world (Hood 1995). Generally, Anglo-Saxon countries have largely adopted NPM into their administrative culture, whereas non-Anglo-Saxon countries have adopted more limited reforms (Steccolini 2019). Pollitt (2000) notes that in some countries the process of changing central and local administrative structures has been particularly difficult due to the constitutional and political context (for example in Germany due to its 'rule of law' culture (Kuhlmann *et al.* 2008)), whereas in other countries it has been relatively easy (New Zealand and the UK). This suggests that there is no single universal model of NPM that has been implemented worldwide. NPM should therefore be treated as context dependent.

Although NPM has been researched from multiple perspectives (from political science to public administration), it has rarely been defined in the existing literature. As Barzelay (2002, p. 15) notes, NPM is perceived as a more recognisable term than a well-known and established concept. In general, defining NPM has been problematic. It has been commonly used as a handy summary of a way in which public sector bodies incorporate their accounting and reporting approaches, which are closer to business models, with competition and the use of incentives (Dunleavy and Hood 1994). Behn (2001) stresses that the purpose of NPM strategies has been to improve public sector performance, although Christophers (2018, 2023) demonstrates how the UK also sought to adopt it to transfer extensive public sector assets into private ownership. Continuous quality improvement (Borins 1995, Ferlie *et al.* 1996, Pollitt 2000) and performance driven approaches (Pollitt 2000) have also been prominent features of NPM reforms. However, one can argue that the ''one-size-fits-all'' adoption of NPM reforms does not exist (Hood and Peters 2004, p. 278). Lowndes (1997) argues that there is no single model of management change, such as NPM, that can be universally applied to all organisations or contexts. Instead, it may be

best to understand it as an umbrella term (Christensen and Lægreid 2002), which is reflected in alternative names that have been used interchangeably to describe the reforms of the 1980s and the 1990s, such as: managerialism (Pollitt 1990), reinventing government (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), and market-based public administration (Lan and Rosenbloom 1992). These different descriptors suggest that NPM is more of an imprecise set of ideas than a coherent and consistent philosophy (Wegrich 2009).

However, NPM reforms tend to have a common core (e.g., Hood 1991, 1995, Boston *et al*. 1996, Ferlie *et al.* 1996, Pollitt and Summa 1997, Kettl 2000, Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). Although some of its main features are clearly not unique to NPM, discussions of the concept tend to refer to the following:

- Application of private-sector techniques of management,
- Transfer of roles, responsibilities, and assets to the private sector,
- Outsourcing,
- Hybridisation,
- Managerialism,
- Separation of politics and management,
- Focus on an apparent need for entrepreneurial leadership within public sector,
- Focus on input and output controls,
- Performance management – individuals and organisations,
- Break-up of services into smaller basic units,
- The growth of markets and competition (marketisation).

Accountability under NPM reforms has been focused on setting targets and holding individuals to account for their delivery. NPM advocates stressed the need to 'free up managers to manage'. Theoretically, this involved giving them specific tasks to undertake and budgets to spend in the pursuit of those tasks. This was based on the idea that organisations could identify how well they undertook specific tasks and make them accountable through targets, indicators, and monitoring (Entwistle 2022). As such, it has primarily concentrated on performance through target setting and measurement (Hood 2006). The focus under NPM reforms moved from hierarchical governance structures towards an increased focus on managerial accountability, which has resulted, in some instances, in the counterproductive effect of creating accountability 'overloads' on service's performance (Halachmi 2014), and in others, the creation of accountability 'deficits' (Funnell 2000, Schillemans 2011, Mulgan 2014a).

New forms of accountability, including horizontal and diagonal accountability, have emerged during NPM (see Table 5). The reforms introduced outsourcing, privatisation and 'agencification' that blurred traditional boundaries between the public and private sector, resulting in fragmentation of the public sector and the accountability relationships that operated within it (Schillemans 2011, Ferry *et al.* 2015). As a result, actors became involved in more horizontal accountability relationships in both the public and private sectors, where they got the opportunity to become actively involved at a similar level of decision-making, without a clear hierarchical definition of authority (Willems and Van Dooren 2012). Public services also became diagonally accountable to 'third party' inspectorates and professional organisations. Thus, decision-making under NPM brought increased difficulty in establishing who is accountable to whom and for what because of the involvement of multiple actors (Bevir 2009).

Accountability under NPM reforms has also been focused on the customer centred role of citizens, who have individualist orientations and fixed preferences (Kaboolian 1998). This type of accountability favoured individual preferences rather than the public interest, according to the public choice and rational choice theories upon which NPM is based (Table 5). This means that accountability under NPM reforms was largely focused on individual as well as organisational targets, and effectiveness and efficiency, rather than public interest and the creation of public value.

Despite NPM's worldwide recognition, the concept has been widely critiqued. It has been accused of promoting the individual career interests of top officials rather than the mass of public service recipients (Hood 1991, Dunleavy and Hood 1994, Van der Walle and Hammerschmid 2011). NPM-based relationships have been reliant not only on individual or organisational self-interest, but they have also been largely dependent on principal-agent theory with conflicting goals of the principal and agent (Jensen and Meckling 1976). NPM relationships have therefore been mainly delivered through leveraging the self-interest of private sector companies with public goals (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007).

In the same vein, NPM's treatment of citizens has been criticised as restrictive (Bovaird and Löffler 2003) and being delivered in a way that is too consumerist, rather than focused on citizens or the 'demos' (Pollitt 2000). Consequently, it has been argued that NPM has de-emphasised citizenship and the tradition of collective participation in political parties

(Aberbach and Christensen 2005), as well as ignored the political nature of local and national political discourse.

Through its preference for market-based approaches and private sector management techniques, NPM has also led to other changes in the public sector. Hood (1991) argues that one of the main points of the NPM's agenda has been improvement in cost efficiency and service effectiveness. Ironically, some have argued (Pollitt 2000) that NPM has not only failed to deliver the promised levels of efficiency and effectiveness in public services but has also led to additional side-effects of weakened accountability (Dunleavy and Hood 1994), unresolved and insignificant impacts on 'wicked problems' (Bovaird and Löffler 2003), increased corruption (Dunleavy and Hood 1994), and higher cost of running public services (Hood and Dixon 2015). This has led to another paradox, in which NPM was supposed to open public administration to the public by improving transparency. What it actually has done is undermine democratic accountability by creating complex autonomous agencies that are often inadequately scrutinised (Behn 2001, Papadopoulos 2003, 2007). NPM reforms brought an increased number of contracts with private sector providers into the public sector, making it more difficult to determine whether private or public sector actors are accountable for a particular service or parts of services. Holding responsible private actors to account has been particularly difficult as they tend to report to shareholders rather than the public (Funnell 2000). Some suggests (e.g., Haque 2001) that this contributed to erosion of the 'publicness' in public services.

Despite its weaknesses, NPM has been a significant theme in the public management literature since the 1990s. There has been an ongoing debate whether NPM is a new paradigm or a new form of the old public administration. Although many believe that NPM is a new paradigm, some argue that it is more of a cluster of several paradigms (Ferlie *et al.* 1996), a failed paradigm (Farnham and Horton 1996) or even that there is no new paradigm at all (Gow and Dufour 2000). Some have suggested that NPM is an alternative (Dunleavy and Hood 1994, Hood 1995) or a reconceptualization (Borins 1995) of the traditional model of public administration. Others have argued that NPM is a sub-school of public administration (Frederickson *et al*. 2015). They claim that there has been a considerable continuity and new reforms often overlap, without fully replacing TPA (Lapsley 2008) owing to path dependencies. In other words, administration and governance do not change immediately but tend to adapt gradually to new circumstances (Christensen and Lægreid 2008).

One conclusion to be drawn from the literature is that there appears to be no consensus on the salience of NPM. The literature raises questions as to whether NPM should be considered as an improvement of TPA or as an alternative paradigm that has emerged to explain recent public sector reforms (Pyun and Gamassou 2018). What is clear is that NPM is perceived as a complex phenomenon that varies considerably between countries, administrative levels, and sectors. This suggests that discussions on NPM reforms should not be generalised, as they are context-dependent, ought to include explanations of detailed terminology, and be conducted on an open and transparent basis. NPM reforms were expected to increase accountability in public services as result of vertical chains of managerial relationships. In practice, they weakened accountability through creation of complex autonomous agencies and public-private partnerships, and reduction of traditional democratic methods of public scrutiny. As result, NPM reforms made it difficult to determine who can actually be held to account for delivery of public services.

2.3.7.3.   Post-NPM reforms

More recently, the focus of public management literature has shifted from the concerns of individual organisations to broader perspectives of complex governance systems due to mounting criticisms and dissatisfaction with NPM. In addition, new wicked problems such as climate change, globalisation, and sustainability have risen in prominence resulting in calls for adjustments. Both the fragmentation of the public sector (Elliott *et al.* 2022) and the pervasiveness of wicked problems during NPM reforms (Head and Alford 2015, Head 2022) required an immediate reaction.

Some scholars simply claim that the era of NPM is dead (Dunleavy *et al.* 2006a) and has been replaced with new post-NPM frameworks, while others contest this move (Pollitt 2007, Lapsley 2008, Steccolini 2019). Another group of scholars (Coen and Roberts 2012, Bryson *et al*. 2014) suggest that new paradigms are still to come. If it has already been problematic to define NPM, then defining what post-NPM constitutes is even more difficult (Lodge and Gill 2011). Clearly, post-NPM reforms have produced a large degree of uncertainty and complexity for public sector accountability.

Many believe that post-NPM body of literature has combined the strengths of both TPA and NPM by recognising inter-organisational processes of public administration and the outputs of NPM (Christensen 2012, Osborne 2006). Interestingly, the post-NPM discourse

has not adopted a single agreed name as yet. It has variously been described as Public Value (Moore 1995), New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne 2006), Network Governance (Andresani and Ferlie 2006), Citizen Governance (Simmons *et al.* 2007), New Political Governance (Aucoin 2012), neo-Weberian state (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011), Digital-era governance (Dunleavy *et al.* 2006a, 2006b), New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000), and Public Service Dominant Logic (Osborne *et al.* 2015). What all these terms have in common is a response to the challenges associated with NPM. The section below describes two most prominent post-NPM paradigms in the accountability literature: Public Value and NPG.

Public Value has been identified as another example of direct a response to NPM reforms. Even though its key features might resemble the Neo-Weberian State or NPG, various scholars (Moore 1995, Bozeman 2007, Bryson *et al.* 2014, 2015, Lindgreen *et al.* 2019) have attempted to promote Public Value as a new governance paradigm. Its origins date back to the 1990s. The main difference between NPM and Public Value is the fact that the latter does not address private sector values, instead, it supports public interests and public values that meet wider society needs. The term Public Value was first coined by Mark Moore (1995) who believed in public managers' ability to create and share public value through strategic management in public sector organisations building upon stakeholder theory. This has been developed *inter alia* by Bozeman (2007) who focussed on public values rather than public value, and examined how public values fit together and how they change over time. Although Bozeman's interpretation of Public Value does not articulate the governance side of Public Value, it still adds a different dimension to the paradigm. In contrast, Bryson *et al.* (2014) argue that Public Value Governance, as they call it, promotes public value outcomes, downgrades the role of public managers, and highlights a collaborative approach to achieving outcomes. In other words, Public Value Governance involves a range of actors from public and private sectors in production and delivery of public value (Lindgreen *et al.* 2019), which brings it close to the notion of NPG. Despite substantial advancement of knowledge in Public Value, some academics (e.g., Rhodes and Wanna 2007) question the fact that Public Value has been classified by many (Stoker 2006, O'Flynn 2007, Bryson *et al.* 2014) as a governance paradigm. This is because there have been many schools of thought on Public Value that offer different interpretations of the concept. Nonetheless, growing interest in Public Value from both academics and practitioners persists, which shows that Public Value has been an important principle

underpinning public service delivery over recent decades (Mulgan *et al.* 2019, Murphy *et al.* 2023).

New Public Governance (NPG) has been the most debated paradigm out of all of the post-NPM reforms. The concept was first introduced by Osborne in an editorial in *Public Management Review* (2006). There have been discussions about how NPG embeds TPA and NPM in the new context. Many believe that NPG has supplemented NPM and TPA (Osborne 2006, Christensen 2012, Hyndman and Lapsley 2016). As with NPM reforms, NPG reforms vary around the world according to country's historical antecedents and national administrative cultures (Christensen 2012). The features of NPG that appear in most debates (Osborne 2006, Christensen 2012, Torfing and Triantafillou 2013, Wiesel and Modell 2014) include:

- The inter-organisational dimension of public services,
- Working across organisational boundaries,
- Citizens as co-producers,
- The emphasis on cooperation and collaboration,
- Collective as well as individual created value,
- Cultivating a strong and unified sense of values and the 'public interest',
- Recognition of both private interests and public interests,
- Shared power and interactive governance.

NPG has been influenced by governance network theory, which addresses complexities and interdependencies of public service delivery (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012). NPG facilitates working with wide-ranging stakeholders across organisational boundaries to create value, which contrasts with the disintegration and 'silo working' driven by NPM (Christensen and Lægreid 2007). Consequently, NPG views citizens more broadly as co-producers, problem-solvers and contributors to public services who are actively involved in a range of activities (Dudau *et al.* 2019), rather than primarily constituents, voters, clients, or customers. The role of government under NPG is to pursue values beyond effectiveness and efficiency as in NPM. It embraces the larger common good based on values such as citizenship, democracy, trust, and loyalty, which are also prominent in the Public Value approach. NPG emphasises a bottom-up and horizontal approach by involving citizens in co-producing public services as it relies on networks and indirect reciprocity that supplement previous coordination mechanisms (Hyndman and Lapsley 2016). Thus, NPG has been seen as a

reaction to both the fragmentation of the public sector and the pervasiveness of wicked problems that require addressing through cross-cutting collaboration in networks of a wide range of actors at different levels.

Unlike NPM, NPG is underpinned by stewardship theory, which places a higher value on the long-term collective interest of others rather than short-term individual interests (Mills *et al.* 2021). NPG assumes goal convergence, whereas NPM underpins goal divergence under principal-agent theory (Van Slyke 2007). Unlike principal-agent theory, stewardship theory argues that institutions shape the behaviour of participants (Olsen 2014). In other words, individuals can be motivated by social, collective goals that are embedded in organisations, networks, and professional fields.

NPG highlights co-production and co-creation (Osborne *et al.* 2016) as key governance strategies based on Public Value. This suggests that public value has become part of a broader NPG paradigm (Liddle 2018). This is because NPG promotes 'common good' by including a wide range of public and private actors involved in dealing with complex issues across multiple boundaries, which builds on the Public Value concepts introduced by Moore (1995).

Overall, post-NPM reforms have promoted the dispersal of power and new forms of collaboration and coordination amongst actors from different sectors or levels of government. Hill and Hupe (2002) argue that such changes have resulted in multiple, rather than single forms of accountability. Collaborative approaches introduced by post-NPM reforms brought a tangled web of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal forms of accountability, often resulting in tensions and conflicts between the actors involved (Piatak *et al.* 2018, Waardenburg *et al.* 2020, Lee 2022). Bovens (2007) argues that collective accountability is a type of accountability in which organisations act as collectives of individuals or on behalf of individuals or communities (Table 5). Therefore, any member of the organisation can be personally accountable for the conduct of the organisation as a whole. However, as Newman (2004) observes, accountability becomes weaker and may even prove elusive where responsibility and authority are shared (Table 5). Even if individuals can be held accountable for the conduct of the organisation, how can the organisation be collectively accountable? In practice, collaborative approaches have created complexity and confusion over who is accountable to whom, for what, and with what effects (Koliba *et al.* 2011,

Romzek *et al.* 2012, 2014). It is therefore essential for academics to explore these new forms of accountability and their potential effects.

2.3.7.4.   An age of uncertainty

In summary, over the last 40 years public management has witnessed "a process of substitution and pendulum swings" (Christensen 2012, p. 2). NPM supplanted the TPA in the 1980s as the dominant view, and more recently, post-NPM reforms have been supplanting or replacing NPM. Due to its focus on governance and emphasis on the public interest, in addition to individual interests and the creation and maintenance of public value, NPG is the most appropriate perspective for this thesis out of all post-NPM perspectives. It will therefore be used interchangeably with post-NPM reforms throughout the reminder of thesis.

What is striking about these governance and management reforms is their differing idea of accountability, performance, and legitimacy improvement (Christensen and Lægreid 2017). How these ideas are achieved has varied between countries over the recent years. Insofar as post-NPM paradigms have emerged, the traditional models of public administration and NPM still persist. NPG does not necessarily replace hierarchy and business-like practices. Ideas derived from TPA and NPM, for example accountability relationships, appear to help mitigate the potential risks inherent in post-NPM reforms. For example, the benefits of stable public governance, particularly in times of turbulence (e.g., during the global COVID-19 pandemic), have recently been gaining traction in modern public administration (Ansell *et al.* 2023, Trondal 2023). This suggests that post-NPM relates to overlapping layers of various reform processes (Dickinson 2016). That is to say that hybrid institutional practices combine TPA, NPM and post-NPM, and have been driven towards each other, which has resulted in overlaps and the convergence of ideas (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012). Nonetheless, what they all have in common is an attempt to improve the accountability of public services (Dubnick and Yang 2011).

2.4.   Conceptual framework

A review of the literature suggests that reforming governance arrangements has significant implications for accountability. Indeed, as we have seen, an underlying rationale for many NPM and post-NPM reforms over recent decades has, *inter alia*, been a desire to improve

public service accountability, even though this has not always been achieved. As Romzek (2000) argues, in times of reform there are usually calls for a reliance on a 'different kind' of accountability. This was the case with NPM reforms when the focus was on the performance notions of accountability and the public choice critique of government-provided services. On the other hand, post-NPM reforms have focused on more collaborative and learning notions of accountability. This suggests that the key to investigating accountability under different reform programmes is not understanding whether they enhance accountability or not. Instead, it is important to understand *what kind of accountability* is perceived as appropriate by different actors (Romzek 2000).

The conceptual framework for the remainder of this thesis brings together key concepts from both the governance and accountability literatures to organise and interpret empirical findings in chapters 5 to 9. Figure 4 illustrates how this framework can help us to understand how the focus on different accountability types may have changed as a result of governance reforms in public services. This study acknowledges that accountability is often perceived in terms of two dimensions – '*accountability for what*' and '*accountability to whom'* (Pilon and Brouard 2023) - and uses them both to explain the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability. '*Accountability for what'* stresses the nature of an organisation's accountability obligation, whereas '*accountability to whom'* demonstrates the relationship between the organisation and other stakeholders. The framework helps to identify how understandings of accountability may change in relation to both dimensions as a result of governance reforms.

The conceptual framework uses the most influential accountability typology by Romzek and Dubnick (1987) (Bureaucratic accountability, Political accountability, Legal accountability, and Professional accountability) as the '*accountability for what*' dimension. Each of the four types of accountabilities focuses on the different nature of an accountability obligation: bureaucratic accountability relies on the performance of delegated duties; political accountability focuses on responsiveness to citizens; legal accountability is based upon legal requirements and sanctions; and professional accountability builds on professional expertise. As discussed earlier, other types of accountabilities are outside the scope of this study (see section 2.3.4).

The framework also employs the second dimension of accountability – '*accountability to whom*' – to examine the impact of governance structures on accountability. It utilises the

three accountability directions identified by Bovens (2007) – vertical, horizontal, and diagonal. As previously explained, traditional accountability relationships, based on vertical structures in which the forum formally wields power over the actor, have been challenged in both theory and practice (Bovens 2007), and other forms of accountability have been recognised, including horizontal and diagonal accountabilities. Horizontal accountability relationships rely on mutual accountability between organisations, whilst diagonal accountability relationships are an intermediary form, where there are no powers to enforce the compliance. '*Accountability to whom*' therefore illustrates to whom the organisation is accountable and the direction of the relationship in which the organisation is involved. Although the existing literature has primarily focused on explaining accountability types in relation to the traditional vertical directions of accountability, this study extends the previous research on accountability by taking into account all three directions of accountability to understand complex governance arrangements and their potential impact on accountability in public sector settings.

Accountability for what?

Accountability to whom?	Bureaucratic	Political	Legal	Professional
Vertical				
Horizontal				
Diagonal				

⬇ **Governance reforms** ⬇

Accountability for what?

Accountability to whom?	Bureaucratic	Political	Legal	Professional
Vertical				
Horizontal				
Diagonal				
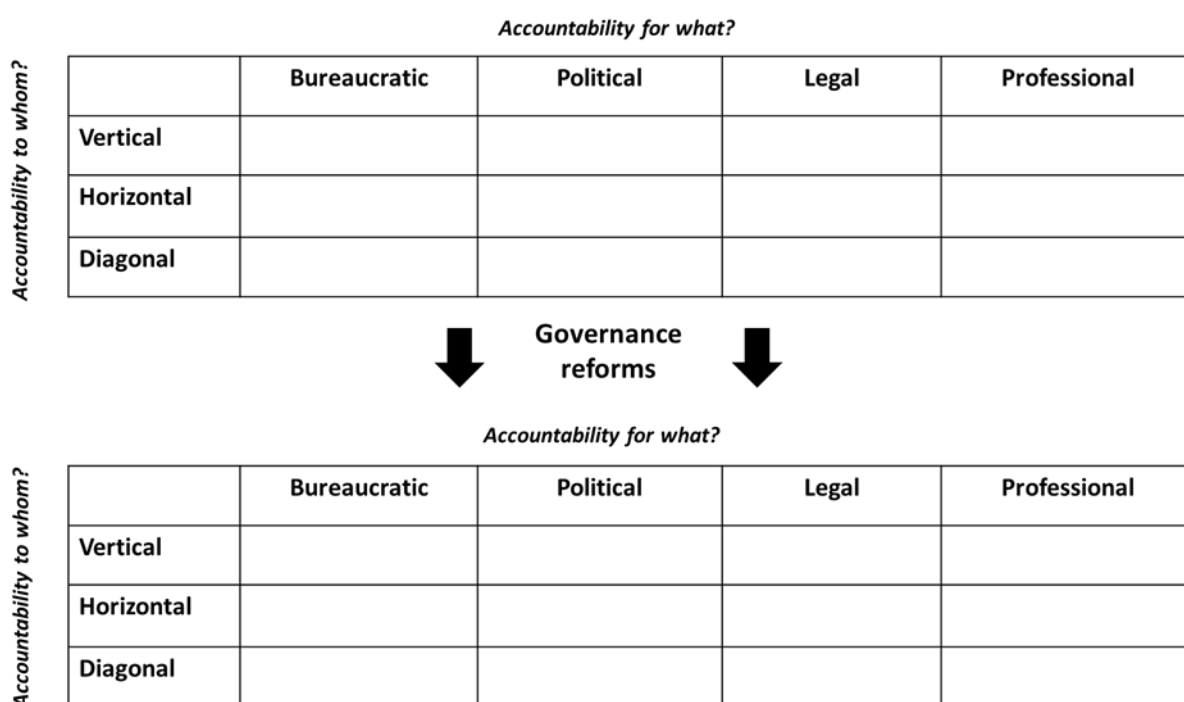
Figure 4: Conceptual framework

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

As such, this framework combines the approaches of both Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and Bovens (2007) to examine how changes in governance structures affect understandings of

accountability in public services. It illustrates how the accountability types and directions may change as result of governance reforms.

The nature of accountability depends on governance arrangements. The aim of this research is therefore to understand how accountability understandings change depending on the way public services are governed. The framework enables readers to identify how governance changes affect understandings of accountability. For example, governance reforms might involve the establishment of an external inspectorate, which is a form of diagonal accountability, whereas introducing additional reporting mechanisms to central government might be perceived as changing a vertical accountability relationship. Both examples theoretically demonstrate bureaucratic and legal types of accountabilities, as they involve external institutions holding an agent to account for performance and reporting. However, these are only theoretical examples of how accountability may change. Building on the notion of 'felt accountability', and the idea that accountability only functions in practice, when those being held to account behave differently in response to the threat of sanctions, it is important to understand how individual actors perceive how the nature of accountability may be changing. This provides new insights into how governance structures that are in flux or operate under uncertain conditions can shape actors' understandings of accountability. With this in mind, the overarching research question for this study is:

How and why might governance changes affect understandings of accountability in public services?

2.5.   Conclusions

This chapter has explored a range of academic literatures relevant to the study of governance and accountability arrangements in public services. It has shown that the two concepts can be pulled together into a framework for analysis of governance changes on accountability.

The public administration literature shows how public services have moved towards various decentralised forms of governance based on collaboration and joint ways of working (Bianchi *et al.* 2021, Elliott *et al.* 2022). As such, public services are increasingly operating in a complex patchwork of governance arrangements and have to manage combinations of multiple accountability types within and outside their organisations in an

increasingly changing politicised context. Drawing on the accountability typology introduced by Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and the accountability directions articulated by Bovens (2007), this chapter has created a framework to study how such governance reforms affect understandings of accountability. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 use the framework to empirically explore accountability in Fire and Rescue Services before and after the introduction of new governance arrangements brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. These chapters discuss each accountability type (bureaucratic, political, legal, and professional) in relation to vertical, horizontal, and diagonal accountability. Prior to reporting on the methodological considerations and the empirical analysis, however, the next chapter focuses on the contextual background of governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It explains the historical context of Fire and Rescue Services in England by drawing on the concepts identified in the literature review to explain Fire and Rescue Services' arrangements before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

Chapter 3. Background and context

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the background to governance and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services in England and sets the context for the empirical analysis. It aims to address the following research objective:

To examine the background and context of the governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

To date, much of the academic literature on emergency services in England has focused on the police and, to a lesser extent, on ambulance services. Only a relatively small body of academic management literature has been directly concerned with fire and rescue services (e.g., Ewen 2009, Wankhade and Murphy 2012, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018, Murphy *et al.* 2020a). However, there is considerable professional and official literature that is available and must be considered. Similarly, although fire engineering and industrial relations in fire and rescue services are major areas of academic interest, to date very little attention has been paid to the leadership and management of fire and rescue services (Wankhade and Murphy 2012, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018, Wankhade and Murphy 2023).

This chapter explores the historical context of English Fire and Rescue Services' governance up to 2017. It draws on the concepts identified in the literature review (Chapter 2) to explain Fire and Rescue Services arrangements in England prior to the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It also draws on the limited research into fire and rescue services and other public services to understand how both governance and accountability have been previously examined in the literature. Finally, it focuses on the impact of the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on governance and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services.

3.2. Fire and Rescue Services before the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Throughout the period from the Second World War to the 21st century, leadership and management structures in UK fire brigades were highly influenced by the traditional model of public administration (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). Fire and Rescue Services were governed by local authorities with the services delivered by firefighters and their support

staff. The service had a hierarchical command structure with strict rules and protocols (Andrews *et al.* 2014). This remained the case throughout the years of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990), even though Thatcher's government drove changes in public services, which focused on the implementation of management and business-like techniques into public service delivery. These NPM reforms did not greatly affect Fire and Rescue Services, which appeared to be relatively impervious to most of the changes at that time (Raynsford 2016, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

In the late 1990s, the fire service was, however, influenced by the wider public service 'modernization' agenda of the New Labour government that took office in 1997. In 1999, Fire and Rescue Services as part of local authorities were designated Best Value organisations by the Local Government Act 1999, which introduced the requirement to facilitate 'continuous improvement' (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2013). The Best Value regime required a best value authority to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness" (Local Government Act 1999, Section 3 (1)). Nonetheless, the fire service initially remained largely impervious to the Best Value regime. Some argue that it was due to the well-established relations between the unions and the fire service (Davis and Norton 1992), while others contend that reforming the fire service was not initially a government priority (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). Consequently, the fire service for a while remained largely unaffected by the New Labour government's modernisation agenda.

However, two highly critical government commissioned independent reports suggested that the fire sector required significant improvement. These were the Burchill Report, which looked at the way terms and conditions within the service had developed (Burchill 2000), and the Bain report (Bain *et al.* 2002), which highlighted the need for change in leadership, governance, and management.

"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 service 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)

"We did not realise until we started this review just how much potential for reform exists in the current Fire Service. We were surprised at the extent to which the fire service has fallen behind best practice in the public and private sector. …The Fire Service needs to be changed from top to bottom and every aspect of its work reformed to bring it into line with best practice at the start of the twenty-first century."

(Bain *et al*. 2002, p. ii*).*

Subsequent reforms were enshrined in the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which repealed all previous fire legislation, became the primary legislation under which Fire and Rescue Services henceforth predominantly operated. The 2004 Act introduced performance management systems (Andrews 2010), including new Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), upon which all strategies and plans were to be based. It introduced a new human resource management system to replace the systems criticised by Burchill (Integrated Personal Development System), and the first national policy and delivery framework for Fire and Rescue Services (ODPM 2004a). The reforms brought a renewed focus on performance management (Andrews 2010), including an emphasis on external audit and inspection, carried out by the Audit Commission, and coordinated in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) system that graded authorities on a performance rating scale (poor, weak, fair, good, or excellent). CPA generated significant improvements across local Fire and Rescue Services (Martin and Bovaird 2005, Audit Commission 2009, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2013, 2018), although the first round of inspections did not address the operational parts of the fire service (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2013, 2018). The CPA process was replaced in 2008 by a new methodology called Comprehensive Area Assessments

(CAA), which included corporate inspections of all fire services. However, CAA was short-lived and was soon to be succeeded by an emphasis on austerity-localism and long-term reductions in public funding, due to a change of government and a new macro-economic strategy.

The Coalition Government of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties (2010-2015) introduced macro-economic policies to significantly reduce UK sovereign debt (HMT 2010, 2013) and local policies based upon austerity-localism (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012, Lowndes and Gardner 2016, Murphy and Ferry 2018), which were meant to be short-term, but in practice introduced long-term austerity (HMT 2015, Murphy *et al*. 2020a) and uncertainty within public services in England. In response to the recession, the Coalition Government adapted neo-liberal economic policies and proposed considerable public sector expenditure reductions. The Audit Commission was abolished and CAAs were terminated. A new, 'sector-led improvement regime' and lighter regulatory system were implemented in their place (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

This new regime ostensibly required both local government and the fire and rescue sector to improve their accountability to citizens and elected representatives as part of the localism agenda (Cabinet Office 2011). This involved local authorities being more responsive to the needs and demands of service users and taxpayers, as well as being transparent when publishing relevant information. In practice, there was a radical shift in government policy from joined-up policy and collaborative working across the public sector (with scrutiny from external audit and inspection) towards 'bottom-up' accountability between local public service delivery bodies and residents (DCLG 2012a). It involved moving accountability from central government and placing responsibilities in the hands of local communities (as represented by Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs)) and giving local authorities more flexibility and freedom to deliver services (Cabinet Office 2011). The members of FRAs were drawn from local councillors elected to the local authorities, based on their size and, in the majority cases, political representation (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). FRAs were to be treated as commissioners of the service, although the existing Fire and Rescue Service remained as the main provider of the service. FRAs had responsibility for the leadership, strategic direction, and oversight of the service, with senior management responsible for day-to-day operation of the service. This meant that local FRAs and services were ultimately responsible for their own performance and accountability.

In 2010, there were 16 County FRAs, 27 Combined FRAs, 6 Metropolitan FRAs, and bespoke governance arrangements in London (see Table 6) (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). In county authorities, the council was the FRA, in that Fire and Rescue Services were integrated into the council and the FRA, with one member in charge of the fire services portfolio and a sub-committee to support the portfolio holder who was normally the chair. In combined authorities, a stand-alone FRA was established to cover multiple local authority areas, with members of the combined authority appointed by the leaders of the constituent councils. In metropolitan authorities (with the exception of London), arrangements were similar to those of combined authorities, with members of the FRA appointed by the leaders of the constituent metropolitan councils. In London, a body called London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (with 17 members appointed annually by the Mayor of London) governed the London Fire Brigade until the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

Table 6: Types of governance arrangements in English Fire and Rescue Services in 2010
Source: Murphy and Greenhalgh (2018)

FRA type	No of FRAs
County FRA	16
Combined FRA	27
Metropolitan FRA	6
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	1

Responsibility for fire policy has also moved between government departments over the past 20 years. Originally with the Home Office since 1946, it moved briefly to the Department of Transport, Local Government, and the Regions (DTLR) in 2001, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2002, and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2006 (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

By 2015, the DCLG was severely criticised for its inadequate leadership of the sector-led system and its approach to accountability and transparency in Fire and Rescue Services. Two reports from the NAO (2015) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) (2016), which built upon earlier commissioned reports from academics (Ferry and Murphy 2015, Murphy 2015), found accountability, financial resilience, transparency and value for money in the fire sector to be inadequate and to have been deteriorating since 2010, even though the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 had specifically sought to improve accountability

and transparency across local public services. As a result, responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services was transferred from the DCLG back to the Home Office in 2016 (Raynsford 2016, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

Following the critical reports, the Home Secretary (Theresa May), outlined a number of inadequacies in the performance management, governance, and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services.

> *"It is currently almost impossible to scrutinise your local fire and rescue service. There's no independent inspectorate; no regular audit of performance and only limited available data on performance over time or between areas."*
>
> (May 2016, p. 8)

Mrs May announced a new fire reform programme, as a response to the recommendations of the NAO and PAC reports, that was largely based upon reforms she had earlier imposed on police services. The reform programme included the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which – despite its name – amended important parts of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018, Murphy *et al.* 2020a, 2020b). The changes promoted greater collaboration between the three emergency services and the opportunity for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to take responsibility for local Fire and Rescue Services. The legislation also re-established an external inspectorate for English Fire and Rescue Services.

This section has shown that English Fire and Rescue Services experienced considerable reforms over the previous two decades, culminating in the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. A more detailed account of the literature on Fire and Rescue Services as well as the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms is articulated in the following sections.

3.3. Literature on governance and accountability in Fire and Rescue Services

The concepts of governance and accountability in Fire and Rescue Services have been a niche area of academic research. To date, only a few studies have specifically examined the recent changes in these areas (Farrell 2005, 2018, Ashworth 2019, Murphy *et al.* 2020a, Taylor *et al.* 2021, Eckersley and Lakoma 2022, Lakoma 2024). This section provides an overview of the available literatures on fire and rescue services' governance and

accountability. It also draws on local government and public services literature, where relevant, to provide context and background for this study.

3.3.1. Governance

Governance of fire services in the UK has received only limited academic attention. However, governing boards as a mechanism for overseeing organisational strategy have been widely prevalent in the UK and internationally across public, private, and third sectors (Schillemans and Bovens 2019). In the public sector, the role of governing bodies has largely been to support and advise on the leadership and strategic direction of institutions, rather than their day-to-day control and operations.

There is a rich, maturing discourse and literature featuring governing boards in the wider UK public sector, including health boards (Peck 1995, Exworthy and Robinson 2001, Addicott 2008, Grubnic and Cooper 2019), police authorities and their replacement with PCCs (Lister and Rowe 2015, Davies and Johnson 2016, Cooper 2020), and school governing bodies (Farrell 2005, Farrell *et al.* 2017). In some cases, scholars found governing boards to be making only marginal contributions to the authorities' strategy planning and decision-making (Peck 1995, Farrell 2005), and in some others, they were even found to be largely redundant (Addicott 2008).

In contrast, PCCs, who have been solely responsible for governing local police forces in England and Wales since 2012, have been seen as powerful governing individuals (Eckersley and Lakoma 2022), which in turn made police services reluctant to challenge them (Raine and Keasey 2012, Cooper 2020). The PCC model of governance has been distinguished from other public governing boards in England as being headed by a directly-elected individual (the only other examples are directly-elected mayors). In the UK, the example of directly-elected individuals as political leaders has been gaining traction, as directly-elected mayors in local government were introduced as a choice in England and Wales under the Local Government Act 2000 (Fenwick and Johnston 2020, Elcock 2008). However, most English councils remained under the traditional leader and cabinet model. Nonetheless, the single-person governance model was implemented to try to improve democratic accountability to citizens (Fenwick *et al*. 2006, Lister and Rowe 2015, Murphy *et al*. 2017).

After decades of working to one model of governance, Fire and Rescue Services across the UK have now developed a variety of governance arrangements, partly as a result of

devolution. In the devolved administrations, Northern Ireland and Scotland have opted for national services with an appointed board at the national level, whereas Wales has retained the more traditional local combined FRA model. In England, the long-standing 'stakeholder' model of a local FRA made up of local councillors accountable to local communities has predominated as the governing body for the vast majority of Fire and Rescue Services, although occasional separate bespoke arrangements have emerged (Farrell 2018). In England and Wales, FRAs operate as a traditional local board-style authority and are made up of local councillors overseeing the policy and service delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service (Farrell 2018). The long-standing model of the local FRA has been adopted in county authorities, combined authorities, and metropolitan authorities, although separate bespoke arrangements have emerged in London, Manchester, and West Yorkshire (mayor-led systems[1]). At the time of the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there were 45 FRAs in England:

- 6 metropolitan FRAs (including Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire),
- 23 combined FRAs,
- 15 county council FRAs,
- London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

The local authority model of governance operated in most police services until its replacement with elected PCCs following the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. The PCC governance model, to an extent, reflects the equivalent American sheriff governance model (Sampson 2012, Baldi and LaFrance 2013). With the exception of bespoke arrangements for the City of London and metropolitan police areas, it replaced all police authorities in England and Wales in November 2012, ostensibly because of dissatisfaction with the performance of police authorities and their lack of engagement with the public (Raine and Keasey 2012).

The UK Home Secretary drew specifically on this experience of police governance reform to argue that similar changes were needed in Fire and Rescue Services (May 2016). These reforms came about in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which introduced the most significant changes to the governance of Fire and Rescue Services in England in decades, in response to perceived accountability deficiencies within the fire sector (NAO 2015, PAC

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[1] An elected Mayor is responsible for governance of the Fire and Rescue Service as result of the combined authority and devolution deals.

2016, May 2016, Murphy *et al.* 2020a). A more detailed account of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms is explained in Section 3.4.

3.3.2. Accountability

As in the case of governance, accountability in Fire and Rescue Services has received relatively little international academic attention, with only a few exceptions (Carvalho *et al.* 2006, Kloot 2009, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2013, Clarke 2018, Murphy *et al.* 2019c, Spencer *et al.* 2019, Taylor *et al.* 2021). Most studies on Fire and Rescue Services emphasise the importance of accountability for performance (Carvalho *et al.* 2006, Kloot 2009, Taylor *et al.* 2021). For example, Carvalho *et al.* (2006) and Kloot (2009) argued that a lack of performance management tools and measures might negatively impact on the demonstration of accountability to communities and government. Taylor *et al.* (2021) echoed these views by arguing that centrally imposed and independent performance management measures are stronger in providing accountability than primarily local tools. Although most of the fire and rescue literature has focused on accountability for performance, some studies have emphasised the importance of financial reporting in delivering financial accountability and public assurance (Spencer *et al.* 2019).

A minority of studies have examined accountability in fire services from other perspectives. For example, Clarke (2018) looked at risk from the account holders' point of view and found that fire services are primarily accountable to local communities as services users through FRAs and senior management. Clarke (2018) also recognised an important relationship between fire services and central government, which financially supports all English fire services. Each of these accountability relationships has different content, different information flows and different accountability structures. As Clarke (2018) acknowledges, changes in governance arrangements may affect the nature of accountability within fire and rescue services.

The empirical evidence presented thus far, however, pre-dates the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, when governance arrangements for English Fire and Rescue Services significantly changed. The next section will discuss the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

3.4. The Policing and Crime Act 2017

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced a number of major changes to how Fire and Rescue Services in England are governed and held accountable for their services. Most notably, it facilitated alternative governance models for Fire and Rescue Services. The legislation enabled PCCs – single, locally directly-elected politicians – to take on responsibility for the governance of their local FRA and become Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs). The 2017 Act has also established an external inspectorate – Her (subsequently His) Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and introduced a statutory duty for emergency services partners to collaborate (Murphy *et al.* 2020a, 2020b). In addition, in May and June 2017, the Manchester Arena Terrorist attack and the Grenfell Tower Fire both highlighted deficiencies within the fire sector and led to major public inquiries that strongly criticised the collaboration between the emergency services in their response (Kerslake 2018, Saunders 2021, 2022, 2023, Moore-Blick 2019, Prosser and Taylor 2020). This section will discuss the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 in detail.

3.4.1. Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners

Chapter 2 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 allowed PCCs to become actively involved in Fire and Rescue Services' governance arrangements. It introduced four potential alternative governance options, in which a PCC can take on responsibilities for the governance of their local FRA and potentially become a PFCC. They apply to county authority, combined authority and metropolitan authority Fire and Rescue Services in England. There are separate arrangements for London (Chapter 3 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 established the London Fire Commissioner[2]), Manchester, and West Yorkshire (combined authority mayors). In ascending order of the scale of change that the various governance options involve, they were:

- The minimum *status quo* option, which results in no structural change, but nonetheless requires Police and Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate more closely.

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[2] As result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority has been abolished and replaced with the London Fire Commissioner as the FRA for London (LFB 2024).

- The *representation* model, in which the PCC is represented on the FRA and has voting rights, becoming one member among many. This is formally initiated by the PCC and is subject to FRA members' agreement.

- The *governance* model, in which the PCC takes over governance of their local FRA and becomes a PFCC, although the Police and Fire and Rescue Services remain as two separate organisations with separate budgets. It is the governance, not the employment responsibility for Police and Fire and Rescue Services that is merged.

- The *single employer* model, in which a PCC takes over the role of the FRA and becomes a PFCC, and a single chief officer and employer for both police and fire personnel, although the operational arms are still separate.

PCCs can only introduce the *governance* or the *single employer* models where a 'local case has been made' (i.e., a business case has been submitted and approved by the Home Secretary). This business case has to demonstrate that the proposed governance change will bring benefits in terms of economy, efficiency, and safety of the public. The business case must also include the results of consultations with councils, the local public, and other stakeholders. Where local agreement on governance change does not exist, the Home Secretary must obtain an independent assessment of the proposal.

All Fire and Rescue Services and FRAs in England were to a greater or lesser extent affected by these changes. By May 2024, five English fire services (Essex, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, North Yorkshire and Cumbria) had transferred to the PFCC *governance* model (at that time no service had opted for the *single employer* arrangement) resulting in the current patchwork of governance models throughout England (Eckersley and Lakoma 2022, Lakoma 2024). All services that transferred to the *governance* model have involved either county FRAs or combined FRAs. In two areas (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and West Mercia) the initial approvals by the Home Secretary were, however, postponed after opponents sought judicial reviews and the proposals were subsequently withdrawn. All submitted business cases met with a certain level of resistance from local public and stakeholders (Eckersley and Lakoma 2022). PCCs in several other areas had investigated the possibility of governance transfer but eventually did not proceed with any proposals. Overall, Fire and Rescue Services and their stakeholders were largely opposed to the government's proposals to merge governance of both services. Nonetheless, potential proposals to submit business cases to move to the *governance* model or the *single*

employer model were clearly encouraged by the government (Home Office 2017). At the time of writing (May 2024), the government has reviewed the proposals included in the White Paper on Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service (Home Office 2022, 2023). They envisaged extending the role of PCCs and PFCCs, with the possibility of strengthening accountability of Fire and Rescue Services. The proposals included a mandatory transfer of local Fire and Rescue Services' governance to PFCCs, or directly-elected mayors, or county council leaders across England (Home Office 2022). The government, however, decided to not take forward the proposals of the mandatory transfer of FRA functions to single-elected individuals, including PCCs (Home Office 2023). Where the police and Fire and Rescue Services areas are co-terminus, the government will nonetheless encourage and support PCCs and mayors to take over the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Services (Home Office 2023).

In 2023, there were 44 local FRAs in England, including 13 County and Unitary FRAs, 20 Combined FRAs, 4 Metropolitan FRAs, 2 Combined Authority Mayor models, 1 London Fire Commissioner and 5 PFCC governance models (Table 7).

Table 7: Types of governance arrangements in English Fire and Rescue Services in 2023
Source: Adapted from Home Office (2022)

FRA type	No of FRAs
County FRA (including Unitary FRAs)	12
Combined FRA	20
Metropolitan FRA	4
Combined Authority Mayor	2
London Fire Commissioner	1
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner	5

3.4.2.   His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Another key aspect introduced in Chapter 4 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has been the establishment of a new external scrutiny arrangement for Fire and Rescue Services. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, originally established in 1856 as an inspectorate for police services (Cowley *et al.* 2007, Davis and Martin 2008), was re-designated as HMICFRS in 2018, to assess and report on the effectiveness and leadership of both police and fire services.

Historically, Fire and Rescue Services had been inspected by His/Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) from 1947. Since HMFSI's formation, the inspectorate monitored the technical standards and operational performance of Fire and Rescue Services by providing

advice on standards and compliance. The inspectorate, however, did not hold Fire and Rescue Services to account. Its role was primarily to provide the sector with advice on compliance with fire standards. Fire and Rescue Services were inspected by HMFSI until 2007, after which, this organisation closed and by this time responsibility for inspections had already passed on to the Audit Commission, as performance (both financial and operational) rather than standards-based inspections were required. Between 2004 and 2010, the Audit Commission carried out corporate and service inspections until it was abolished between 2010-2015 (Audit Commission 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009). However, the Audit Commission did not undertake any inspections after 2010, as the Commission was gradually wound down, before being formally closed in 2015 (Tonkiss and Skelcher 2015). Instead, Fire and Rescue Services moved on to be subject to a new "sector-led improvement" regime, which replaced the inspection regime and the Audit Commission (see Downe *et al.* 2018, Ferry and Murphy 2018). After 2010, therefore, they were not inspected by an external inspection body, until the Policing and Crime Act 2017 amended the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 by creating HMICFRS.

HMICFRS introduced external service inspections modelled on police's PEEL methodology (police effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy). Fire and Rescue Services' inspections include three main 'pillars' (effectiveness, efficiency, and people) that comprise questions about core areas of Fire and Rescue Services' work. It is important to note that inspections do not include an assessment of governance nor accountability structures nor the use of resources (Murphy *et al.* 2020a). The inspectorate assesses each service based on inspection visits, with the analysis and inspectors' professional judgment synthesised into the following grades: outstanding, good, adequate, requires improvement, or inadequate (HMICFRS 2024). Inspections involve interviews and focus groups with staff, document reviews, and collecting relevant data. The inspectorate publishes individual results on their websites and produces national 'State of Fire Reports', which brings together common areas for all inspected services (HMICFRS 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a). HMICFRS has also the power to undertake 'thematic inspections' on a specific activity (e.g., Fire and Rescue Services' response to COVID-19 (HMICFRS 2021c) or values and culture in the service (HMICFRS 2023b)).

HMICFRS formally reports annually to the Home Office, as the department in charge of Fire and Rescue Services in England, and the Home Office also sets its budget. This demonstrates that the inspectorate is largely dependent on a single government's

department, which some view as an area of concern (e.g., Murphy 2017, Murphy and Glennon 2018, Murphy *et al.* 2020a).

3.4.3. Collaboration

As result of the Chapter 1 in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services, police, and ambulance services have also been legally required to collaborate, if it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness. This legal duty generated an expectation for emergency services to explore possible collaboration opportunities.

Fire and Rescue Services were previously involved in external collaboration with other emergency services, key stakeholders, and other partners. Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, they were designated as services that were required to continuously improve (Best Value - Local Government Act 1999), prevent and respond to emergencies (Civil Contingencies Act 2004), and implement strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder in their local areas (Crime and Disorder Act 1998), along with other national and local organisations (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). Prior to 2017, however, there was no statutory legal duty imposed on Fire and Rescue Services to work collaboratively with other emergency services (except in response to local incidents and major emergencies), although they had generally done so in practice for decades (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). The 2017 legislation formalised the duty to collaborate and attempted to extend it into other areas, although, to-date, this has largely been seen in central support services such as estates, finance, human resource management, and IT.

In summary, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has introduced significant changes into governance and accountability arrangements in the fire and rescue sector, including an alternative governance model for Fire and Rescue Services, the establishment of an external inspectorate and a legal duty on collaboration across emergency services partners.

3.5.   Other governance changes since 2017

In addition to the changes brought about by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, a number of other governance changes were introduced in the fire sector at the same period (Murphy *et al.* 2020a). The most important ones included transformation of the Chief Fire Association (CFOA) into the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) and the establishment of professional standards body – the Fire Standards Board.

The CFOA evolved into the NFCC with an obligation to drive improvement and development throughout the fire sector, while supporting strong leadership. Chief Fire Officers (CFOs), along with senior management from each service in the UK, were previously members of the CFOA. The NFCC has, however, continued to be the professional voice of senior management in the UK Fire and Rescue Service. This reflects similar changes from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC).

Another major change for the sector has been an establishment of the Fire Standards Board in May 2018. Fire and rescue stakeholders (including the NFCC) had pushed for this reform to address the inadequate quality and consistency of professional standards in the sector (Murphy *et al.* 2019c, Wankhade and Murphy 2023). The Fire Standards Board is therefore an advocacy body, and its role includes setting priorities for the development and approval of professional standards for the fire sector. The standards are applicable to all Fire and Rescue Services in England. The Board's membership includes independent members as well as a Home Office representative, a NFCC representative, an LGA representative and a PFCC representative (Fire Standards Board 2024).

Although these changes were not included in the provisions enshrined in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, they had been previously suggested by key stakeholders and the government to improve accountability arrangements in the fire and rescue sector. This means that they ultimately have had an impact on the fire and rescue organisational landscape, along with other changes brought in by the 2017 legislation.

3.6. Implications for accountability

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms, along with the parallel governance changes in the fire and rescue organisational landscape (including the transformation of CFOA into the NFCC and the establishment of the Fire Standard Board), have affected and therefore potentially changed the nature of accountability relationships since 2017.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 suggest how the UK government envisaged the governance and accountability regime in the fire sector to look like as result of the 2017 reforms (May 2016, Lewis 2017). Figure 5 presents the intended effect of governance changes on accountability types and directions before and after the 2017 reforms and parallel related governance changes, using the conceptual framework (see section 2.4.). Figures 6 and 7 illustrate these

changes in the form of diagrams of FRA-governed and PFCC-governed Fire and Rescue Services. The changes form the basis of the empirical inquiry reported in chapters 5-8.

Accountability to whom?	Accountability for what?			
	Bureaucratic	Political	Legal	Professional
Vertical	Scrutiny from a traditional 'board' style FRA.	Public indirectly elect councillors on FRA.	Legal obligations (primary and secondary legislation).	
Horizontal			Partial collaboration in civil emergencies.	Sector-led improvement, including peer-challenges.
Diagonal				Professional advice from CFOA.

Governance reforms since 2017

Accountability to whom?	Accountability for what?			
	Bureaucratic	Political	Legal	Professional
Vertical	Enhanced scrutiny from a traditional 'board' style FRA / Enhanced scrutiny from a PFCC.	Public indirectly elect councillors on FRA / Public directly elect a PFCC	Legal obligations (primary and secondary legislation).	
Horizontal	Collaboration with other emergency services, if in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness.		Legal duty of collaboration with other emergency services.	
Diagonal	Inspection reports from HMICFRS; NFCC influencing leadership in the sector.			Professional advice from HMICFRS, NFCC and Fire Standards Board.

Figure 5: Accountability changes as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 in Fire and Rescue Services as envisaged by the UK government

Source: Author's interpretation

The UK government envisaged the governance and accountability regime in the fire sector to gradually change from the FRA governance model towards the PFCC governance model (May 2016). It also intended to move away from the sector-led improvement initiatives by introducing HMICFRS as an external inspectorate, as well as imposing a formal legal duty on Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with other emergency services. Additionally, it transformed CFOA into NFCC, and established a new professional standards body for the fire sector. These changes were intended to have a profound effect on improving accountability in Fire and Rescue Services.
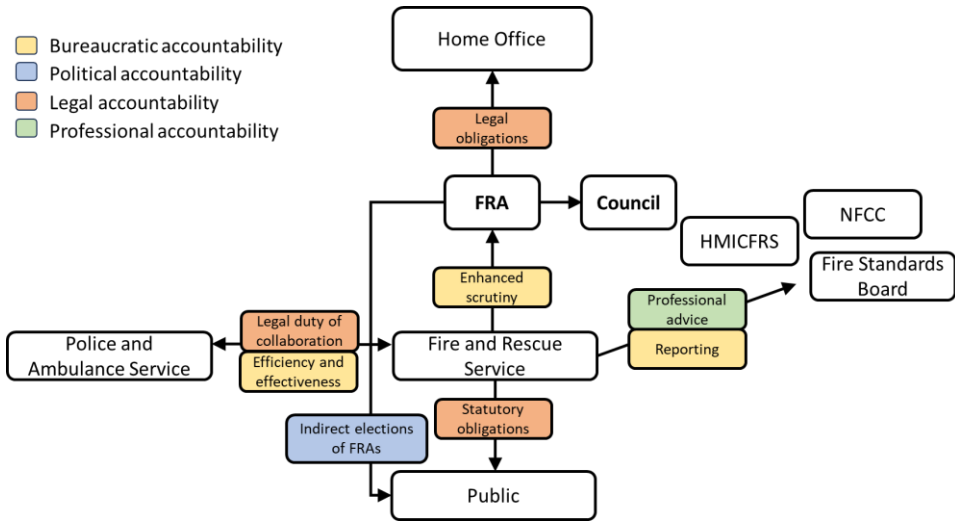
Figure 6: The government's intended changes in accountability of FRA-governed Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation
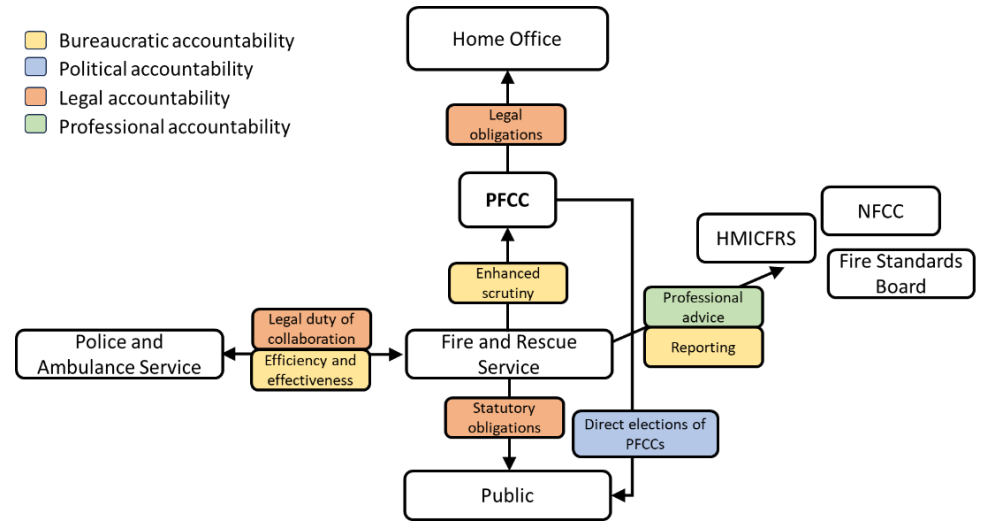
Figure 7: The government's intended changes in accountability of PFCC-governed Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

First, the introduction of the PFCC model of governance was portrayed by the government as a way of making Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to the public (May 2016). By giving the public an opportunity to directly elect an individual in charge of their local Fire and Rescue Service, the government intended to move away from the traditional stakeholder 'board' style FRA to the more democratic PFCC model. This is because the FRA governance model did not allow the public to directly elect local councillors in charge of Fire and Rescue Services and hold the FRA and/or the service directly to account. Instead, the FRA governance model primarily focused on the indirect political accountability, as local councillors sitting on FRAs were indirectly elected by the public. The FRA governance model is therefore more aligned with *bureaucratic* rather than *political* accountability. This is because it operates in a 'committee' style when vertically scrutinising Fire and Rescue Services, whereas the PFCC model of governance enables the public to directly and vertically scrutinise the service, through their local PFCC. In addition, the PFCC's decisions are scrutinised by Police, Fire and Crime Panel - a body made up of local councillors and independent members. The government's intention was to establish PFCCs in as many services as possible as a result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (Lewis 2017). The 2017 legislation also enabled local PCCs to be represented on local FRAs to strengthen the traditional FRA governance model (enhanced FRA governance model) to bureaucratically scrutinise the service's performance.

Second, the establishment of HMICFRS aimed to have a bureaucratic impact on the accountability of Fire and Rescue Services. The inspectorate assesses services based on the certain set of criteria, and makes them more accountable to government, the public and other stakeholders through its reports. The inspectorate plays a diagonal accountability role in the fire and rescue sector, as it cannot directly enforce compliance on services, but it directs or advises them (as well as the government) in the way they should be developing. Similarly, the establishment of the Fire Standards Board has affected the sector indirectly, as it introduced professional standards for all Fire and Rescue Services in the UK. Both HMICFRS and the Fire Standards Board are an attempt to improve on the sector-led improvement approach, which included so-called peer challenges. Peer challenges involved services carrying out assessments of neighbouring services in a less rigorous and formal way than under an external inspection regime (LGA 2011, Downe *et al.* 2013, 2018, Murphy and Ferry 2018). The role of 'peer' services was to provide challenge and share learning with the 'inspected' service. This resembles a horizontal type of professional accountability,

focused on learning, improving, and increasing professional standards in a less formal setting than a typical inspection regime (Davis and Martin 2008).

Third, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has also introduced a legal duty on Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with other emergency services, if it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness or the interest of other services. This corresponds to horizontal legal accountability, where services might face consequences for not following the legislation, but where fire services share this duty (and accountability) with other emergency services partners (known as mutual and several responsibility). These provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 also represent a horizontal bureaucratic accountability, in that they included formal written collaboration agreements between the emergency services. Before the introduction of the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services were not legally obliged to collaborate with partners, other than in the case of large-scale civil emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This means that they were theoretically not accountable for collaboration, even though they had worked and engaged with other emergency services and other partners for many years (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018). Nonetheless, before and following the introduction of the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services had various legal obligations from central and local government as result of the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000, the Fire and Rescue Act 2004, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Finally, although the transformation of the CFOA (a body focused on senior management leadership and advocacy for Fire and Rescue Services) into the NFCC and the establishment of the Fire Standards Board were not a direct result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, they occurred around the same time, involved the same key stakeholders, and have had an impact on both professional and bureaucratic accountability in the fire sector. Prior to 2017, Fire and Rescue Services operated in a "data poor" environment, which consequently led to poor evidence-base decision-making (Murphy *et al.* 2020a, p. 61). This inadequacy has been acknowledged by the government (May 2016, Lewis 2017), and as a result, the operational landscape for Fire and Rescue Services has been extended by the creation of a number of professional standards bodies. The establishment of the NFCC has extended CFOA's role by an additional obligation to drive improvement and development in the leadership of the fire sector. The NFCC does not directly enforce compliance on services, but it directs them in the way they should be developing bureaucratically and professionally. Similarly, the establishment of the Fire Standards Board has affected the

sector indirectly. It cannot directly hold the services to account for disregarding the professional standards that it establishes. However, it strongly recommends all services to implement and follow the professional standards, and HMICFRS have regard to the professional standards when undertaking inspections. This amounts to a form of diagonal accountability, which means that Fire and Rescue Services might be held to account as result of the establishment of both the NFCC and the Fire Standards Board when being scrutinised by other stakeholders (e.g., the government, HMICFRS or the public).

3.7. Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed governance and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services in England and has set the context for the empirical analysis that is reported in chapters 5 to 8. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has introduced major changes to how Fire and Rescue Services in England are governed, and have had a major impact on the accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services (Murphy *et al.* 2020b). Since English Fire and Rescue Services previously had no directly-elected element, the PFCC model of governance, when and where implemented, changes the nature of accountability relationships with local authorities, central government, other emergency services, and the public. The establishment of the inspectorate, as well as the legal duty to collaborate, also means that the governance arrangements and accountability relationships in English Fire and Rescue Services have become increasingly complicated (Prosser 2019).

By introducing the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the government's intentions were to enhance and focus on different types and directions of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services. In particular, the government intended to improve political accountability of Fire and Rescue Services by establishing directly-elected PFCCs and strengthening bureaucratic accountability in the form of an external inspectorate.

This thesis empirically researches accountability understandings of senior management and front-line staff in Fire and Rescue Services before and after the introduction of the governance arrangements brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. In part, this helps to identify whether the government's vision of enhanced accountability within the fire sector equates with the Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability after the implementation of the Act. Examining these changes enables us to improve our knowledge about the social construction of governance models and the accountabilities

that individuals and organisations both create and are constrained by. The next chapter discusses the methodology, methods, and ethics used in this study to answer the research question, before outlining the findings in the following chapters.

Chapter 4.   Methodology, methods, and ethics

4.1.   Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodological considerations that underpin this thesis. It outlines the philosophical positioning of this project and discusses how it determined the selection of methodology and methods used to collect the data and information for this research. It discusses key debates on research methods to provide a theoretical justification for the chosen methodology.

The chapter is developed from Crotty's (1998) model of research. First, it discusses the general philosophical positioning of the research, including the ontology and epistemology of this study. Then it moves on to explain the research design and methodology, which are both informed by the philosophical positioning. Following the methodology, the chapter discusses the methods employed in this study and the data analysis process. Finally, it also outlines ethical considerations throughout all stages of the thesis.
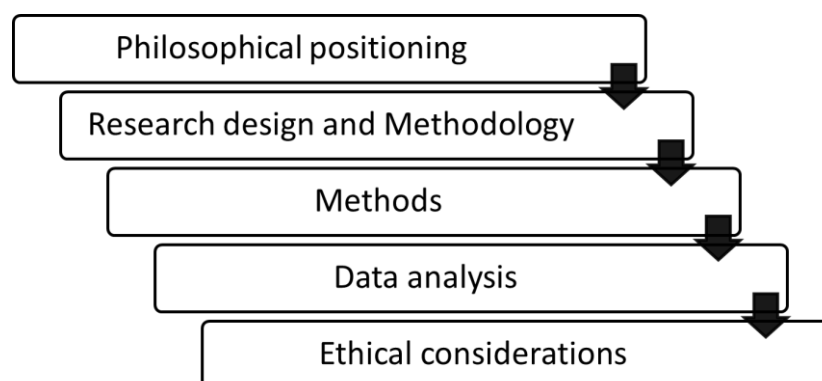
Figure 8: Model of research adapted from Crotty

Source: Crotty (1998, p. 2)

4.2.   Philosophical positioning

This section discusses key debates within research philosophy in order to locate this study's philosophical positioning, whilst discussing other alternative philosophical considerations. It focuses on ontological and epistemological considerations that inform the methodology of research.

Ontology explains the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2021). There are two main ontological positions in research: objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders *et al.* 2012).

Objectivism asserts that there is a single truth about the nature of reality. This means that the world exists as external reality to social actors and needs to be discovered. The contrasting view, known as subjectivism, explains that there are multiple truths about the nature of reality. This means that social phenomena are created through perceptions and the actions of actors.

Epistemology is the inquiry into the conditions (for example, principles, procedures, and ethos) of the possibility of knowledge (Hughes and Sharrock 2016). In other words, epistemology explains how we know what we know. As with ontology, there are two contrasting views of how research should be carried out: positivism and social constructionism (Table 8).

Table 8: Contrasting epistemologies in research - positivism and social constructionism

Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2021), Saunders *et al.* (2012), Hughes and Sharrock (2016)

	Positivism	Social Constructionism
Reality	Single reality	Multiple realities
Social world	External	Created by individuals
Researcher's role	Independent from the study	Part of the study
Goal	Explaining	Understanding
Concepts	Defined and measured	Individuals' perspectives
Research logic	Deductive	Inductive
Generalisation	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction

The conditions that support the importance of natural sciences is an epistemological stance known as *positivism* (Hughes and Sharrock 2016). *Positivism* stresses that the social world exists externally, which is in line with objectivism, and it therefore can be discovered using objective measures. Positivists reject subjective methods of research, including sensation or reflections, because they rely on measuring the reality through a certain method which cannot be easily replicated. They believe that knowledge is objective and they, as researchers, remain independent from the research. Positivists are interested in causal relationships between variables, often through experiments and surveys. Nonetheless, *positivism* has been widely criticised as it tends to produce different results to the original positivist research (Tsang and Kwan 1999). Some argue (e.g., Joullié and Gould 2023) that positivist research needs to be more transparent so it can be replicated. Nonetheless,

positivism has been found to be the most extensively used epistemology in business research studies (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991).

Some believe (e.g., Robson 1993) that positivist assumptions are often unsuitable in social sciences research. The contrasting epistemological stance to *positivism*, known as *social constructionism*, asserts that knowledge is a social construct and is uncovered by people rather than by external and objective measures[3]. Social constructionists are therefore interested in the meanings of individuals' experiences through feelings and communication. Social constructionists are part of the research and aim to understand the situation through observation of interactions between individuals (Crotty 1998). Everyone has their own opinions, however, it might be difficult to compare them with those of other individuals (Bazeley 2004).

Within the two contrasting epistemologies, positivist and social constructionist, there are other philosophical stances, including one of the most common social sciences research paradigms – *realism*. *Realism* assumes that there is a single external reality, in which objects interact with each other through certain mechanisms (Sobh and Perry 2006). However, unlike positivists, realists are searching for a common reality and do not believe that one negative result might reject their theory. Instead, they are interested in understanding deeper reality through real life experiences and interactions with humans. In *realism*, the reality has been experienced before through prior research, which suggests that the researcher ought to familiarise themselves with prior literature on specific phenomenon before commencing their data collection. In contrast to social constructionists, who consider multiple realities, realists believe that there is one external reality, however, various perceptions of that reality need to be triangulated to obtain a clearer picture of it (Perry *et al.* 1999). Critical realism is a specific type of realism, which asserts that reality can be understood through critical investigation (Bhaskar 2010).

Ontological and epistemological beliefs are ultimately shaped by the researcher's position and the discipline of the study (Creswell 2009). They also inform the ultimate decisions on the choice of methodology and methods. It is important to note that coherence between these elements is essential and that the researcher's decisions are sufficiently justified

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[3] Social Constructionism is different from Social Constructivism. Social constructivism is a learning theory focused on perceptions and experiences of individuals (Taylor 2021).

(Marsh *et al.* 2017). No single philosophical stance is superior to any other, as the choice of research philosophy needs to be appropriate to the research problem being studied.

This study has adopted a *realist* approach to understanding the external reality and its complexities. Given the various perspectives on accountability available within the literature, it was concerned with understanding the concept of accountability from the individuals' viewpoints (Bevir 2009). This is because individuals create and are constrained by accountability arrangements (Overman and Schillemans 2022). The study explored the implications of governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on understandings of accountability. This project triangulated the individuals' perceptions of accountability to understand how and why understandings of accountability may change as result of governance reforms.

4.3. Research question and research objectives

The overarching research question for this study was:

How and why might governance changes affect understandings of accountability in public services?

This research question was broken down into six research objectives:

Research Objective 1: To examine the background and context of the governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. (Chapter 3 – Background and context)

Research Objective 2: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability. (Chapter 5 - Bureaucratic accountability)

Research Objective 3: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability. (Chapter 6 - Political accountability)

Research Objective 4: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability. (Chapter 7 - Legal accountability)

Research Objective 5: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability. (Chapter 8 - Professional accountability)

Research Objective 6: To examine how and why governance reforms affect accountability dynamics within public services. (Chapter 9 – Discussion)

The main research question and five of the six research objectives were concerned with exploring the phenomenon of accountability within its context. Only Research Objective 1 was more of a descriptive nature as it explained the background for this study. Overall, the study aimed at understanding the deeper reality of accountability through real life experiences in the Fire and Rescue Services context.

4.4. Research design

Research design organises research activity in ways that are expected to answer the research question (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2021, Saunders *et al.* 2012). It also informs the data collection and the data analysis stages of research.

4.4.1. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies

Research design encompasses several methodological elements. First, it is essential to determine whether the project is of a *quantitative, a qualitative, or a mixed methods* nature. *Quantitative* studies use numerical data, whereas *qualitative* studies use any non-numerical data (Saunders *et al.* 2012). *Quantitative* studies are often associated with the positivist tradition and rely on objective and external measures, including questionnaires or surveys, followed by statistical techniques for data analysis (Gray 2021). Quantitative studies enable comparability of findings through replication. On the other hand, *qualitative* studies are linked to the social constructionist stance and use techniques that help to understand the meanings of individuals' experiences, including interviews, focus groups, and other techniques that gather non-numerical data (Gray 2021). In reality, many projects draw from both positivist and constructivists traditions, and use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques in a single study. This is known as *mixed-methods* research, which aims to increase validity and generalizability of results (Creswell and Clark 2011, Tashakkori and Teddlie 2021).

4.4.2. Research approach

Quantitative studies tend to be associated with *deductive* research, with the aim of testing already existing theory, whereas qualitative studies tend to rely on an *inductive* research approach that helps construct generalisations and develop a theory (Saunders *et al.* 2012, Gray 2021). In practice, many qualitative projects, but also quantitative studies, use an *abductive* approach, which combines both *deductive* and *inductive* approaches.

The nature of research design depends on the research question. When a research project is looking to answer open questions and gain insights about a certain subject, the nature of the project is *exploratory* (Saunders *et al.* 2012). As with exploratory research, *descriptive research* focuses on gaining understanding of a certain topic, however, it relies on studying the phenomenon before collecting the data. On the other hand, if a research project is looking to explain the causes of a well-defined situation or a problem, the nature of such a project is *explanatory*.

This study was of a *qualitative* nature as its aim was to understand accountability from the Fire and Rescue Services' operational viewpoints. As discussed in Chapter 2, accountability is a complex phenomenon that is not always clearly defined in public administration literature. Empirical studies of accountability primarily rely on qualitative research designs (Yang 2014). Quantitative empirical studies into accountability are limited because of complex measurements of accountability (Brandsma 2014). Accountability cannot be easily condensed into statistical datasets, which means that quantitative methods would not be able to adequately address the research question in this study.

Additionally, the principal aim of this thesis was not to quantitively measure whether accountability increased or decreased as result of government reforms, instead its objective was to understand *how* and *why* accountability understandings might change in public services as result of governance reforms. This project was therefore an *exploratory* study as it looked into the holistic understanding of the phenomenon of accountability based on individuals' perceptions.

This study adopted an *abductive* approach as it combined both deductive and inductive elements of research approaches. In realism, research is undertaken using prior theory (Sobh and Perry 2006). First, this study began with a deductive approach as it utilised already established theoretical studies on accountability to better understand the concept prior to data collection. Miles *et al.* (2014) recommend a pre-structure design in qualitative

studies, which helps with some initial ideas before the fieldwork begins. This study adapted two academically established accountability frameworks from Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and Bovens (2007) and combined them into one preliminary conceptual framework, which was then applied in the context of changing governance arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services. The framework was then tested through data collection. Following the data collection and initial data analysis, the study subsequently shifted to an *inductive* approach as it investigated understudied phenomena in a new setting. It then focused on seeking patterns, drawing conclusions from the findings, and theory building.

4.4.3. Research strategy – comparative multiple case studies

Research design includes a certain research strategy. Research strategy is the link between the chosen research philosophy and subsequent research methods (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Research strategy is also informed by the overarching research question. Some research strategies are exclusively linked to qualitative methods (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, and narrative research), whereas others are principally associated with quantitative methods (e.g., experiments, surveys). However, there are some research strategies that can involve qualitative and quantitative methods in mixed-methods studies (e.g., case study).

This research adopted a case study design, as it explored the phenomenon of accountability within its changing context. A case study strategy is particularly relevant for projects that intend to gain a detailed understanding of the context of the research (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). In this case, in order to explore the governance changes in Fire and Rescue Services, a specific type of case study design was selected – *comparative multiple case studies* (Yin 2018) – to show different perspectives on the issue.

When a study includes more than one case, it is used to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the cases (Baxter and Jack 2008). Even though qualitative research tends to be criticised for not being generalisable, multiple case studies attempt to overcome this issue by replicating the procedures for each case (Yin 2018). Evidence from multiple case studies tends to be more compelling than evidence from a single case study because multiple case studies are regarded as being more robust and reliable (Dyer and Wilkins 1991, Baxter and Jack 2008). They also allow analysis within the cases and across the cases (Yin 2018).

However, it is important to note that the researcher needs to carefully select representative cases for inclusion in this type of study (Creswell 2007). In this project, the focus was on Fire and Rescue Services in England. The units of analysis in this study were therefore individual English Fire and Rescue Services as organisations. There are 44 local Fire and Rescue Services in England operating under a range of different governance models (Home Office 2022). The cases were purposively selected according to "predetermined criteria relevant to a particular research objective" (Guest *et al.* 2006, p. 61) with maximum variance on the governance models that exist within English Fire and Rescue Services (Figure 9).
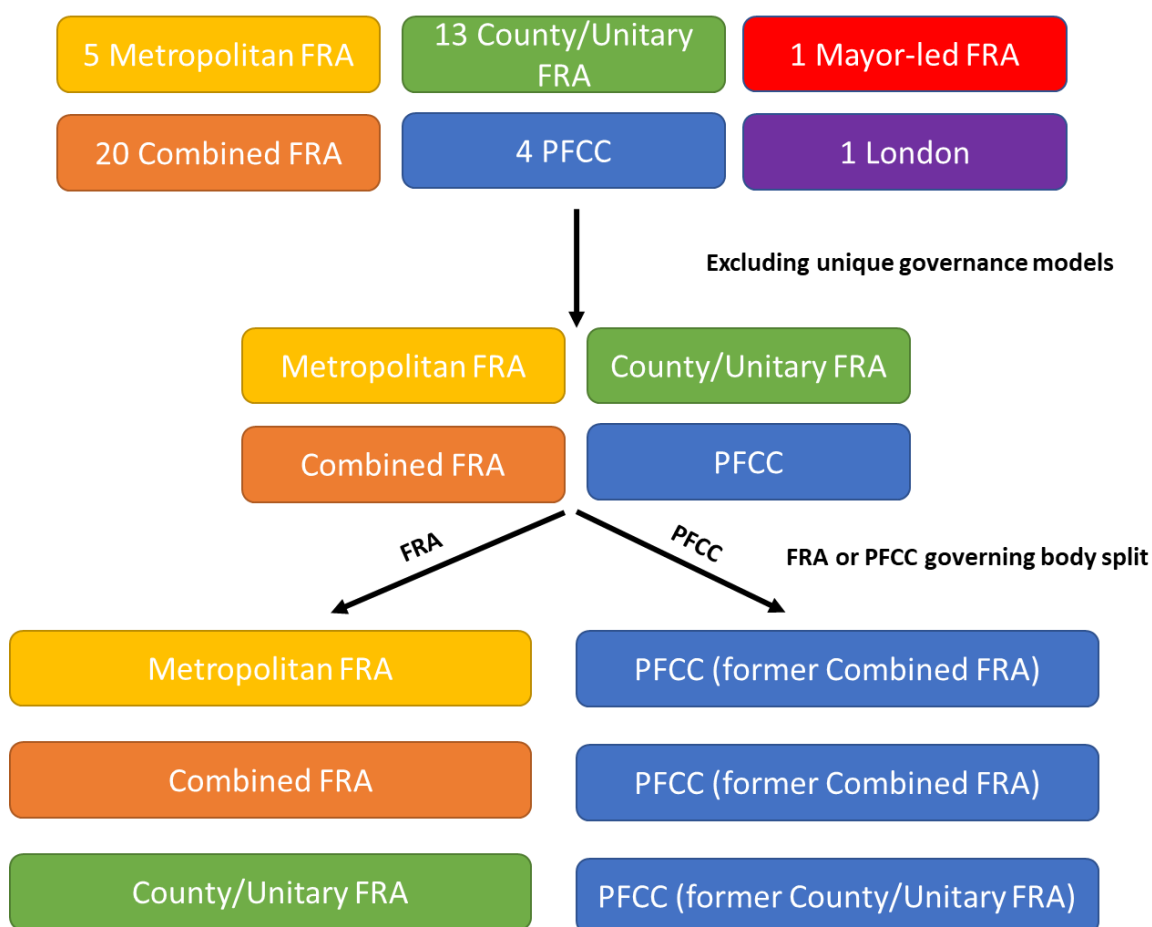
Figure 9: Sampling strategy at the time of data collection (as of March 2020)
Source: Author

The main criteria for case selection were as follows: first, replicable governance arrangements. English Fire and Rescue Services operate under a range of different governance models. According to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (Home Office 2018), Fire and Rescue Services can adopt the following governance models: metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA), combined FRA, county/unitary FRA, Police,

Fire and Commissioner (PFCC)-type FRA, London, and Mayor-led FRA (see Appendix 1 for the detailed breakdown of governance models and the geographical areas they operate within).

The study sample deliberately excluded London and Mayor-led FRAs due to their distinct and bespoke governance structures that cannot be replicated across other cases. London has a London Fire Commissioner overseeing Fire and Rescue Services, whereas a Mayor-led FRA (Greater Manchester) has a Mayor responsible for the overall governance, strategic and financial management of the Fire and Rescue Service. At the time of data collection, London and Greater Manchester had therefore unique governance models and were excluded from the sample in this study. The thesis examined four common governance models in Fire and Rescue Services in England: metropolitan FRA, combined FRA, county/unitary FRA, and PFCC-type FRA.

Second, the case selection targeted the presence of the PFCC-type governance model, which significantly differs from the other three governance models (metropolitan FRA, combined FRA, county/unitary FRA). The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has created a route, in which PCCs can submit a business case, and if approved, take over the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Services and become a 'PFCC-style' FRA (*PFCC governance model*). The PFCC is a directly-elected individual responsible for overseeing both the police and the Fire and Rescue Service. Since most English Fire and Rescue Services previously had no directly-elected element, this changes the nature of their accountability relationships with local authorities, central government, other emergency services, and the public. Studying them enables us to increase our knowledge about the governance models and the accountabilities that individuals both create and are constrained by.

In order to examine understandings of accountability from services governed by PFCCs, the study aimed to compare them with the understandings from the other FRA governance models, in which the FRA is a governing body made up of local councillors. This strategy encouraged the researcher to consider what was unique and what was common across the different models of governance.

Fire and Rescue Services that satisfied the PFCC governance model requirement for selection were then selected accordingly to the type of former FRA governance model. Before the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, all existing PFCC governance model services were governed by local FRAs. Within the three case studies examining the

PFCC governance model, 1 former county/unitary FRA, and 2 former combined FRAs were selected as the representative sample. The PFCC governance model sampling did not acknowledge a former metropolitan FRA as only 4 PFCC governance models (1 former county FRA, and 3 former combined FRAs) had been approved and had come into force at the time of data collection (2020-2021)[4]. On the other hand, within the 3 case studies with a FRA governance model, 1 county/unitary FRA, 1 combined FRA, and 1 metropolitan FRA were selected to maximally differentiate between the FRA governance model.

For the purpose of this thesis, services' names have been anonymised (Table 9). Case numbering does not correspond to the order in which the case studies were carried out.

Table 9: Case Studies sample

Source: Author

FRA governance model	PFCC governance model
Case study 1 (combined FRA)	Case study 4 (former county FRA)
Case study 2 (metropolitan FRA)	Case study 5 (former combined FRA)
Case study 3 (county FRA)	Case study 6 (former combined FRA)

Overall, six Fire and Rescue Services were studied in depth, as this study explored the differences between three cases of the PFCC model of governance, and three cases of services that continued to rely on the FRA model of governance. This strategy was chosen as the literature suggests that different governance structures might result in different understandings on accountability. According to Yin (2018), this type of sampling is known as *theoretical replication*, where the choice of cases is made to produce contrasting results for predictable reasons. This aim of this study was to compare Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, while focusing on the differences between accountability in the PFCC governance model services and in the FRA governance model services.

4.5. Methods

Given the various perspectives on accountability available, this study was concerned with understanding the concept from the individuals' viewpoints and revealing the complexity of accountability (Bevir 2009). It focused on collecting data from Fire and Rescue Services'

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[4] A 5th PFCC was established in Cumbria alongside local government restructuring in Cumbria in 2023 after the data collection phase.

personnel to understand how their roles and understandings of accountability had changed due to the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It did not involve other stakeholders such as the PFCCs, as they would not have known the situation before the 2017 legislation. As previously stated, a single Fire and Rescue Service was the unit of analysis in this study. Collecting data from individuals within Fire and Rescue Services aimed to help with theory-building, since it linked micro-level human interactions with how organisations function at a more macro level (Peters 2017).

This project was a qualitative study, though it relied on more than one qualitative data collection technique – publicly available documents, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups – to triangulate the data and obtain a more reliable portrayal of the phenomenon of accountability (Farquahar 2012). Data were collected in a two-phase process. The first phase included collection of secondary data via publicly available sources, whereas the second phase consisted of collecting data and information through primary sources of evidence.

4.5.1. Secondary data collection – publicly available documents

The first phase of data collection occurred between January 2020 and March 2020. Publicly available documents related to contextual information on governance and accountability arrangements were collected from the services' websites. These included governance frameworks, senior organisational charts, annual reports, and statements of assurance. The documents were collected to gain better insights into governance and accountability arrangements within each case, prior to primary data collection. This method enabled the researcher to identify organisation-specific contextual factors as well as common factors across the cases to better understand the context of each case study organisation.

4.5.2. Primary data collection – semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Primary data collection took place between March 2020 and June 2021 (Table 10), and it was carried out primarily online using Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business, after the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020. Only one focus group in Case Study 1 was conducted face-to-face. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded either via Dictaphone (when face-to-face) or via Microsoft Teams/Skype for Business (when online) and subsequently transcribed.

Case Study 1 acted as a pilot organisation to test the interview and focus group schedule. Minor changes to interview and focus group questions were made after the data collection finished in Case Study 1.

Table 10. Primary data collection timetable

Source: Author

	Interviews	Focus group
Case Study 1	20/04/2020 – 03/07/2020	06/03/2020
Case Study 2	09/02/2021 – 06/04/2021	13/04/2021
Case Study 3	17/03/2021 – 12/05/2021	02/06/2021
Case Study 4	28/09/2020 – 22/10/2020	20/11/2020
Case Study 5	07/01/2021 – 08/02/2021	12/01/2021, 13/01/2021, 22/01/2021[5]
Case Study 6	18/01/2021 – 10/03/2021	06/04/2021

The researcher invited individuals to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus groups via email and reached out to Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) in the selected services to ask for permission to collect the data. The participants in both semi-structured and focus groups were purposefully selected based on their roles within their organisations. However, the number of individuals that participated in this study was not confirmed until the collected data reached the point of saturation.

In qualitative research, data saturation is reached when collected data are sufficient and therefore further data collection is unnecessary (Saunders *et al.* 2018). The literature on qualitative methods is inconclusive in terms of the sample size required to obtain sufficient data (Guest *et al.* 2006, Barker and Edwards 2012). This study used an adaptive approach to qualitative research rather than a more complex approach of deciding on a number of interviews or focus groups *a priori* (Sim *et al.* 2018) to collect the data. This is because this study was of an exploratory nature and the sample size was dependent on the data collected. For example, Corbin and Strauss (2015) propose at least five one-hour interviews for theoretical saturation in studies using a grounded theory methodology.

In this study, 35 semi-structured interviews were held with senior Fire and Rescue Services' officers. The study envisaged a minimum of 5 senior officer interviews per case study,

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[5] In Case Study 5, three interviews with front-line operational staff were carried out instead of a focus group, at the request of the Chief Fire Officer.

including uniformed staff and a minimum one non-uniformed member of staff per case study to match the Corbin and Strauss' (2015) interview saturation sample per case study. The participants included CFOs, Deputy CFOs, Assistant CFOs, Area Managers, and professional non-uniformed managers (see Appendix 2 for more detail on the participants and their roles – their names have been anonymised). The study targeted both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel at senior management level to gain better understandings of perceptions of accountability from both operational and professional support perspectives. This reflects the typical proportion of uniform and non-uniform staff in Fire and Rescue Services. These individuals were chosen because they were experts (Pfadenhauer 2009) in accountability and governance in their services. On average, an interview lasted around 50 minutes.

Questions on the interview schedule explored the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on governance and accountability in Fire and Rescue Services (see Appendix 3). However, the interviews were semi-structured and therefore included other questions as the researcher picks up on certain issues referred to by participants (Rubin and Rubin 2005, Adams 2015). In addition, the researcher adapted the questions to the case studies' circumstances, and therefore interview questions in FRA-governed services differed from the questions asked in PFCC-governed services, as the FRA-governed services had not experienced having a PFCC overseeing their service. In this case, questions revolved around a potential change to a PFCC governance model and its implications for accountability. Nonetheless, semi-structured interviewing has potential disadvantages, for example Kvale (1996) argues that not following an identical interview schedule might actually distort or misrepresent the data.

In addition to interviews with senior management, five focus groups and three interviews were conducted with front-line operational staff of Fire and Rescue Services to understand perceptions of accountability at an operational level. The study used two different methods to collect primary sources of data because the researcher expected senior managers in interviews to have stronger grasp of accountability issues than front-line staff in focus groups, and therefore hoped that understandings of accountability would be teased out better in a focus group environment for the firefighters. The study envisaged one focus group per case study. Five, instead of six, focus groups were carried out because one CFO objected to a focus group, but subsequently agreed to three interviews with front-line operational staff as an alternative. Focus group size was between three to five individuals.

On average, a focus group lasted 70 minutes (see Appendix 4 for more detail – participants' names have been anonymised).

Table 11 illustrates the number of interviews and focus groups, and participants' roles within their organisations, for each case study.

Table 11: Interviews and focus groups within each case study

Source: Author

	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3	Case Study 4	Case Study 5	Case Study 6
Senior management (interviews)						
CFO	1	1	1	1	1	1
Deputy CFO	1	1	1	0	1	1
Assistant CFO	0	2	2	2	0	0
Area Manager	2	0	2	2	2	3
Non-uniformed (professional) staff	2	2	0	1	1	1
Total	**6**	**6**	**6**	**6**	**5**	**6**
Front-line staff (focus groups)						
Focus groups	1	1	1	1	0	1
Watch manager (interviews)	0	0	0	0	3	0

As with the interviews, questions on the focus group schedule (see Appendix 5) explored the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on governance and accountability in Fire and Rescue Services. Three interviews were conducted based on the same focus group schedule for Case Study 5. The questions on the focus group's schedule provided more contextual information than in the semi-structured interviews to enable participants to familiarise themselves with the implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. In this study, the researcher used open-ended questions in both interviews and focus groups to enable participants to respond in a more expansive manner. Focus groups were also conducted in a less structured format than the interviews. This allowed the participants to freely exchange their views on accountability and governance issues in a more familiar environment, as they were surrounded by their colleagues (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014). Focus groups are also less time consuming than traditional one-to-one interviews as the researcher spends less time and cost, than would be the case in a one-to-one interview. However, this method of data collection can also result in some participants dominating the discussion or making up the answers based on the responses from other participants

(Krueger 2014), and therefore the researcher sought to ensure that all participants were granted equal opportunities to contribute.

Both secondary and primary data sources have their advantages and disadvantages. This research uses multiple sources of evidence to respond to the potential limitations of these methods. All of the documentary sources were discoverable under freedom of information legislation at the time that the primary research was undertaken. The secondary data and information were all internally and externally audited, and similarly were in the public domain. Using multiple sources of evidence, and triangulating their results is highly recommended when conducting case study research, as it allows the researcher to present more convincing and accurate findings from the study (Yin 2018).

4.5.3. Data analysis

In this study, data analysis was concurrent with data collection in order to help the researcher with closing possible gaps during data collection (Miles *et al.* 2014). This enabled the researcher to cycle back and forth between analysing already collected data and thinking of strategies to collect new data. Digital recordings of interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim into text. Each interview and each focus group were saved as a separate Word file and all files were imported into NVIVO version 12. Similarly, publicly available documents were downloaded, saved, and imported into NVIVO. NVIVO stored the documents and assisted in the data analysis process (Jackson and Bazeley 2019).

The transcripts were read and analysed in the order in which data collection for case studies was undertaken, which means that they were grouped by an organisation. This enabled a within-case analysis in each organisation. Cases Studies 1, 2, and 3 (FRA governance model services) as well as Cases 4, 5, and 6 (PFCC governance model services) were then cross-analysed to determine similar understandings of accountability within the same governance models. Finally, a cross-analysis between Case Studies 1, 2, and 3 and Case Studies 4, 5, and 6 sought to find different understandings of accountability between FRA governance model services and PFCC governance model services.

Data analysis was largely informed by the chosen research philosophy – realism. Realists are interested in underlying structures and mechanism, and their data are primarily qualitative in nature (Sobh and Perry 2006). In contrast to social constructionism, realist research is not concerned with all the detailed perceptions of participants. Realists believe

that there is one external reality, however, various perceptions of that reality need to be triangulated to obtain a clearer picture of it (Perry *et al.* 1999). In this case, individual perceptions of accountability needed to be triangulated to obtain a clear picture of the holistic understanding of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services.

Realists are also interested in those perceptions that are relevant to the research question and suggest that coding should come from the conceptual framework (Perry *et al.* 1999). Similarly, Yin (2018) recommends using existing theories in case study research to organise data analysis. As previously stated, this study began with a deductive approach as it utilised theoretical studies on accountability (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Bovens 2007) to develop the conceptual framework. The framework was consequently tested through data collection in the pilot study (Case Study 1) and minor changes to the framework were applied.

This project used thematic analysis to identify certain patterns of meaning (themes) across the dataset (Braun and Clarke 2012). Themes are codes assigned to the data chunks. In this study, the first round of codes was established from the conceptual framework rather than the data. Realism research is concerned with relationships and connections (Sobh and Perry 2006), therefore these included the following codes emphasising the relational aspect of accountability: Bureaucratic accountability, Political Accountability, Legal Accountability, and Professional Accountability (see Appendix 6 for an example, Romzek and Dubnick 1987); and Vertical Accountability, Horizontal Accountability, and Diagonal Accountability (Bovens 2007). They were then allocated to chunks of text. Saunders *et al.* (2018) argue that there are four models of saturation in qualitative research: theoretical saturation, inductive thematic saturation, *a priori* thematic saturation, and data saturation. This study, employed the third model of saturation, known as '*a priori* thematic saturation', as it used pre-determined theoretical categories to exemplify the theory of accountability.

Second cycle coding moved towards more of an inductive approach as it sought relevant data that were not included in the conceptual framework but were relevant to the study and emerged from examining the transcripts. Most of them developed into sub-themes of the first round of codes. They were then reviewed when writing the empirical chapters (Chapters 5-8). Saturation in this case was determined when there were no new themes emerging (Strauss and Corbin 2015). The entire data analysis process was not linear, as it involved an interplay between the data and the coding process to refine the sub-themes.

Qualitative data analysis can be subjective, which means that it can corrupt the data analysis process. It is therefore essential to minimise the researcher's bias throughout the entire research process, from familiarising with the literature, through developing a conceptual framework, collecting the data, and analysing it. Establishing validity and reliability criteria helps to evaluate the quality of qualitative data. There are four key validity and reliability criteria in case study research (Table 12): *construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability* (Riege 2003, Yin 2018). Validity is generally concerned with reducing different forms of bias in research.

Table 12: Criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research

Source: Author and adapted from Eisenhardt (1989), Farquahar (2012), Yin (2018)

Criteria	How it has been used in this study
Construct validity	• Multiple case studies used, • Triangulation - a range of qualitative methods employed, • Several participants, including both senior management and front-line staff to gather multiple perceptions on accountability in the fire sector.
Internal validity	• Within-case and cross-case analysis, • Thematic coding, • Linking results to the literature that discusses similar findings.

External validity	• Theoretical replication. Six case studies were selected considering the different governance models within Fire and Rescue Services:
	    o 3 cases of a service under the FRA-governance model
	    o 3 cases of a service under the PFCC-governance model.

Reliability	• Universal conceptual framework, • Pilot study, • Use of a semi-structure interview and focus group schedule, • Development of the case studies database in NVIVO.

More specifically, *construct validity* is about establishing correct operational measures that reflect theoretical concepts in research (Yin 2018). This study used a number of techniques to increase *construct validity*, including using multiple case studies rather than just a single case study and triangulating sources of evidence to reduce potential bias.

Another type of validity, known as *internal validity*, is generally concerned with quantitative research as it explains causal relationships. However, it also applies to case study research as it establishes the phenomenon within its context in the study. *Internal validity* is primarily evidenced in the data analysis phase of research. In this study, *internal validity* was established through within-case and cross-case analysis, use of thematic analysis and linking the results to existing literature.

The third type of validity criteria, known as *external validity*, is concerned with generalisability of research findings to some broader theory. This study, as previously stated, used theoretical replication logic, that enabled comparisons between the two governance models within Fire and Rescue Services. This enables the FRA governance model's findings to be applied to other FRA governance model services, and the PFCC governance model's findings to be generalised to other PFCC-governed services. In addition, general understandings of how accountability perceptions can change as result of governance reforms may also be applied to other public services.

The last criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, *reliability*, refers to demonstrating that the procedures within the study (e.g., data collection) can be repeated by other researchers, which then achieve similar results and arrive at similar conclusions. The conceptual framework that this project is based upon is universal and can be adapted in other public services experiencing governance reforms. In terms of methodology, this study used consistent semi-structured elite interviews and focus groups scheduled throughout all six case studies (Appendices 3 and 5) to increase the reliability of this research. The project also included a pilot study that tested the quality of the interview and focus group schedule, and revised them accordingly to avoid potential bias when asking questions (Chenail 2011). In order to further increase reliability, the researcher developed a database of all interviews and focus groups transcripts in NVIVO to organise and document all the collected data.

4.6. Ethical considerations

This study was carried out within the guidelines of Nottingham Trent University's ethical procedures. The researcher submitted an application form, participant information sheet and consent form for review to the College Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 7). The ethical approval was subsequently granted on 6 December 2019. The structure of this section is based upon Fisher's (2010) ethical considerations (Figure 10).
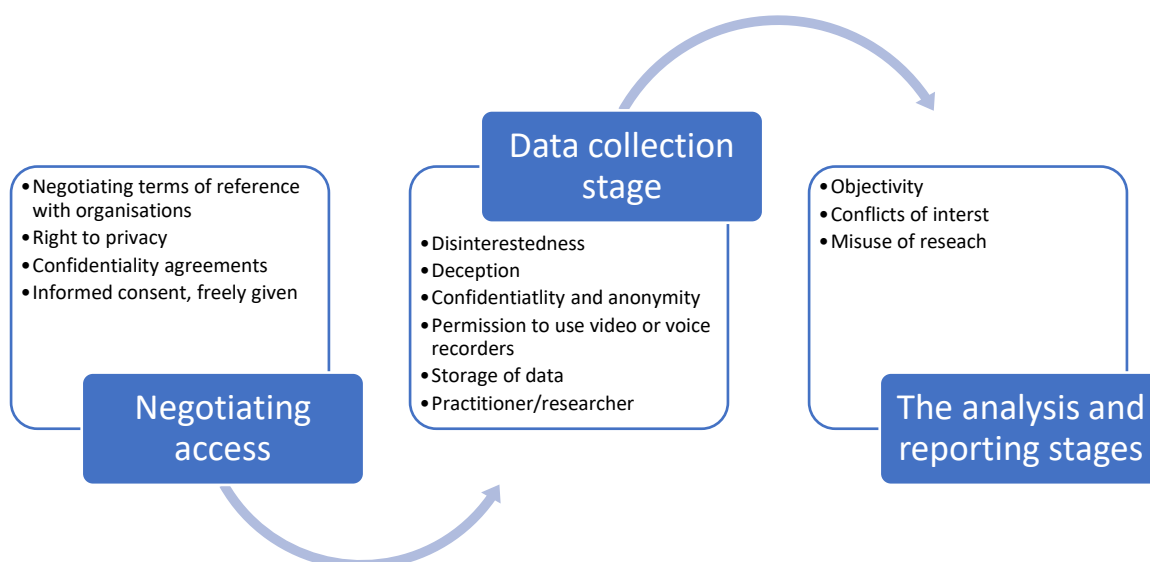
Figure 10: Ethical consideration

Source: Adapted from Fisher (2010)

4.6.1. Negotiating access

Negotiating access was the first stage after the ethical approval was granted. As previously stated, the researcher reached out via e-mail to CFOs in the selected Fire and Rescue Services to ask for permission to access the organisations and collect the data. The invitation e-mail included a brief information about the study, including the aim of the study, the timeframe of the project, and the number of individuals required to take part in the study. The application form, participant information sheet, and consent form were attached to the invitation e-mail. All six Fire and Rescue Services that were approached by the researcher to participate in the study were keen to take part in the project. CFOs and their Personal Assistants assisted in scheduling all the interview and focus group arrangements.

The project was conducted entirely by the researcher, with advice from the supervisory team. The researcher was the only individual conducting the data collection. The supervisory team did not take part in negotiating access to organisations. In terms of confidentiality agreements, the participants were informed about the research being openly available to any member of the public at the end of the project. They were made aware that not only the thesis, but also subsequent publications arising from the thesis,

will be published online. The researcher asked all participants to read the participant information sheet and sign the informed consent form before taking part in the study (Appendix 7). Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and participants were assured that there was no penalty or adverse implications to them if they would have withdrawn from the research – either within their own organisation or outside. Both documents explained when and how participants could withdraw their responses from the study, if they had originally agreed to take part in the project.

4.6.2. Data collection stage

The second stage of the ethical process was data collection. There were no previous relationships between the researcher and the participants that could have influenced the data collection process and the results. The researcher also had no operational nor managerial background in the Fire and Rescue Services. Before, during, and after the data collection stage, the researcher did not reveal her personal views on the researched subject. In terms of deception in research ethics, this study did not intentionally provide any inaccurate information. The researcher did not mislead or omit any information about the study aims, procedures used in the study as well as the role of the researcher, and reassured participants of anonymity and confidentiality when taking part in the project (see Appendix 7).

Originally, the researcher envisaged collecting data in person at the organisations' premises. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in England, this was not possible. The first focus group was, however, conducted in person at the organisation's premises. The participants were asked if their responses could be audio recorded on a password protected Dictaphone. If they had not wished to be audio recorded, the focus group would have been recorded via note taking. All other interviews and focus groups were carried out online through Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams. The researcher asked the participants for permission to audio or video record all interviews and focus groups. All interviewees and focus group participants agreed for their participation to be audio or video recorded.

Both the audio/video recordings and transcripts were stored on an NTU SharePoint, with the researcher being the only person with access to all the files. Each interview and each focus group was anonymised and given a unique code. The researcher created and

maintained a key to link these codes, to the individuals interviewed and dates of each conversation, and stored this key on the NTU server, separate from the audio/video recording, transcript, or write-up of the findings. This enabled the researcher to identify and delete the data provided by any participant who might have decided to withdraw from the study. Access to the data was restricted to the researcher and the supervisory team. All the data were kept secure and confidential during the duration of the research and for the 10 years period after the end of the project, in accordance with the NTU policy for data retention. After this period, they will be destroyed, unless further research involving the use of this information (with appropriate permissions and ethical approvals) is conducted.

The researcher's intention was to carry out research that would help Fire and Rescue Services to improve their accountability and governance arrangements. The researcher offered participants to have their final say over the data and offered to feedback views to all the participants and the senior management teams within the six local Fire and Rescue Services, if they found that useful. All participants agreed to participate, and senior management were very keen to read the findings of the study.

4.6.3. The analysis and reporting stages

The last stage of the ethics process concerns the analysis and reporting. As previously stated, research needs to be objective. A number of validity and reliability criteria were utilised in order to reduce the potential researcher's bias. The researcher tried to ensure her own impartiality by being transparent when analysing the data. The researcher worked independently from any organisations and had no previous experience of professional work in Fire and Rescue Services. This meant that the researcher had no conflicts of interests with either the participants or the organisations.

This study did not harm any participants or organisations. The researcher exercised all possible care to ensure that all participants and their organisations could not be identified in the findings by determining what to include or exclude from the data in relation to the issues raised by participants. This decision-making process was driven by a commitment to protecting confidentiality and ensuring that participants' identities were not revealed. The researcher addressed this issue in the letter of invitation to potential participants (Appendix 7). However, there was a slight chance that participants and their organisations could be identifiable by the nature of the quote in the thesis. The steps to overcome this

possibility included ensuring all personal identifiable data were not included and any identifiable data collected during interviews and focus groups (such as names of organisations or specific contextual details) were excluded from any quotes. The researcher did treat all the participants fairly before, during, and after the data collection process, and did not use any of the participants' data to harm anybody.

This section has provided an overview of the ethics considerations in this study. The entire project was undertaken according to the NTU's accepted ethical standards to protect the rights of the research participants and their organisations.

4.7. Conclusions

This chapter has explained the philosophical considerations of this thesis, discussed the research design and methodology applied in this study, and provided justification for the chosen research strategy. It has also outlined the research methods together with the data analysis process and criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Finally, it discussed some ethical considerations arising as result of this study. The following chapters (Chapters 5-8) will present and discuss the empirical findings of this research under the headings of bureaucratic, political, legal, and professional accountability.

Chapter 5. Bureaucratic accountability

5.1. Introduction

Bureaucratic forms of accountability are widely used to manage expectations (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Under this model, there is a principal-agent relationship between a superior and a subordinate, and a wide range of bodies act as superiors who exercise scrutiny. They vary from external administrative to independent supervisory authorities, chartered accountants, inspector generals, and internal bodies (Bovens 2007).

Fire and Rescue Services are hierarchical organisations, which means that they are in a supervisory control relationship with a number of internal and external stakeholders. The section below describes Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability. It shows who Fire and Rescue Services feel accountable to in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions of accountability *('accountability to whom').* More specifically, it examines how these accountability understandings have changed in the context of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (see Figures 11 and 12).
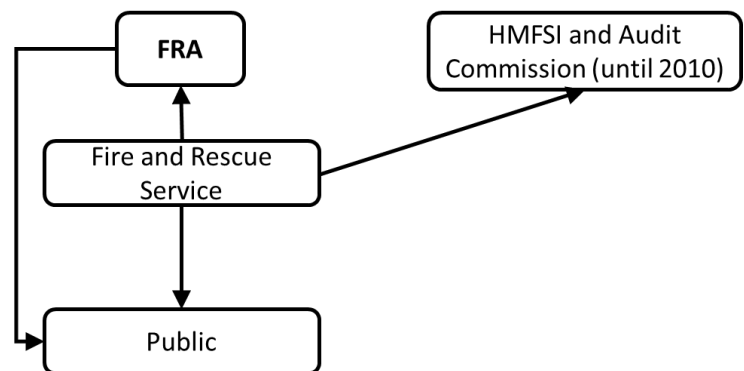
Figure 11: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings on bureaucratic accountability relationships in FRA-governed Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017
Source: Author's interpretation
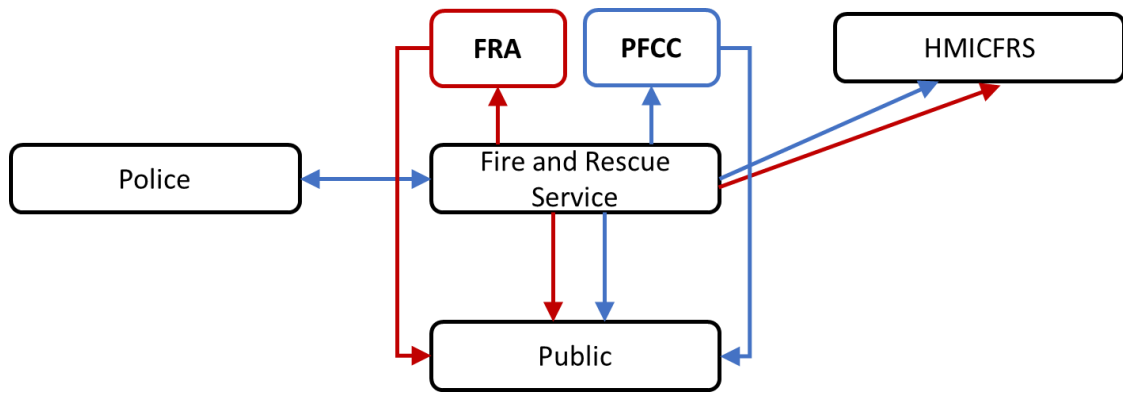
Figure 12: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings on bureaucratic accountability relationships in FRA-governed (in red) and in PFCC-governed (in blue) Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

5.2. Accountability arrangements prior to the Policing and Crime Act 2017

5.2.1. Vertical accountability

In a vertical accountability relationship, a superior is calling for an account from those who are accountable (subordinate), including the rights to demand answers and to impose sanctions. This subsection covers the sub-themes of overview and scrutiny, and performance management, which emerged from the thematic coding on the vertical dimension of bureaucratic accountability.

5.2.1.1. Overview and scrutiny

An executive model of decision-making was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, which distinguished between executive decision-making, and overview and scrutiny in local government. In Fire and Rescue Services, Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have been carrying out the role of overview and scrutiny, which means that they have the power to scrutinise the decision-making of their local Fire and Rescue Service and make relevant recommendations. More specifically, FRAs' strategic role has been to oversee Fire and Rescue Services' organisational strategy and approve statutory documents, including the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), the Annual Statement of Assurance and financial plans.

Notwithstanding the FRA's statutory responsibilities, senior managers had mixed views on the actual ability of FRAs to challenge their local Fire and Rescue Services. Many participants indicated that their FRA had insufficiently scrutinised their service. They attributed this primarily to local councillors' other commitments that required substantially more of their time and interest than their local Fire and Rescue Service. This was particularly notable in the services that were an integral part of county council arrangements (Case Study 3 and Case Study 4).

"We were a very small fish in a very, very big pool with other demands…we were always playing second fiddle to those [other services]."

(Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

"Governance wise, I think rather than just being the main voice to your authority, we are part of a bigger team."

(ACFO 1, Case Study 3)

A key reason for this was because the county councils were not only scrutinising Fire and Rescue Services but also various other services, such as social care, education, public health, and highways. According to senior managers, local councillors often relegated the Fire and Rescue Services' matters to a secondary priority, on the assumption that other services were more important or more interesting.

In terms of individuals sitting on FRAs, they had varying levels of expertise in Fire and Rescue Services. Local councillors theoretically ought to draw on diverse backgrounds and experience to oversee Fire and Rescue Services, but many participants felt their scrutiny and oversight of the services was questionable. In most cases, local councillors had limited experience of dealing with Fire and Rescue Services, either operationally or strategically. Their lack of experience and their other commitments resulted in an inadequate ability to robustly challenge their local Fire and Rescue Service.

"A lot of the previous FRA members were very nice people but perhaps hadn't got the capability to understand the level of detail within some of those reports, but more importantly ask the right questions."

(DCFO, Case Study 5)

Senior managers reported that local councillors struggled to understand the fire and rescue environment, especially the day-to-day operational provision of services. Their insufficient understanding and knowledge of the fire sector often resulted in deferring to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) as a subject expert.

"The FRA defer to CFO… and won't challenge their strategic recommendations."

(Director 1, Case Study 1)

"The CFO gets relatively little direct scrutiny of their performance or their organisation's performance."

(CFO, Case Study 6)

These views surfaced mainly in relation to the FRA members being overly reliant on senior officers' expertise, particularly on the CFOs'. Interviewees suggested that CFOs formed bonds with some local councillors, particularly chairs of FRAs, which ultimately contributed to distorted decision-making and limited scrutiny. Inexperienced local councillors preferred to rely on the CFOs' expertise rather than be accountable themselves for decision-making, which would have affected both the service and their political appointment (see Chapter 6 – Political accountability).

The inadequate scrutiny from the FRA was further exacerbated by the lack of 'specific' independent scrutiny committees for Fire and Rescue Services. Scrutiny committees are supposed to provide independent oversight of the Fire and Rescue Service's performance, however:

"There was no independent scrutiny panel for fire and rescue, we only really took the one paper each year to the FRA, that was about the IRMP, generally that would go through on a bit of a nod."

(CFO, Case Study 4)

"There is no designated overview and scrutiny committee, there's no committee which sits specifically to examine the key performance indicators or the metrics from the service to challenge us as to say for example, well you said you were going to do 10,000 safe and well visits this year and you've only done 7,000, why is that? That level of scrutiny isn't coming from the FRA."

(Director 1, Case Study 1)

Overall, the evidence suggests that the oversight and scrutiny of Fire and Rescue Services' performance was largely inadequate because of the absence of dedicated scrutiny committees. In some cases (e.g., Case Study 3), local councillors sitting on FRAs overlooked the services' inadequate performance. This suggests that FRAs in some cases were unable to adequately hold Fire and Rescue Services to account.

The relationship between FRAs and Fire and Rescue Services were quite distant and formal. FRAs would meet quarterly on a formal basis with no further follow up meetings, resulting in a relatively distant communication between FRAs and senior management. Senior managers indicated that they felt accountable to their FRAs only when reporting on a formal basis. They argued that the more difficult the decisions they were asking the FRA to take, the more scrutiny and accountability from the FRA they got in return. For example, CFOs indicated that local councillors did hold them to account when taking decisions that could have costed the service a lot of money.

Nonetheless, many senior managers raised concerns around adequacy of scrutiny arrangements provided by FRAs. Many suggested there was insufficient overview and scrutiny from a statutory body that was set up specifically to give advice and oversee the service, to ensure it performs efficiently and in the best interest of the public and the community it serves (House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Select Committee 2017). The issues around inadequate fire knowledge, reliance on the chief's expertise, lack of independent scrutiny committees as well as other councillors' commitments were the main factors that had contributed to the poor FRA scrutiny and oversight over Fire and Rescue Services.

Accountability, and more specifically overview and scrutiny, within Fire and Rescue Services cascaded down from governing bodies and management hierarchies to the front-line. Perceptions on scrutiny and oversight differed between senior management staff and front-line staff. Firefighters theoretically perceived senior management as vertically accountable downwards to their staff because of their duty of care to their employees, including front-line firefighters and professional services staff (HR, finance, communications, and IT). According to the firefighters, CFOs had the ultimate accountability for managing the Fire and Rescue Service staff because of the nature of working in a hierarchical uniformed service with notions of rank (Andrews *et al.* 2014).

"If somebody died or something went wrong, then it would be the chief who would be responsible for that."

<div align="right">(Firefighter, Case Study 6)</div>

Front-line staff found CFOs as being ultimately responsible for anything that happens in the service. In practice, firefighters indicated that they were insufficiently informed about what was happening in the organisation. More specifically, they were often not informed about the decisions taken by senior management that ultimately had an impact on the front-line. Notwithstanding the issues around inadequate communication down the hierarchy, firefighters felt accountable to both senior management and their direct line managers for their day-to-day responsibilities. They felt accountable for their every action. Line managers were able to oversee their subordinates' performance and had an ability to reprimand them disciplinarily if they were underperforming.

"I'm accountable for every action that I do… to senior officers I'm accountable."

<div align="right">(Firefighter, Case Study 3)</div>

"On a day-to-day basis, say as a watch, we've obviously got accountability, we're looking at accountability to our watch manager, who gives us our orders."

<div align="right">(Firefighter, Case Study 1)</div>

This reflects a bi-directional relationship, in which CFOs were accountable to the staff, and the staff perceived themselves as accountable to their line managers on the performance of delegated duties, and ultimately felt accountable to their CFO, as the leader of the organisation. Managers were bureaucratically accountable for supervising lower-level staff on the performance of delegated duties, and front-line staff felt downward bureaucratic accountability because of the duty of care from their senior management. The bureaucratic command-control relationship was therefore exemplified under this type of accountability.

It is noticeable that front-line officers felt there was an adequate level of scrutiny within Fire and Rescue Services, for example through a bi-directional accountability relationship between firefighters and their line managers. Nevertheless, Fire and Rescue Services generally perceived that FRAs provided an inadequate level of scrutiny on their

performance, which they largely attributed to the lack of an in-depth understanding of Fire and Rescue Services' operational and strategic matters.

5.2.1.2. Performance management

Before 2010, Fire and Rescue Services were bureaucratically accountable for performance to the Audit Commission. This included external audit as well as financial and non-financial performance assessments of Fire and Rescue Services. If performing inadequately, Fire and Rescue Services were subject to potential consequences, including government intervention (see Chapter 7 – Legal accountability). The Audit Commission assessments were criticised by government and some local authorities for being "top-down, costly, not providing significant 'added-value' and focussing upon corporate processes rather than operational performance" (Downe *et al*. 2018 p. 61). Many condemned its performance measurement and target-setting approach, and the Audit Commission was abolished in 2010.

> *"The original inspections [pre-2005 by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate] were … just like some an old boys' club… the actual testing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Fire and Rescue Services was just a pantomime really. Then came the Audit Commission… everything had a target to the point that you lost the point of doing it. And again, that was a sort of show-boating exercise where people tried to satisfy the metric."*

> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

External performance management was significantly diminished following the abolition of the Audit Commission. Between 2010 and 2017, Fire and Rescue Services became responsible for managing their own performance as result of the Coalition Government's policies of austerity-localism (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012) and sector-led improvement (Murphy and Ferry 2018). Senior managers argued that they were ultimately accountable for performance (or potential lack of performance) in their organisations under sector-led improvement. They were responsible for setting performance measures in service delivery plans and potential progress against the predefined targets in their services. Accountability for performance also cascaded down to the firefighter level. Front-line staff felt accountable for the delivery of the predefined performance targets such as response times.

"We're questioned on why we miss that response time. Every time we go out to an incident, we have a workbook to complete, that workbook includes the response time, so if we've missed it, we have to justify in that workbook the reasons why we've missed that response time."

(Firefighter, Case Study 2)

Every aspect of a firefighter's job was recorded, including response times, the amount of prevention and protection work, the number of smoke alarms fitted, and the provision of education. Firefighters felt accountable to their line managers for how they operationally perform, whether it was response to emergencies or carrying out prevention work.

Fire and Rescue Services were ultimately accountable to their local FRAs for meeting performance targets. This is because FRAs were responsible for monitoring Fire and Rescue Services' work and ultimately ensuring that they meet the organisation's goals in an effective and efficient manner. Senior managers were responsible for setting the detailed targets and tracking the front-line staff's performance, whilst front-line staff were implementing the predefined targets in their day-to-day provision of services.

5.2.2. Horizontal accountability

Horizontal accountability is a form of accountability between parties operating or collaborating in the same areas of interest. Typically, all parties are equal to one another, and more negotiation and collaboration than vertical command takes place under this direction of accountability. Horizontal accountability occurs with other emergency services working towards public safety, but it could also be observed at a team level within the service when responding to incidents. This could also be the case when two or more Fire and Rescue Services respond to large incidents. In the next subsection, external and internal collaboration is discussed in more detail.

5.2.2.1. External and internal collaboration

Before the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services were involved in external collaboration exercises with other emergency services, key stakeholders, and other partners. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (see section 3.4.3.), there was no statutory legal duty imposed on Fire and Rescue Services to work collaboratively with other

emergency services. This meant that Fire and Rescue Services theoretically were not in a horizontal bureaucratic accountability relationship with any partners at the time, because none of the collaboration exercises introduced before 2017 were closely supervised, and there were no clearly stated rules for these collaborations. Although collaboration and partnership working had been enabled and encouraged by the Local Government Act 1999, Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Fire and Rescue Services were not mandated to collaboratively respond to them with other partners (although they could have been criticised in post-incident inquiries and coroner's courts, most notably after the Manchester Arena Terrorist Attack (Kerslake 2018, Saunders 2021, 2022, 2023).

However, bureaucratic accountability was prevalent when working in teams within Fire and Rescue Services. All fire and rescue staff have been working towards the same goal – public safety. Team working, mutual dependence and team culture were features of fire services, since members of the team (known as the 'watch') were highly dependent on each other, particularly when responding to incidents and dangerous contexts. Participants, particularly in the focus groups, highlighted that they were accountable for their own actions to their colleagues and senior officers, and vice versa. However, front-line staff, when working in a team, also acted as subordinates, as they were bureaucratically accountable to their superiors for the performance of delegated duties. This meant that they felt bureaucratically accountable for their team response to their watch managers, who were then accountable up to the senior management. Firefighters at the front-line worked together, shared information and negotiated how to approach each incident, although there was always a single incident commander involved, who was responsible for the whole incident (Wilsher 2019). Talking about this issue an interviewee said:

> *"So, everyone's got to take their own responsibility in this, so we're all accountable at some degree but if it really went wrong, obviously it then goes to the chief and then it goes to everyone."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

> *"If you make a bad decision, you're accountable for it and … and you learn from it. You know if … and that's what we need to do as a service. I think the problem is that when individuals do make bad decisions there's a blame culture and we need to get away from that culture."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 3)

Although primarily associated with a strong hierarchy and ranks, Fire and Rescue Services also exhibited a strong horizontal accountability team culture to their managers and to the public. Although horizontal accountability was important when team working, firefighters also pointed out a blame culture could exist at the front-line. Making a wrong decision meant that firefighters could bear some consequences, primarily from their line managers. Making incorrect decisions and learning from the decisions made was therefore highlighted as an issue requiring greater attention from middle and senior management.

5.2.3. Diagonal accountability

Diagonal accountability relationships are in-between hierarchical and horizontal forms of accountability. They are the kind of relationships in which there are no powers to enforce compliance, however, the consequences still might be severe (Schillemans 2008). Inspection bodies and audit institutions are examples of diagonal accountability relationships, in which Fire and Rescue Services have been involved over the decades. In this subsection, inspections and peer review are discussed in more detail.

5.2.3.1. Inspections and peer review

Before the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services were diagonally accountable to His/Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) until 2007. They were superseded by the Audit Commission, who had been collecting performance information on Fire and Rescue Services since its establishment in 1983 (Campbell-Smith 2008). Following HMFSI's formation in 1947, the inspectorate monitored the standards and operational performance of Fire and Rescue Services by providing advice on standards and compliance. However, the inspectorate did not hold Fire and Rescue Services bureaucratically to account for performance, as its role was primarily to provide the sector with fire standards. This meant that the level of scrutiny on Fire and Rescue Services' performance was limited. The HMFSI closed in 2007, by which time the role of external inspection had already passed on to the Audit Commission. However, after 2010, the Audit Commission no longer undertook inspections, and the Commission was gradually wound down before being formally closed in 2015.

Fire and Rescue Services became subject to a new sector-led improvement regime, which replaced the inspectorate and the Audit Commission (see Downe *et al*. 2018,

Murphy and Ferry 2018). Sector-led improvement involved moving accountability from the national level and placing responsibilities in the hands of local FRAs, by giving them more flexibility and freedom to deliver local services. Peer review was one of the main initiatives of the sector-led improvement regime. Fire peer challenge and operational assessments were co-ordinated by the Local Government Association (LGA) and involved senior staff from other Fire and Rescue Service assessing their peer service. There were also thematic reviews of certain areas of business.

> *"A team of people from across the sector would land in an organisation and basically do like an HMI inspection…I can understand the allegations or accusations of it being quite weak because it wasn't quite marking your own homework, but it was quite friendly!"*

> (Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 5)

> *"Peer review findings tended to be limited in terms of its sharing internally."*

> (Director of Response, Case Study 5)

Senior managers indicated that this form of diagonal bureaucratic accountability was weak, as it was more of a friendly visit than an assessment done by an independent body. Furthermore, the results of peer challenges were not transparent as they were only shared internally. Front-line staff did not express their views on previous arrangements under this type of accountability, as they were not familiar with them. Further investigation of the impact of sector-led improvement regime is discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

The next section of this chapter moves on to explain the perceptions of bureaucratic accountability within vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions after the introduction of the provisions of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

5.3.   Accountability arrangements after the Policing and Crime Act 2017

5.3.1.   Vertical accountability

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced alternative governance models for Fire and Rescue Services. This section discusses the understandings of vertical bureaucratic accountability under the sub-themes of overview and scrutiny, and performance

management, in the FRA governance model (the representation model) and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) governance model (the governance model) following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

5.3.1.1. Overview and scrutiny

In response to widespread scrutiny deficiencies pre-2017 legislation, Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA governance model have implemented various internal governance arrangements, ranging from designated sub-committees and groups to formal schemes of delegation. They have been introduced to improve scrutiny and oversight within all Fire and Rescue Services. Nonetheless, the majority of interviewees claimed the FRA arrangements remained largely inadequate in terms of scrutiny following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

> *"That level of scrutiny isn't coming from the FRA, and if it doesn't come from the FRA, what we have to do as a service is almost scrutinise ourselves, which we do try to do."*
>
> (Director 1, Case Study 1)

Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA model identified scrutiny deficiencies within their services and attempted to seek appropriate solutions to these problems. This, *inter alia,* involved revising their schemes of delegations to improve scrutiny and overview within their services.

> *"We've just gone through a process of redefining and agreeing those delegations. And we've got a level of structure within the FRA that provides that level of accountability."*
>
> (ACFO 1, Case Study 2)

Fire and Rescue Services also indicated that they started to feel more bureaucratically accountable for their duties to the FRAs under the revised schemes of delegations as they were more familiar with the scope of their accountabilities within the service.

Two out of the three traditional FRA-governed services (Case Study 1 and 2) adopted the 'representation' model of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This meant that FRAs were able to appoint additional members to their boards, including a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) or a PCC representative. According to participants, the presence of

the PCC or the PCC representative brought an outside perspective to the decision-making process. Having an additional individual, experienced in overseeing police services on the FRA, has brought more emergency services-specific bureaucratic accountability to their Fire and Rescue Services. According to participants, PCCs or PCC representatives would ask challenging questions when scrutinising Fire and Rescue Services.

"I've certainly noticed a change in the conversation at FRA, having the PCC present in the meetings I think that has made the scrutiny and the accountability of the service much greater as well, having that awareness that the PCC is there."

(Director 1, Case Study 1)

"I think just having a PCC represented on the FRA increases that accountability because we've got some extra scrutiny there, some challenge from a different perspective."

(Director of Strategy, Case Study 2)

The influence of the PCC or the PCC representative was evident through questioning senior managers' decisions in FRA meetings. In those services where a PCC representative sat on the FRA, the PCC representative ensured that there was more challenge in FRA meetings, and that information and the agenda was driven by the PCC through discussing the delivery and translation of the FRA strategy into operational plans within Fire and Rescue Services. The presence of the PCC or the PCC representative on the FRA therefore contributed to increased bureaucratic scrutiny within Fire and Rescue Services.

Overall, the majority of senior managers of services that remained under the FRA governance model claimed that the new 'representation' model of FRA governance brought increased bureaucratic scrutiny to the services. Front-line staff were not directly affected by the 'representation' model changes and did not identify major changes with regards to the scrutiny and oversight of their day-to-day operational jobs and targets.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has also introduced a single-person fire authority to oversee local Fire and Rescue Services under the PFCC governance model. The PFCC's powers specifically include implementing a fire and rescue plan, setting fire and rescue service budgets, and appointing and dismissing a CFO. The PFCC's role is therefore similar to the FRA's role. Whilst FRAs consist of a group of local councillors overseeing the fire service, a PFCC is a single individual responsible for holding the fire service to account.

Senior managers, from services that had transferred to the PFCC governance model, were unanimous in the view that the PFCC model brought an additional level of scrutiny when questioning the service's decisions:

"I think the PFCC and the people that work with them have a much better understanding of the actual work we do in communities, so they are able to ask us the right questions."

(Partnerships Manager, Case Study 4)

"I do think there's been more scrutiny if I'm honest, in terms of detail and depth."

(DCFO, Case Study 5)

"We now have a commissioner that is very, very focused, switched on, asked some very difficult and awkward questions."

(DCFO, Case Study 6)

Senior management found PFCCs to be bureaucratically holding fire services to account. They indicated that the depth and detail of scrutiny improved as result of having a PFCC overseeing the service. Senior managers argued that PFCCs and the PFCC's support staff had both the experience of working with communities, as well as knowledge of policing, which ultimately contributed to better understanding of emergency services governance and increased scrutiny from PFCCs. In addition, the actions and decisions of PFCCs were also scrutinised by local Police, Fire and Crime Panels.

By attempting to bring Fire and Rescue Services into greater collaboration with police services through the PFCC model of governance, the 2017 Act highlighted the differences between fire and police in terms of clear operational independence for their Chief Officers. In contrast to Chief Constables, CFOs under the PFCC governance model had no operational independence. In all cases of the PFCC governance model (Case Studies 4, 5 and 6), participants highlighted tensions between their CFO and their PFCC. This is because PFCCs had too much operational power over Fire and Rescue Services, while CFOs had insufficient operational responsibilities and independence. This created a considerable tension and real interference in operational issues with the single-person leadership, which on occasions led to conflicts between CFOs and PFCCs, when the goals of PFCCs diverged from those of CFOs. Some senior managers recognised that having a single-person governing body instead of a

group of individuals contributed to potential conflicts, especially if there was a personality clash between the PFCC and the CFO.

> *"Clearly with the PFCC you have got one person essentially and if you don't get on, you don't get on."*

<div align="right">(Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 5)</div>

Despite the PFCCs' experience of working in communities and within policing, senior managers indicated that PFCCs did not comprehend the operational side of Fire and Rescue Services and ultimately should not be responsible for operational decision-making. In all cases (in both PFCC- and FRA-governed services), senior management highlighted the need for reform in the fire sector, which would provide clarity in the divide between strategic and operational issues. They argued for CFOs to be responsible for the operational side of Fire and Rescue Services, whilst PFCCs remain in charge of the service's strategy.

Despite negative perceptions on the lack of operational independence, senior managers had encouraging comments on the speed of decision-making in the PFCC governance model.

> *"Meetings become more structured, more detailed… on most parts decisions are made quicker, so there's a bit more decisiveness having that single accountable person."*

<div align="right">(Director of Response, Case Study 5)</div>

> *"I think it's speeded up some of the decision-making processes. I think it's removed some layers of bureaucracy."*

<div align="right">(DCFO, Case Study 6)</div>

The speed of decision-making has largely improved as result of the move from a slow and bureaucratic FRA to a single-person PFCC governing body. This view was also echoed by other senior managers.

In terms of the front-line, firefighters were largely aware of the governance changes in their services. However, the majority of firefighters felt that they experienced no real difference in terms of governance, as they ultimately reported to their CFO and were not involved in higher level governance meetings.

"To me, it doesn't matter who … how or whether it's an authority or it's a single PCC or it's another model that might be out there… I think…it's just more of the same."

(Firefighter, Case Study 6)

"I think we all understand that… we come under their [PFCC] umbrella now but the way our rank structure and who's in charge… remains the same and as far as we're concerned down here, it's up to our CFO."

(Firefighter, Case Study 4)

Although reporting mechanisms remained the same, watch managers argued that the PFCC's office staff were involved in meetings at the middle management level, which was previously not the case with the FRA representatives. The presence of the PFCC's staff was also reflected in greater scrutiny at lower levels of directorate boards. However, firefighters were not aware of how their work at the front-line level was scrutinised by their PFCC.

Front-line staff were generally aware of the governance changes within their service. However, they were not familiar with how the governance changes might have changed the scrutiny of their activities. They still felt ultimately accountable to their CFO rather than a politician. Watch managers indicated that the introduction of new governance structures enabled greater scrutiny at lower levels of directorate boards than before the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This was mainly because of the involvement of the PFCC's support staff at lower levels within the service. Nonetheless, front-line staff continued to perceive their accountability demands largely in the same way as before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

As result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, bureaucratic accountability has remained primarily about Fire and Rescue Services' responsibility to report to and be scrutinised by a governing body, which oversees the service's organisational strategy. The findings show that the arrangements brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, including both the reformed FRA as well as the PFCCs, have clarified and improved sources of scrutiny and accountability.

5.3.1.2. Performance management

Since the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, performance has continued to be scrutinised internally and vertically, either by an FRA or by a PFCC. External performance management was re-introduced through the creation of the inspectorate, which holds Fire and Rescue Services accountable (see section 5.3.3.).

Having a PCC or a PCC representative present on an FRA has increased pressure on Fire and Rescue Services to improve their performance. Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA governance arrangements were also concerned about a potential 'takeover' if their service was underperforming:

> *"By having that extra pressure that if the authority and the organisation don't perform, then there is the possibility that the PCC would be driven to take over or to put a bid in to take over, to put forward a business case. Whereas before the legislation, there was nothing really challenging the FRAs."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 1)

Fire and Rescue Services were aware of the possibility of a PCC 'takeover' if underperforming and therefore felt that they had to adequately perform under their FRA. Many participants viewed a potential takeover as a threat. CFOs, together with other senior managers, were therefore mindful of building an effective rapport with their PCCs, in case of a sudden business case submission from their PCCs. The threat of a potential governance change was also pointed out by the front-line staff.

> *"Certainly, my perception is if you are not performing as a Fire and Rescue Service then we will hit you with a big stick of the PCC and potentially you'll be taken over."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

Having a PCC or a PCC representative sitting on an FRA generally made the fire services more conscious of building an effective relationship with PCCs or PCC representatives in case of a potential change of governance to the PFCC model, as indicated by both senior managers and front-line staff. Fire and Rescue Services generally felt greater bureaucratic performance-oriented accountability under the reformed FRA rather than under the previous arrangement.

New channels of communication up to the PFCCs were identified in all three services that had transferred to the PFCC model of governance. They included establishment of specific internal performance-oriented boards focused on performance management.

> *"The monthly accountability board, the PFCC and his directors basically will drill down, and they will tell us we want to know more about this, this month, we want to know how you've planned this, why you're delivering it in this way, where it's going, what the future plans are, how it links to your IRMP."*

> (Partnerships Manager, Case Study 4)

Senior managers claimed that these new accountability structures contributed to increased scrutiny within their service, primarily because of the detail and depth of conversations around performance management. Senior managers attributed this enhanced scrutiny to the PFCCs and their office staff, who had experience of analysing performance within policing. Nonetheless, some found the arrangements, in particular the meetings, as too bureaucratic:

> *"I think sometimes having less accountability board meetings might actually increase the accountability because you get time to actually write better papers, you get time to pull the right information together."*

> (CFO, Case Study 4)

Senior managers were initially hopeful that the new arrangements would reduce the bureaucratic burden on Fire and Rescue Services. Instead, they found that the performance-oriented arrangements contributed to greater demand in terms of scrutiny and accountability for senior officers. Having too many senior leadership meetings was argued to be counterproductive in delivering accountability, as the meetings were perceived as excessively bureaucratic. Reducing the frequency of meetings was proposed as a solution to less bureaucratic arrangements under the PFCC governance model.

Overall, in both governance models, participants found an increased focused on performance management. In FRA-governed services, staff were conscious of a potential takeover bid from a PCC if inadequately performing. In PFCC-governed services, participants felt that the new performance-oriented arrangements increased the focus on performance, but also were heavily bureaucratic and created unnecessary burden on services. Notwithstanding the difficulties, Fire and Rescue Services felt more accountable

for performance management to their governing bodies since the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

5.3.2. Horizontal accountability

Horizontal accountability continued to be operationalised between parties collaborating in ensuring public safety. This section explains how horizontal bureaucratic accountability has been operationalised since the introduction of the 2017 legislation in Fire and Rescue Services.

5.3.2.1. External and internal collaboration

The 2017 legislation formalised the duty on emergency services to collaborate, where it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness and attempted to accelerate it into other areas. This meant that Fire and Rescue Services, together with other emergency services, have become bureaucratically accountable for service collaboration, which had not been the case before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

The evidence shows that the vast majority of collaborative activities (excluding those relating to the COVID-19 pandemic) has been between police and fire services in both FRA-governed and PFCC-governed services. Most participants indicated that the 2017 legislation established closer working relationship between the two services, and in the case of PFCC-governed services, launched joint decision-making with the police. This meant that police forces and Fire and Rescue Services ultimately worked towards the same goal, which is community safety.

> *"The personal relationship between me and the chief constable becomes quite important in the sense that we've both got to get ourselves on the same page, with regard to some of this stuff, mainly because we've both got the same boss! So when we have a lot of our three-way meetings they are … very clear that we need to get on the same page and we need to be singing on the same hymn sheet."*

> (CFO, Case Study 4)

In those services that adopted the PFCC model of governance, having clear goals established together with the police contributed to closer collaborative working.

Participants observed that CFOs and Chief Constables had formed close relationships based on accountability when working under the PFCC-governance model. Chiefs provided constructive feedback to one another and aimed to focus on services' learning and improvement.

Other examples of collaboration initiatives included joint first responders work, road safety campaigns, back-office support and sharing estates initiatives. The duty to collaborate created a focus for Fire and Rescue Services (and the police) to explore all possible approaches to collaboration. Whilst Fire and Rescue Services identified a number of ways to collaborate with the police, participants reported limited collaboration with ambulance services. The majority of FRA-governed services argued that it was not possible to be accountable to other emergency services, as they had different governance arrangements than Fire and Rescue Services:

> *"We're a standalone organisation. We work in partnership with them [police], but we're not accountable to them, unless it was a legal issue."*
>
> (ACFO 2, Case Study 3)

> *"We seek to collaborate, we seek to be accountable … we can't be accountable to each other because… we've got very different governance arrangements between the three [emergency services] … So, I don't think it's really held us accountable with regards to duty to collaborate."*
>
> (ACFO 1, Case Study 2)

> *"We've got a close relationship [with ambulance services] but not from an accountability point of view…my relationship with the chief constable now is stronger than it ever has been… but I wouldn't say it's one of accountability, we don't hold each other to account, other than in a professional standard as kind of professional peers."*
>
> (CFO, Case Study 1)

Senior managers from FRA-governed services agreed that there was no scrutiny relationship between fire services and other emergency services due to different governance arrangements. Nonetheless, the 2017 legislation enabled all services, including those that remained under the FRA arrangements, to work together as professional peers in responding collaboratively to incidents (see Chapter 8 – Professional accountability).

Bureaucratic accountability also continued when working internally within Fire and Rescue Services.

Overall, Fire and Rescue Services remained horizontally bureaucratically accountable for internal collaboration within the fire service. Since 2017, they have also been theoretically involved in an external horizontal accountability relationship with two other emergency services, namely the police and ambulance services. In practice, in PFCC-governed services, Fire and Rescue Services believed that police and fire services were in an accountability relationship, whereas in FRA-governed services, they did not perceive it as an accountability relationship due to different governance arrangements between the two services. Fire and Rescue Services also felt that there was very limited horizontal accountability relationship between ambulance services and fire services under both governance models.

5.3.3. Diagonal accountability

Diagonal accountability relationships, as previously stated, are usually developed with inspection bodies and external audit institutions. The following section explains in detail how diagonal bureaucratic accountability has been operationalised as result of the establishment of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

5.3.3.1. Inspections

HMICFRS's role has been to provide assurance on how effective and efficient Fire and Rescue Services are, how well they manage their people and whether they are fulfilling their statutory obligations to improve performance as well as accountability. The inspectorate's function has therefore been to bureaucratically hold Fire and Rescue Services to account for performance and report its findings in public reports.

> *"So, I personally was delighted that an inspectorate was coming back into the fire and rescue service, I think the inspectorate provides a very important function in terms of questioning and challenging a fire and rescue service, helping a fire and rescue service to be more aware of itself and its abilities, its lack of abilities in the journey that it's on."*
>
> (CFO, Case Study 6)

Fire and Rescue Services viewed the establishment of the inspectorate as an additional method of scrutiny. The inspectorate assesses each services' effectiveness, efficiency, and its people, and the inspection outcome, in a form of a publicly available report, summarises whether the service has delivered what they had originally set out to deliver or not. It also recommends areas for improvement and learning for each service.

The results of the inspection process have been available to all the FRAs and all the PFCCs who subsequently scrutinise the service's performance based on the HMICFRS reports. In both governance models, participants argued that inspection reports helped FRAs and PFCCs to scrutinise their Fire and Rescue Services, as the reports clearly showed which areas required improvement. In addition, the public has direct online access to the reports, which increases FRAs' and PFCCs' motivation to adequately scrutinise the services.

> *"Our authority members are taking a keen interest in the HMICFRS results."*
>
> (ACFO, Case Study 1)

> *"I've actually got evidence now that's coming through against areas that I can clearly see all about efficiency and effectiveness and people, that makes sense to me, and you're telling me that we're not doing very well in this area and we need to do this. What a great tool to help the PFCCs."*
>
> (ACFO 1, Case Study 3)

The results of the inspection process were used by both FRAs and PFCCs to assess and scrutinise the service's performance. This often simplified the governing bodies' overview and scrutiny responsibilities by having ready reports to assess their service's performance. Although perceptions on the inspectorate were mainly positive, there were also views that the inspection process was a siloed tick-box exercise focused on compliance rather than improvement. For example, when looking at certain areas of Fire and Rescue Services' responsibilities, the actual level and depth of activities was not investigated, which ultimately resulted in focusing on quantity over quality. Nonetheless, services were required to prepare "*to make sure everyone looks tidy…make sure it's perfect*" (Watch Manager 2, Case Study 2).

In all case studies, under both governance models, participants at both senior management and front-line level identified burdensome requirements of the inspection process. This was because HMICFRS has placed requirements upon the fire services with regard to the amount of information they are required to produce ahead of an inspection visit.

"When people start imposing targets… I think that the quality goes out of the work and it's all down to quantity, we've got to hit this, we've got to hit that, and a lot of the quality disappears."

(Firefighter, Case Study 1)

"There is a lot of paperwork, there's a lot of red tape and there's a lot of preparation involved in making sure that when the inspection takes place, all the information's available for the inspectorate."

(Director of Finance, Case Study 5)

The burdensome requirements were mainly expressed in relation to preparing for the inspection visit by putting together data and information. This involved extra services' capacity, taking the staff's time away from their day-to-day responsibilities.

Overall, many senior managers believed that the inspection process brought bureaucratic scrutiny back into the fire sector. However, staff at both senior management and front-line levels indicated that the inspection process introduced burdensome requirements into their services, including preparing in advance for inspection visits, ultimately creating accountability overloads. The latter was perceived as superficial by many participants as it did not show the 'real' state of Fire and Rescue Services, which could have been actioned through unannounced visits.

5.4.   Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Table 13 summarises Fire and Rescue Services' bureaucratic accountability understandings in relation to vertical, horizontal, and diagonal directions.

Table 13: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

| Directions | Main sub-themes | Before the 2017 Act | After the 2017 Act | |
		FRA-governed services	FRA-governed services	PFCC-governed services
Vertical (Governing body – Fire and Rescue Service, senior managers – front line staff)	**Overview and scrutiny**	**Limited** scrutiny from an FRA.	**Moderate** scrutiny, as result of the PCC sitting on an FRA.	**Extensive** scrutiny as result of the PFCC.
	Performance management	**Moderate** accountability from top to bottom through meeting performance targets.	**Moderate** accountability as result of the PCC sitting on an FRA.	**Extensive** accountability through performance-oriented structures within services.
Horizontal (Fire and Rescue Service – other emergency services; Fire and Rescue Service staff)	**External and internal collaboration**	**Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services. **Extensive** accountability within services when working in teams.	**Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services. **Extensive** accountability within services when working in internal teams.	**Moderate** accountability relationship when collaborating with police. **Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with ambulance services. **Extensive** accountability within services when working in internal teams.
Diagonal (Inspectorates/ peers – Fire and Rescue Service)	**Inspections and peer review**	**Limited** accountability towards inspection bodies or peer organisations.	**Extensive** bureaucratic scrutiny on services focused on performance.	**Extensive** bureaucratic scrutiny on services focused on performance.

Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act were vertically bureaucratically accountable to FRAs as they had responsibility for the leadership, strategic direction, scrutiny, and oversight of the services. However, they found the FRA scrutiny arrangements as largely limited due to the lack of an in-depth understanding of fire operational and strategic matters, which ultimately contributed to poor scrutiny and oversight over Fire and Rescue Services, and ultimately less clear accountability. In addition, slow and bureaucratic decision-making and excessive focus on formal engagements held by FRAs were counterproductive in holding the services to account.

The introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 brought new overview and scrutiny arrangements under the reformed FRA governance model and the PFCC governance model. In the reformed FRA governance model, the staff found improving scrutiny as result of the optional PCC or PCC representative presence and oversight on an FRA. In the PFCC governance model, the depth and detail of scrutiny, as well as the speed of decision-making also improved as result of having a single individual overseeing the service. PFCCs effectively utilised their understanding, knowledge, and experience of policing in the fire and rescue context. Consequently, they effectively scrutinised the decisions. Although on occasions, they had too much operational powers when taking decisions against the advice of professional CFOs. Before the 2017 legislation, services were also vertically accountable for meeting performance targets internally within their services. The 2017 Act increased pressure on services to improve performance. In the case of reformed FRA-governed services, participants feared if they were underperforming, they could be taken over by a PCC. In PFCC-governed services, newly established performance-oriented structures resulted in increased accountability within services.

Fire and Rescue Services before the 2017 legislation did not feel horizontally bureaucratically accountable to other organisations (other than when acting in major emergencies). At the time, there was no statutory legal duty imposed on Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with their partners. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced a formal duty to externally collaborate with other emergency services which officially required Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with police and ambulance services. Under the FRA governance model, Fire and Rescue Services did not perceive the relationship with either of the two services to have an accountability element, due to

different governance arrangements. On the other hand, Fire and Rescue Services under the PFCC governance model established closer working arrangements with the police services as result of being scrutinised by the same individual. Consequently, they felt more bureaucratically accountable to police horizontally, in that the services were working towards the same goal, which is public safety, and providing constructive feedback to each other to find the best options of service delivery to the public. Notably, they did not identify the relationship with ambulance services as one of accountability due to different governance arrangements. This demonstrates that the 2017 legislation has changed how Fire and Rescue Services perceive horizontal accountability. Nonetheless, Fire and Rescue Services before and after the 2017 legislation continued to feel horizontally accountable when working in teams within their services, as they were held bureaucratically accountable by their line managers.

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there was limited diagonal bureaucratic accountability within Fire and Rescue Services. Fire and Rescue Services were accountable to HMFSI, which was subsequently superseded by the Audit Commission, before inspections were abolished in 2010. Fire and Rescue Services became subject to the sector-led improvement regime that proved to be a weak source of bureaucratic accountability. The 2017 legislation established HMICFRS, which provided bureaucratic scrutiny on services and focused on their performance. Fire and Rescue Services started to feel bureaucratically accountable to the inspectorate under both FRA and PFCC governance models. However, they indicated that the inspection process had introduced some burdensome bureaucratic requirements into their services, which could ultimately create accountability overloads.

Overall, Fire and Rescue Services changed how they understand bureaucratic accountability in all three dimensions (vertical, horizontal, and diagonal) as result of the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. More specifically, they felt greater bureaucratic accountability at various levels under both governance models as result of the 2017 legislation.

Chapter 6.   Political accountability

6.1.   Introduction

Political accountability relies on responsiveness to the concerns of key stakeholders in representative democratic systems (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). In a political accountability relationship, the representative makes decisions on behalf of the constituents, who can dismiss the representative(s) through elections. The representative might be an individual politician, for example an MP, a local councillor, a portfolio holder, or a scrutiny chair, or representatives might embrace a group of politicians, for example, a sub-committee or board, which might or might not be politically balanced.

Political accountability requires Fire and Rescue Services to be responsive to their communities, and their needs and ambitions. Fire and Rescue Services are accountable to their communities through their governing bodies who directly or indirectly elect them. The section below describes Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability. It demonstrates who Fire and Rescue Services feel accountable to in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions of accountability ('*accountability to whom*') and examines how these accountability understandings have changed in the context of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (see Figures 13 and 14).
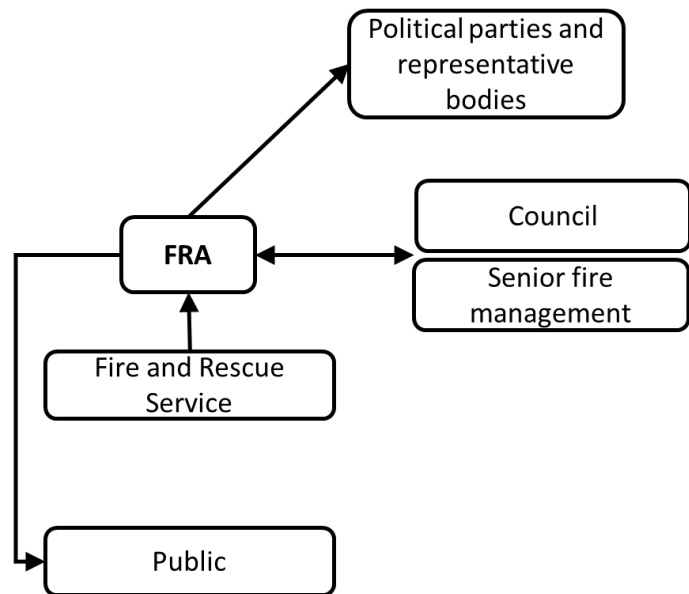
Figure 13: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability relationships in FRA-governed Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation
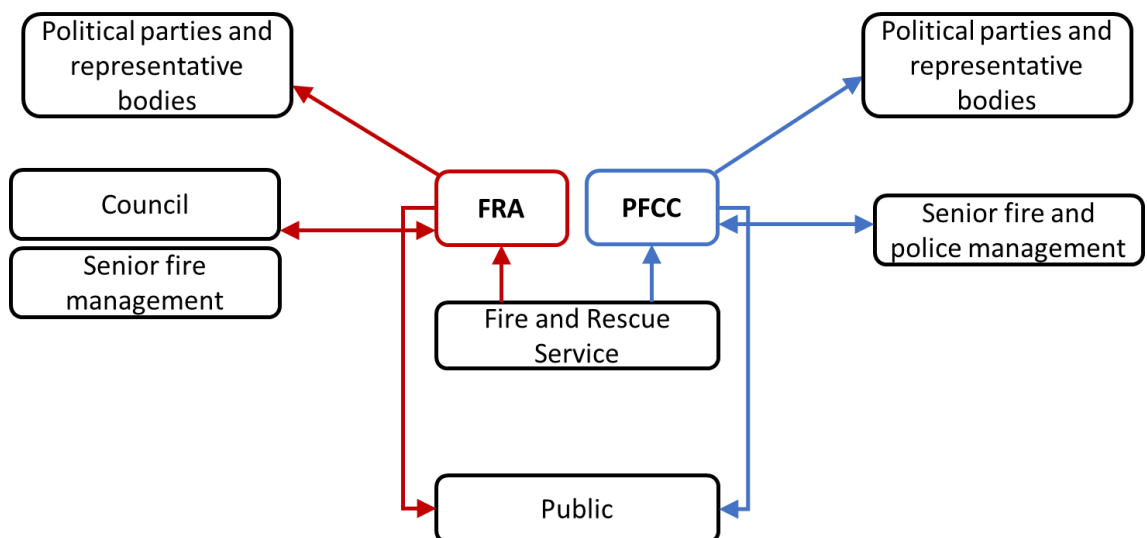
Figure 14: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability relationships in FRA-governed (in red) and in PFCC-governed (in blue) Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

6.2. Accountability arrangements prior to the Policing and Crime Act 2017

6.2.1. Vertical accountability

The sub-themes of local elections and representation, decision-making, public engagement and transparency, and the responsiveness to communities, emerged from the thematic coding on the vertical dimension of political accountability.

6.2.1.1. Local elections and representation

Different types of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) adopted different ways of holding Fire and Rescue Services to account through elected local councillors. Under the combined and metropolitan FRAs, FRA members are drawn from councillors elected to local authorities, based on their size and political representation. Under county council arrangements, the council is the FRA and all councillors attend full council meetings. However, the Fire and Rescue Service has a single individual, a lead cabinet member for fire (also called a portfolio holder), who is appointed by the leader of the council, who makes a range of delegated decisions on Fire and Rescue Services.

Overall, under all three types of FRA governance, the public were theoretically able to hold their FRA indirectly to account. The FRA governance model enabled local councillors to be directly elected by voters, albeit not directly elected to sit on an FRA. In practice, some senior managers (e.g., Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Case Study 4) found that the FRA arrangements did not provide political accountability, because communities were not able to have their direct say on who sat on an FRA. In addition, residents had limited ability to dismiss FRA members. This in practice meant that communities had limited powers to hold individuals sitting on FRAs to account.

6.2.1.2. Decision-making

Local councillors sitting on FRAs typically represented their political parties. The vast majority of councillors were members of political groups representing national and local political parties. A minority of local councillors were independent, and in some councils the independents formed a political group, although others chose to operate outside of any group or party affiliation. Senior managers and front-line staff believed that the FRA

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governance model facilitated constructive discussions and negotiations to take place between FRA members from different political parties.

However, senior managers felt that decision-making processes were largely politically influenced. Interviewees pointed out a number of examples, when local councillors made decisions along party-political lines.

> *"We've got a Labour-led FRA and the FBU are obviously also with a Labour affiliation, so that has had an impact in the past in a way that it should not have, political impact… we were approaching a trade dispute because we had sought to deliver wider preventative services to our communities, one, because of the value it could bring in terms of the services that we already deliver, so we were able to access more vulnerable people. And two, it was commissioned services, so it provided us with more input. Due to the pressure that our Unions applied locally to our local authorities and our members [FRA], we had to exit from those arrangements…So that does have an impact on accountability to the public I would say."*
>
> (Director of Strategy, Case Study 2)

Participants pointed out that Labour-led FRAs had been influenced to a great extent by Trade Unions (with Labour affiliation) (see Section 6.2.3.). This, according to senior managers, meant that political affiliations ultimately had an impact on delivery of services. This was seen to be exacerbated when a council majority was from the same political party as the central government in Westminster.

> *"If there's a government push on an item, and it links to something we're doing, you'll find that it will go through very quickly, whereas if it's a Labour council and it's a Conservative government, then your changes and things take a lot more time because you've got to convince the local people."*
>
> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 3)

The same party majority in both central government and the local FRA ultimately helped FRAs to take controversial decisions for Fire and Rescue Services. In the case when central government had a different party majority than the local FRA, the decision-making process could take considerably longer and was more complex, as the proposals from two different political parties would clash. Overall, decision-making on FRAs was easier when an FRA had a majority of local councillors from a single political party who agreed on certain matters.

"You've got a Labour group and a Conservative group, we know Labour views are different to Conservative views, so quite often they won't agree, don't agree, and that can make it difficult for us to deliver the best service to the public."

(DCFO, Case Study 2)

Notwithstanding the political decision-making, FRAs seemed to be more politically accountable to local people than fire officers, as they had their final say on decisions taken in the service. This was also the case even if the decisions taken might not have been best for local people. Nonetheless, senior management observed that local councillors sitting on FRAs would not make any unpopular decisions with regards to the Fire and Rescue Service immediately before local government elections.

"They're very fearful of change because if they're in a political position, any change that affects their seat, they are very worried about... So if we say, we need to close that fire station because we're not getting value for money, if that's in a councillor's area and then the public say to them, well you're the lead councillor and you're allowing them to close a fire station, rather than them promoting the benefit that would come from closing that fire station, they then act against us and say, well actually it's really going to affect my seat in the next elections, so don't close that fire station, which actually is not the best thing to do in that area."

(Area Manager 1, Case Study 3)

On many occasions, FRA members were fearful of making any significant changes or taking controversial operational decisions in the run up to elections, because this would affect their chances of getting re-elected. Senior fire officers perceived local councillors' re-election as more important to local councillors than providing the public with value for money services. Party-political decision-making was detrimental to the service delivery. The decisions made by FRAs often reflected political or individual priorities rather than benefits for local communities. According to senior officers, members of FRAs did not feel that residents can politically hold them to account, even though they were taking controversial operational decisions in the run up to elections. This is because the FRA governance model did not provide any direct mechanisms to hold them to account.

6.2.1.3.   Public engagement and transparency

Before the Policing and Crime Act 2017, FRAs were required to have transparent processes in place to deliver accountability to the public and actively engage with local communities (DCLG 2012a). Local communities were therefore able to actively help to plan their local service delivery through effective consultation and involvement. For example, residents were able to participate in consultations on a local Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), which was the basis of the service's strategy and ultimately the service's performance plan to create safer communities in the longer term.

In addition to the consultation exercises, FRAs were required to have arrangements in place to ensure that their decisions were open to public scrutiny. This was enabled by the FRA transparency mechanisms - the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014 and the Local Government Transparency Code (DCLG 2015). FRAs, like other English local authorities, had to publish numerous documents, including senior salaries, organisation charts, and procurement information. FRAs also published papers and reports both before and after their meetings, which were open for public scrutiny.

> *"So previously [before the 2017 legislation], the FRA was required to publish papers, reports that were going to any of its meeting, regardless of whether it was the full authority or any of its committee meetings, ten days before, so they were open for public scrutiny…I'm not saying that thousands of people ever looked at those, but the point was that they were there, and they were available, should people wish to see them. They then were required to provide minutes against those meetings, again within a certain timescale, so that you could see an audit trail very clearly as a member of the public should you want to."*
>
> (CFO, Case Study 5)

Each service had all the relevant FRA meeting data stored on its respective websites, open for public scrutiny. The public were able to access the data on their local service's websites, but, according to Fire and Rescue Services, the data were often insufficient on their own for residents to scrutinise their local service.

FRA meetings were open for the public to attend and meet their local councillors. Residents were able to raise any issues concerning their local fire service. However, some senior managers suggested that these arrangements were not fit for purpose as they were not

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easily accessible to communities. They found online and more frequent meetings to be a better way of communicating relevant decisions made on FRAs to the public.

Nonetheless, residents were not particularly concerned about their Fire and Rescue Services' strategic matters because they had a lot of trust in the services, which ultimately meant that they did not wish to scrutinise some of their activities, or they trusted other key local stakeholders, such as local authorities, to act as 'proxy' scrutinisers. Participants at both senior management and front-line levels suggested that public ultimately wanted fire services to be responsive to emergency incidents.

> *'I think the reality of it is the public aren't that interested quite a lot of the time, as long as their house is on fire and a fire engine turns up, they're happy with that. '*

(Director 1, Case Study 1)

> *"It's the engagement and the interest in fire is low. Crime, health, they're all much higher, and the thing is there are acute issues and also chronic issues that people can see every day…. we don't get many complaints. And I think it's quite difficult to traverse through … if you've got an issue with the fire and rescue service, who do you speak to?"*

(ACFO 1, Case Study 3)

Overall, communities had a number of opportunities to engage with their local Fire and Rescue Services and the respective FRA. They included public consultations, attending FRA meetings, and direct conversations with their local councillors. However, most residents did not actively engage in the detailed formal consultation processes of their local fire services and most of the residents were not aware who has oversight of their service. In practice, the public were relatively unaware of how to hold their Fire and Rescue Service to account, nor how to engage with the service.

6.2.1.4.   Responsiveness to communities

Fire and Rescue Services were responsive to communities through FRAs. Each local councillor as an elected member sitting on an FRA represented their local communities' interest within the area, in which they had been elected, to serve their term of office. In

many cases, senior management found that by representing the communities, local councillors were able to deal with the communities' issues at a local level.

> *"They [FRA members] would have visited their local fire station, they would have got to know the crews and they would have been aware of what's going on within their local area. So, the local community … if they'd got issues, they'd be able to go directly to their councillor, and their councillor could have come to the authority… they would have had contact with their local fire station, with officers, would have been able to … really deal with people's issues on a local level."*
>
> (Director of Finance, Case Study 5)

Senior managers understood that local councillors were often approached by their constituents about various issues, including Fire and Rescue Services, and they were able to bring them into the FRA meetings. This suggests that FRA members, although making decisions as local councillors, were actively involved in engaging and representing communities' needs and were ultimately politically accountable to their constituents.

6.2.2. Horizontal accountability

In this subsection, horizontal political accountability is operationalised in personal relationships between officers and politicians, and focuses on providing constructive feedback.

6.2.2.1.   Personal relationships between officers and politicians

Fire and Rescue Services and FRAs worked together, not only on the basis of oversight and supervision (see Chapter 5 - Bureaucratic accountability), but also in the interest of local communities. Senior managers found relationships between officers and politicians to be crucial to working together and ultimately affecting the political decision-making within Fire and Rescue Services.

"It all really depends on those relationships between officers and the politicians, and that is so important, and being able to work together collectively and respectfully for each other to do the best for the service…And it's only through really understanding the political dynamic and then the politicians understanding the operational dynamic that you can then reach a consensus about what the best thing to do for the organisation and for the community."

(CFO, Case Study 1)

"I see some county council Fire and Rescue Services doing extremely well. I think it's all to do with that relationship the CFO has with…potentially the lead of the county council, or the lead of a combined fire authority."

(ACFO 2, Case Study 4)

Although FRA members were overseeing senior managers' work, the relationship between them in this case was of a horizontal nature of mutual accountability as they both worked towards developing policies and strategies, and had the same goal of maintaining effective service delivery. In particular, the relationship between CFOs and leaders of FRAs was important to providing effective leadership of Fire and Rescue Services on behalf of the public. Senior officers and politicians were ultimately acting in the best interest of communities when working together. They held each other accountable when providing constructive feedback on proposed decisions for the services. Negotiations held between them ultimately aimed to facilitate learning and improvement, maintain effective service delivery, and keep local communities safe.

6.2.3.   Diagonal accountability

Diagonal political accountability characterises the relationship between Fire and Rescue Services and FRAs on the one hand, and a third party (such as a political party or representative body) on the other. In such relationships, the third party might be influencing FRA's decisions about Fire and Rescue Services, which ultimately affect residents or Fire and Rescue Services' staff.

6.2.3.1.   Local and national politics

Prior to 2017, political parties indirectly influenced decision-making within Fire and Rescue Services because local councillors sat on FRAs. These councillors come from different

political parties, or they can be independent, whether sitting as part of a formal independent 'group' or individually. Senior managers and front-line staff both considered that political party membership affected certain decisions within Fire and Rescue Services.

> *"Depending on if it's a blue or a red council will depend on what goes through or doesn't go through."*
>
> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 3)

> *"It depends if your authority is Labour- or Conservative-led makes a massive difference in the political side of things."*
>
> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

Local councillors on many occasions voted along party lines on their FRAs and ultimately made decisions that chimed with their party's political policy or strategy. Senior fire officers were, however, not aware if local councillors had been instructed by politicians higher up the political party or simply felt that they should be voting according to political party lines. Under this type of accountability there were no powers to enforce compliance, however, the consequences from political parties could have nevertheless been significant (ultimately local councillors could be expelled from their political party for voting against their party's manifesto).

6.2.3.2.   Representative bodies

Political accountability also operated diagonally between FRAs, Fire and Rescue Services and the employees' representative bodies. Representative bodies included unions, associations and/or professions representing groups of individuals within the fire sector. They are generally acknowledged in accredited collective bargaining arrangements over terms and conditions of service. Their objectives are not always synonymous with the objectives of the governing body of the service. The evidence showed that the representative bodies, primarily trade unions, had a significant, but indirect, influence over the decisions undertaken by FRAs. This influence was often on long-term policy and strategy but could have also been on a particular issue or short-term decision.

Fire and Rescue Services are heavily unionised as a service. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is a trade union that represents the professional voice of firefighters. Front-line staff believed that their responsibilities were sometimes being taken too far away from their

core duties (Firefighter 1, Case Study 1) and the union's role is to protect firefighters' rights and the fundamental values of the service from any reforms that might jeopardise them.

The FBU had a strong political influence on the service, as indicated by the participants. The union would often put pressure on local FRAs to change decisions that might already have been made. In some cases, this led to national or local industrial disputes between the management, FRAs and the FBU (Case Study 2 and Case Study 6).

> *"The point that led us to an industrial dispute was where the staff, via the representative bodies, went round the chief to the FRA, to get them to change a decision that they'd made."*

> (ACFO 2, Case Study 2)

In Case Study 2, the staff, represented by the union, undermined the Chief's choices, and challenged the FRA to change the decisions. CFOs did not have operational independence (see Chapter 5 – Bureaucratic accountability), meaning that they were not able to take operational decisions without FRA's approval. All decisions potentially had to go through FRAs. In this case, the Chief's decision was challenged by the unions on the FRA. The FBU was traditionally associated with the Labour Party, and the FRA in Case Study 2 also had a Labour majority. Subsequently, the individuals representing the Labour Party on the FRA helped to effect the ultimate change preferred by the unions. In Case Study 6, there was also a case that nearly led to industrial action. A proposed change was not introduced in a mutually acceptable manner and led to industrial issues between officers, the FRA and the FBU.

This shows that the FBU as a representative body had an influence in affecting decisions in Fire and Rescue Services. This was particularly seen in the cases where the FRA had a Labour majority. Workforces, through their union representatives, challenged decisions taken by CFOs or FRAs, which led to the organisation taking a decision that chimed with union preferences. The representative bodies had no formal powers to enforce compliance on CFOs or FRAs, however, the potential consequences of union's action could have nevertheless been severe (for example, front-line staff going on strike).

The next section of this chapter moves on to explain the understandings of political accountability within vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

6.3. Accountability arrangements after the Policing and Crime Act 2017

6.3.1. Vertical accountability

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 enabled Fire and Rescue Services to be taken over by a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). The sections below describe the sub-themes that emerged from the thematic coding on the vertical dimension of political accountability, in the traditional FRA governance model (the representation model) and in the PFCC governance model (the governance model), following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

6.3.1.1. Local elections and representation

In services that remained under the FRA governance model, the public continued to indirectly choose their local councillors sitting on an FRA. As result of the 2017 legislation, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) or the PCC representative has been able to sit on an FRA. PCC is directly elected by local public in elections and is an additional politician, amongst other local councillors, appointed to sit on an FRA.

> "*The PCC is just … another elected member*".

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 1)

Senior managers perceived FRA members, including a PCC (or a PCC representative), as politicians elected by residents, and subsequently appointed by council leaders to represent public interests. Indirect elections under the FRA governance model meant that local communities were not able to directly dismiss their FRA members (apart from the PCC), however, they were still responsible for electing individuals who could potentially sit on an FRA.

Since 2017, in services that adopted the PFCC governance model, residents have been able to elect an individual politician in PCC/PFCC elections in their area. The PFCC governance model has enabled local public to directly choose their preferred individual in charge of both policing and fire service. Senior managers found this way of electing the authority more accountable than the indirectly-elected FRA arrangements.

"One thing you can't argue is that it's less transparent and it's less accountable than what people have currently got because no fire authorities are elected to be fire authorities, people are elected to be councillors in councils, they are then appointed on to fire authorities. There is no [direct] electoral accountability in that whatsoever…if you don't like them [PFCC], you can get rid of them at the end of the day, and you can vote for somebody else."

(CFO, Case Study 4)

According to senior officers, the PFCC governance model provided direct political accountability to local communities who were able to elect and dismiss their PFCC, if they were not pleased with the politician overseeing their local fire service.

6.3.1.2. Decision-making

The process of decision-making changed in both governance models as result of the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. In the FRA governance model, decision-making remained in the hands of FRA members who were local councillors. However, the 2017 Act has enabled a PCC or a PCC representative to sit on an FRA and directly influence the decision-making by having voting rights. Senior managers continued to believe that FRA governance arrangements enabled diverse conversations on certain matters during FRA meetings, because of a number of individuals involved in decision-making who could step in and contribute to certain decisions.

Nonetheless, they also agreed that the FRA governance model remained politically driven. Having a PCC or a PCC representative sitting on an FRA had no significant difference to the political nature of the strategic decision-making process as the individual was another politician representing their political party on an FRA.

"PCC isn't really making that much difference currently to us."

(CFO, Case Study 1)

"If you have got six or seven Labour members and one PCC, the Labour members, if they want to be political, will still vote in terms of the Labour Party, and they won't necessarily change their view because you've got a PCC on the authority."

(DCFO, Case Study 2)

Senior managers found the presence of the PCC or the PCC representative as ultimately not affecting their final decision-making process. This is because local councillors outnumbered the individual PCC or the PCC representative, and the decision-making process remained heavily politically influenced. FRA members continued to vote in favour of their political party and often ignored the PCC's or the PCC representative's views. Decisions continued to be based upon political affiliations and potential impact on re-election, which meant that they were fairly cautious and 'conservative' in nature.

> *"That's frustrating because they're [FRA members] saying, no we're not doing that because that puts my seat at risk, or that causes local political issue and angst. And so, it's frustrating to the chiefs that they can't deliver what they're being told they need to deliver by national government."*
>
> (DCFO, Case Study 3)

On occasions, FRAs decided on operational matters in line with their party-political affiliations rather than advice focused upon effective service delivery (Case Study 2). Senior managers were unanimous in their view that politics should be separated out from service delivery, to provide the best service to communities.

Firefighters were more concerned about the reformed 'representation' FRA model. They indicated that if a new PCC is elected, he or she could potentially change the political agenda on the FRA and ultimately take over their local Fire and Rescue Service. In contrast to their senior officers, front-line staff believed that having a PCC or a PCC representative had meant changes to their FRAs.

> *"What happens if the PCC goes, someone else comes in? You don't know, you're never going to know but … I would say there's an element of anxiety about it."*
>
> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

Front-line staff feared the unknown political consequences of being overseen by a different individual, whether it was a new PCC on the FRA or a PFCC. They were anxious about potential changes to the general strategy for the service, which could affect the front-line staff as well as the senior managers, and ultimately local communities.

In the PFCC governance model, the PFCC is ultimately responsible for decision-making. Senior managers claimed that having a single politician responsible for their Fire and Rescue Service had brought 'short-termism' into the fire governance. Most senior

managers noted that PFCCs, especially in the periods before the elections, would make populist decisions, which they thought would help PFCCs get re-elected. However, those decisions often had a detrimental impact on the local Fire and Rescue Service and ultimately local communities. For example, some PFCCs decided not to increase the precept for the local taxpayers, which ultimately affected the service's capacities and capabilities. This reduced the quality of the service that the Fire and Rescue Service provided to residents. On the other hand, it encouraged the public to vote for the existing PFCC to keep their local council tax at the same level as the year before. Decision-making under the PFCC-governance model was therefore considered to be more influenced by the political election timetable.

> *"As it gets closer to an election, the PFCC is looking for more and more good news to put in their press releases. And good news stories are fairly short lived obviously in political circles, you're only as good as your last headline at the end of the day, so they [PFCC] want to keep that going."*
>
> (CFO, Case Study 4)

> *"Our commissioner won't make any unpopular decisions in the six months prior to an election period, which is a big frustration. So, you're working to a political timetable which is unhelpful."*
>
> (Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 5)

> *"There are times when there is political involvement, which can be frustrating, particularly around the General Election time, we had some changes which we wanted to make, and it became very political …it was very much motivated by the General Election and the involvement of local MPs. And once that had passed, the interest all disappeared from everybody."*
>
> (DCFO, Case Study 6)

Senior officers suggested that PFCCs take political decisions because they feel pressured by national and local political leaders. PFCCs, according to senior management, often felt that their governance position was largely due to their political affiliation, and they felt the need to reciprocate it through loyalty to the party-political line. This happened primarily around the General Election time when PFCCs made certain decisions that did not harm the electoral chances of their party colleagues.

Having a single politician overseeing a Fire and Rescue Service also means that the decision-making process can significantly change every time there is an election. A new individual from a different political party can come along with a new agenda for the service and change the direction in which it might be heading in the future.

> *"The PFCC changes, and we have someone who's fairly left or fairly right, you could find yourself having to sort of with agendas that probably have little to do with the fire service in some respects."*

> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

The possibility of a change in political agendas was perceived as a major concern for most senior managers who believed that political stability in the strategy and direction of Fire and Rescue Services was very important. In comparison, the FRA governance model was not significantly affected by the elections as the political composition of FRAs does not change as often as the individual politician.

6.3.1.3. Public engagement and transparency

One of the stated aims of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 was to enhance the accountability and transparency of the services to the public. Fire and Rescue Services have been required to provide transparency and accountability to their communities for their actions, as well as opportunities for communities to help to plan their local service development (Home Office 2018). They have been legally obliged to provide such opportunities under both governance models.

Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA arrangements continued to comply with the Local Authority Transparency Code 2015 and the Local Accountability and Audit Act 2014, as they did before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (see Chapter 7 – Legal accountability). Despite publishing required information, local communities were not particularly interested in directly scrutinising their local Fire and Rescue Service.

> *"It [Policing and Crime Act 2017] gives potentially greater opportunity for the public to make clear about what they think should be the governance model. However, I would say … the public is perhaps not as engaged with that process as they could be, or they have the opportunity to be?"*

> (CFO, Case Study 2)

The opportunities for communities to get involved in the development of their local service remained in place. The 2017 Act has additionally enabled the communities to have their say on consultations when a PCC wishes to take over their local fire service. However, residents remained largely reluctant to be involved in the planning processes of their local Fire and Rescue Service.

Fire and Rescue Services that experienced a transfer of governance to a PFCC have been required to comply with transparency requirements under section 11 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) Order 2011, rather than the equivalent Local Government Acts. As with the FRA governance arrangements, these would include publishing senior officers' salaries, organisational charts, budgets, records of decisions taken, and minutes of public meetings. However, this meant that the PFCC, or more precisely the Office of the PFCC, instead of an FRA, would publish the information and run public consultations under the PFCC model of governance. According to participants, this meant that more people have been able to get involved in the service's planning.

> "*When we do consultations through the PFCC, we get huge responses compared to when we've done it on our own or under the old governance arrangements, so we get more public accountability*."
>
> (DCFO, Case Study 6)

Senior managers found that consultation response rates were higher under the PFCC governance model than under the FRA governance model. For example, communities were consulted on the potential increase of the precept for both policing and Fire and Rescue Service in their local area, and the Fire and Rescue Plan, which sets out the service's strategic vision, priorities, and objectives.

Residents have also been given other opportunities to actively take part in the services' decision-making processes under the PFCC governance structures. The quarterly FRA meetings have been replaced with monthly meetings, attended by a CFO, a PFCC and a Chief Constable and other senior managers. They have been live streamed online, and despite low public attendance, in some cases, the communities have had the opportunity to raise questions about their service.

"Public accountability meeting is the opportunity for the fire service to explain our performance, and for the PFCC and the public to attack it, to scrutinise it, to question it, to praise it, to whatever."

(CFO, Case Study 6)

"The scrutiny is provided by the commissioner to me, and that's streamed to the county, so anyone who wants to log on, can log on to it, should they wish to."

(CFO, Case Study 5)

Senior fire officers felt that regular public meetings with the PFCC provided a source of accountability and transparency to residents. Accountability was evident in cases where the meetings facilitated interactions between the PFCC, the fire service, and the members of the public. In cases, where interaction was not possible, they at least offered more transparency into the decision-making process.

Some services, however, experienced reduced levels of transparency in terms of publishing key or relevant documents. As previously stated, Fire and Rescue Services that transferred to the PFCC governance model have been required to comply with different transparency requirements, meaning that the Office of the PFCC has been responsible for publishing documents. In one case, senior managers found that transparency had reduced in comparison to the FRA governance model, as some information, including meeting minutes, was no longer published online before, during, and after the decision-making process.

"In terms of transparency, that could be improved because I would like all the papers to be in the public domain, I would like the meetings to be in the public domain…the communities would understand then that they can, if they so wish, look at the minutes of those meetings, see how the discussions, the dialogue and the debate around certain topics has progressed within those meetings, rather than just having a decision note published on the commissioner's website without the detail, because a decision note really just says a decision's been made. You can't then go into the granularity of detail of how that decision has been made, where it's come from and the discussions around that. So, I think that would improve the accountability."

(DCFO, Case Study 5)

Under the FRA governance model, items to be submitted for decision to the FRA were published in advance, alongside reports and recommendations, before the FRA made their

decision, and subsequently decisions were captured in the meeting minutes, which were published according to established timescales. Senior managers found this to be a transparent method of demonstrating to the public the available options and recommendations in meeting agendas before the final decisions of the FRA. Under the PFCC arrangements, decision notes were required to be published only after a decision was taken, clearly reducing transparency of decision-making and ultimately reducing resident's possibilities to actively hold the PFCC accountable for the decisions.

6.3.1.4. Responsiveness to communities

Fire and Rescue Services have been responsive to communities either through an FRA or a PFCC. The FRA 'representation' model has allowed PCCs to sit on an FRA and have voting rights, but also enabled other co-opted members from partner organisations to contribute towards debates and decisions on the delivery of local services. This in turn, as reported by the interviewees, has enabled fire services to operate in a way that involved the representatives of local communities in the service's decision-making process, thus making the service more accountable to communities.

> *"I think with FRAs, officers in many cases are able to form a relationship with the public, and have a wide connection through elected members, that's less likely with a PFCC because… in our FRA each of our members will have a connection with their local areas and their local stations."*
>
> (Director of Strategy 1, Case Study 2)

Senior managers found local councillors, as well as PCCs and other community representatives on FRAs, to be bringing an understanding of the needs of local people. This is because they have connections with their constituents, hold meetings and surgeries within their local areas, and therefore they can bring up any issues raised by the communities into the FRA meetings.

The PFCC model of governance was introduced, *inter alia,* to improve accountability to the public. PFCCs have been portrayed as directly-elected individuals who are meant to be directly engaging with their communities. Fire and Rescue Services that adopted the PFCC governance model found that their PFCC, despite being a politician elected to improve accountability to the public, had in fact less direct engagement with their constituents than the FRA members:

"I don't know of any member of the public that's contacted the PFCC to hold us to account for anything."

(CFO, Case Study 5)

"Obviously the PFCC hasn't got the time to go out, although [the PFCC] does go out and visit fire stations, has done, it's probably more of a challenge for a PFCC to have that sort of local impact that the [FRA] member potentially would have had previously."

(Director of Finance, Case Study 5)

Participants found the single-person governance to be difficult in terms of responsiveness to the residents and fire service needs. Some senior managers said that it was impractical or unfeasible in terms of capacity and capability on a day-to-day basis.

Although the level of public interest in fire services remained low, participants found that sufficient communications channels for residents were in place to directly contact their PFCC. For example, PFCCs held surgeries for their constituents. There was also an opportunity for local people to speak to the Office of the PFCC.

"I think the access to be able to speak to the office of the PFCC is there, whereas previously there was nothing of that nature… now there's a place to go and speak to someone… So, there's a lot more accountability now than under the old arrangements."

(DCFO, Case Study 6)

Some participants believed that the PFCC model of governance provided more accountability because it offered more direct communication channels than the FRA governance model. However, there were also contrary views that the FRA was more accountable. FRA members represented their local areas and had day-to-day direct contact with their communities, whereas, although some PFCCs held surgeries with the public, they were not very well attended and PFCCs did not have sufficient resources to actively engage with the constituents at a local level.

6.3.2. Horizontal accountability

Horizontal accountability continued to be important between individuals operating and collaborating in the same areas of interest, which is the safety of their local communities.

This involved personal relationships between fire officers and politicians at the leadership level.

6.3.2.1. Personal relationships between officers and politicians

In the FRA governance model, the relationships between senior officers and local councillors remained crucial to working towards developing the right policies and strategies for their local service and for the best interest of the public. Since the 2017 legislation and PCCs being able to sit on FRAs, a closer relationship between senior officers and PCCs developed. Some senior officers were concerned that this might encourage PCCs to go ahead and develop a business case to take over the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Service. They found having a good working relationship with their PCC as crucial in maintaining the existing governance arrangements.

> *"In terms of the PCC and the CFO, I think that our PCC is very moderate, it's been very vocal and very open around not seeing a need to take over or bid for governance of the fire service, which I think has appeased a lot of members on the FRA and made that more of a relaxed situation. So, I'd say relationships and personalities are a very large contributing factor in terms of where we are in the current position of the service."*

(Area Manager 2, Case Study 1)

Maintaining healthy governance relationships between the senior officer and politicians, including PCCs, within the Fire and Rescue Services, was perceived as very important by managers, as it could obviate the desire of PCCs from taking over the governance of their local service.

Under the PFCC model of governance, the relationship between officers and politicians has also been important. The relationship between CFO and PFCC, both ultimately responsible for their fire service, has become crucial to the success of the PFCC governance model. CFO and PFCC have on many occasions been accompanied by Chief Constable responsible for policing, as both police and Fire and Rescue Service worked towards maintaining or improving community safety within their area.

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"The relationship is very important… the relationship between a PFCC and a CFO, or a chief constable, is one built upon trust, one built upon mutual respect, and one built upon the needs of the community… to ensure that we're not always going to agree but we've got to have that safe environment to be able to bounce ideas between all parties."

(DCFO, Case Study 5)

The relationship between PFCCs, CFOs and Chief Constables was built on informal mutual accountability during private discussions. The discussions were formal as well as informal, but all focussed upon the safety of local communities. In the early stages, they were crucial as the senior officers had to pass the knowledge and understanding about the fire service, including direction of travel, and community needs and aspirations, to PFCCs, to be able to allow them to fulfil their role in the most effective manner.

On many occasions, however, the relationship between CFOs and PFCCs was challenged, mainly because of the political nature and objectives of PFCCs. Senior officers tried to persuade them to make decisions based upon operational matters and safety of the public, rather than political aspirations.

"PFCCs' assumption was that because the political view was like this, then of course that's what my view would be as a professional officer. And so there was a lot of time spent shifting that position of thinking, because it was wrong."

(CFO, Case Study 5)

Overall, in both governance models, the relationship between officers and politicians was seen as a significant element of sound governance arrangements and ultimately the common service objective of keeping local people safe. However, the relationship appeared more of a personal matter in the PFCC governance model, where a collective dialogue between three individuals takes place to ensure that they hold each other accountable for safety of the public.

6.3.3. Diagonal accountability

Diagonal accountability relationships continued to play a significant role under political accountability. Fire and Rescue Services through their governing bodies have remained indirectly accountable to political parties and representative bodies.

6.3.3.1. Local and national politics

Party-political affiliation remained an important factor in political accountability relationships. In all six areas examined in this study, there was a mixture of Labour, Conservative and Independent leadership in the FRAs, while all three of the PFCC services were led by Conservatives.

Under the FRA governance arrangements, PCCs from the Conservative Party were more interested in taking over the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Services than PCCs from other political parties. In one case study, the fact that the PCC and the FRA were both Labour Party affiliated meant that they mostly agreed about the strategy for the service.

> *"The manifesto of the Labour Party back in 2015 was to abolish PCCs. So, I think there's been an influence from the Labour Party in why the PCC has not wanted to consider taking over the Fire and Rescue Service. But there's also a very good positive relationship between the FRA and the PCC, probably based upon them being from the same political persuasion."*
>
> (CFO, Case Study 1)

> *"Because the chair of the FRA and the PCC is a Labour chair, they almost got together and agree a political agenda."*
>
> (ACFO 2, Case Study 2)

In case study 1, the Labour PCC was open about not seeing a need to take over the Fire and Rescue Service's governance. On the other hand, the Conservative PCC from Case Study 3 was interested in a potential transfer from a Conservative-led FRA to the PFCC model. This suggests that the same political party affiliation of the PCC, as well as the FRA or the county council, facilitates developing a complementary approach to Fire and Rescue Services. However, a more politically diverse FRA with opposing politicians might be more likely to effectively scrutinise the service and ask challenging questions.

Under the PFCC governance model, PFCCs can belong to a political party or can be independent, although most PCCs have an affiliation to a political party. All four PFCCs that have taken over the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Services have been associated with the Conservative Party. The PCCs were nominated by their political parties, and then elected by their local communities.

Interviewees also felt that Conservative PFCCs were closer to the central (Conservative) government than the FRA members.

"I think PFCCs are much closer to the Home Office than FRA members… I know for a fact my PFCC on various issues has directly rung up the Home Office or spoken to the minister in person about things, whereas that's very, very rare for a FRA member to do that, even the chair of a FRA to have that type of direct relationship with central government."

(CFO, Case Study 4)

"I think we are more accountable because of the PFCC and because of their political standing."

(Director of Finance, Case Study 5)

Fire and Rescue Services, through PFCCs, felt more accountable to central government than before under FRAs, because of the PFCCs' political positions. The Conservative party ideology and its policies, which the PFCCs generally agreed with, have indirectly influenced the Fire and Rescue Service's decisions. This could come directly from their local political party or the national political party, or from the Conservative central government, all complicating the accountability relationships of the PFCC, but clearly influencing their relationship with the CFO and senior managers. This suggests that the PFCCs, when scrutinising their local Fire and Rescue Services, have been influenced by party-political affiliations. PFCCs felt accountable, at least to some degree, to party leaders for their positions, as they had been nominated by their political parties. They were chosen from a list of candidates for the PFCC position by the party members. As a result, PFCCs generally aligned themselves with party-political positions.

"PFCCs are elected, so they've got a political element to it, and party line of course."

(Area Manager 2, Case Study 4)

"If you've got a Blue area…it would be very unusual if it wasn't a Conservative PFCC."

(Managing Director, Case Study 6)

Firefighters also found PFCCs to be heavily influenced by their party politics as well as the political agenda from central government. Most found the governance transfer to be a political manoeuvre to gain political power over their local Fire and Rescue Service.

"It's supposed to be apolitical but actually is it? … Is that person driven by a political agenda from the government or the party they represent, outside of being a PFCC."

(Watch Manager 2, Case Study 5)

"The move to a local commissioner-led model, supports an almost neo-liberal ideology from government, to try and move public sectors under local political figures, which can then, I guess, start to introduce, and implement more of the state's desire into the Fire and Rescue Service. "

(Director of Response, Case Study 5)

PFCCs felt largely accountable to their political parties and have been able to introduce and implement their party-political (Conservative) ambitions into Fire and Rescue Services. National and local political parties have had no powers to enforce PFCCs' compliance with party-political agenda. However, the consequences for PFCCs might nevertheless be significant if they are expelled from, or disciplined by, their political party.

6.3.3.2.   Representative bodies

Political accountability between the representative bodies and the Fire and Rescue Service has remained important after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. In FRA-governed services, the representative bodies continued to have a strong political influence on the service. The unions have had a significant influence over the Fire and Rescue Services. For example, in one service, the local FBU branch was promoting the transfer of governance to a PFCC model as opposed to remaining under the FRA, while in others it favoured the FRA model.

Under the PFCC governance model, the FBU continued to represent firefighters, and in some cases, challenged PFCCs' decisions. For example, pressures from the FBU caught one PFCC off guard and were seen as having created adverse publicity for the Fire and Rescue Service. This has had an effect on the political standing of the PFCCs and ultimately affected the PFCC's chances of getting re-elected in the elections.

"There will be some bad headlines created by the FBU which might not politically sit well with someone who wants to be elected."

(Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 5)

However, in some cases, the participants also found that the FBU had a remarkably good relationship with PFCCs, which was based on mutual respect and an open-door policy to discuss fire matters.

Overall, the representative bodies, most notably the FBU, continued to have a strong political influence on the service following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. They have been representing firefighters and challenging advice and/or decisions put forward by the service, the governing bodies, or the government. FRAs and PFCCs have been consequently mindful of the representative bodies' demands.

6.4.   Conclusions

This chapter discussed Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Table 14 summarises Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability in relation to vertical, horizontal, and diagonal directions.

Before the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the public were theoretically able to hold their local FRAs to account indirectly. The FRA governance model has enabled local councillors, who sit on FRAs, to be directly elected by voters, although not directly elected to sit on FRAs. In practice, under the FRA governance model residents had limited powers to hold FRA members to account and/or dismiss them. After the introduction of the 2017 legislation, in services that remained under the FRA governance model, the residents continued to indirectly choose their FRA members. However, a directly-elected PCC (or a PCC representative) has been able to sit on the FRA. Since 2017, in services that have adopted the PFCC governance model, residents are able to directly elect an individual politician in local PCC/PFCC elections. The public are also able to dismiss their PFCC, if they are not pleased with the politician, by electing another individual in local elections.

Table 14: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings on political accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

Directions	Main sub-themes	Before the 2017 Act	After the 2017 Act	
		FRA-governed services	FRA-governed services	PFCC-governed services
Vertical (Governing body – communities)	**Local elections and representation**	**Limited** ability to dismiss FRA members.	**Moderate** ability to dismiss FRA members, including the PCC.	**Extensive** ability to directly dismiss the PFCC.
	Decision-making	**Moderate** accountability in terms of political agenda on FRA.	**Moderate** accountability in terms of political agenda on FRA.	**Limited** accountability in terms of political agenda on FRA.
	Public engagement and transparency	**Limited** opportunities for the public to engage with the service. **Moderate** transparency.	**Limited** opportunities for the public to engage with the service. **Moderate** transparency.	**Extensive** opportunities for the public to engage with the service. **Limited** transparency.
	Responsiveness to communities	**Moderate** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Moderate** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Limited** level of connections with local areas and communities.
Horizontal (Senior managers – governing body)	**Personal relationships**	**Moderate** 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 (Fire and Rescue Service – political party/ representative body)	**Local and national politics**	**Moderate** level of influence of political parties on FRAs' decision-making.	**Moderate** level of influence of political parties on FRAs' decision-making.	**Extensive** level of influence of political parties on PFCCs' decision-making.
	Representative bodies	**Moderate** level of influence of representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making.	**Moderate** level of influence of representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making.	**Extensive** level of influence of representative bodies on PFCCs' decision-making.

Before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, political decision-making played an important role under both governance models. However, both senior managers and front-line staff felt that the PFCC governance model resulted in more politicisation because of one politician accountable for the service, whereas under the FRA governance model there were several people involved who could step in and debate decisions. Notwithstanding the increase in political decision-making, senior officers found post-2017 FRAs and PFCCs to be more politically accountable to local people than pre-2017 FRAs, as they were more representative of their communities when making final decisions, for which they were accountable.

Public engagement in both governance models has been relatively low, both before and after the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Residents have not been involved in the decision-making of their local Fire and Rescue Service, although they have had a number of opportunities to be engaged in services' planning. Following the introduction of the 2017 legislation, FRA members continued to represent their local areas and had day-to-day direct contact with their constituents. In contrast, although PFCCs held various engagements with local public, they were not very well attended and PFCCs did not have sufficient resources to directly engage with constituents at a local level. The PFCC governance model introduced greater opportunities for communities to actively take part in the services' decision-making processes, but it also brought limited transparency arrangements, which ultimately reduced possibilities to actively hold PFCCs to account.

Fire and Rescue Services and FRAs/PFCCs also held each other horizontally to account when working collaboratively in the interest of local communities. In both governance models, a good working relationship between senior officers and politicians was perceived as a sign of sound governance arrangements, and ultimately the common service objective of keeping local public safe. The relationship appeared more of a constructive debate in the PFCC governance model between PFCCs, CFOs and Chief Constables. Nonetheless, a closer relationship between PCCs and senior officers as well as local councillors also developed under the reformed FRA model.

Fire and Rescue Services have also been diagonally accountable to political parties and various representative bodies. Under this type of accountability there are no powers to enforce compliance, however, the consequences from political parties and

representative bodies could be significant. FRAs and PFCCs tended to vote party-politically and ultimately were taking decisions in line with their party's political policy or strategy, whereas trade unions were often pressuring the services to change their policies.

Overall, Fire and Rescue Services felt that the Policing and Crime Act 2017 brought greater focus on political accountability in all three directions. However, political or individual priorities continued to be a distortion of Fire and Rescue Services' accountability in both governance models.

Chapter 7.   Legal accountability

7.1.   Introduction

Legal accountability is similar to bureaucratic accountability, in that it involves the frequent application of control to a wide range of activities. However, in contrast to bureaucratic accountability, the source of control in legal accountability is external rather than internal to the organisation (Romzek and Dubnick 1987).

Fire and Rescue Services are in a legal accountability relationship with a number of external stakeholders who can impose legal sanctions and assert obligations if Fire and Rescue Services violate the law. They primarily include central government departments, but also the courts or other government bodies, particularly when incidents result in fatalities. Legal accountability can be mandatory or discretionary. When legal accountability is mandated, this means that it applies to all Fire and Rescue Services. If it is discretionary, Fire and Rescue Services have the right to undertake the role or action, but they also have the right not to undertake it.

The section below describes Fire and Rescue Services' understandings on legal accountability. It demonstrates who Fire and Rescue Services feel accountable to in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions of accountability ('*accountability to whom*') and examines how these accountability understandings have changed in the context of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (see Figures 15 and 16).
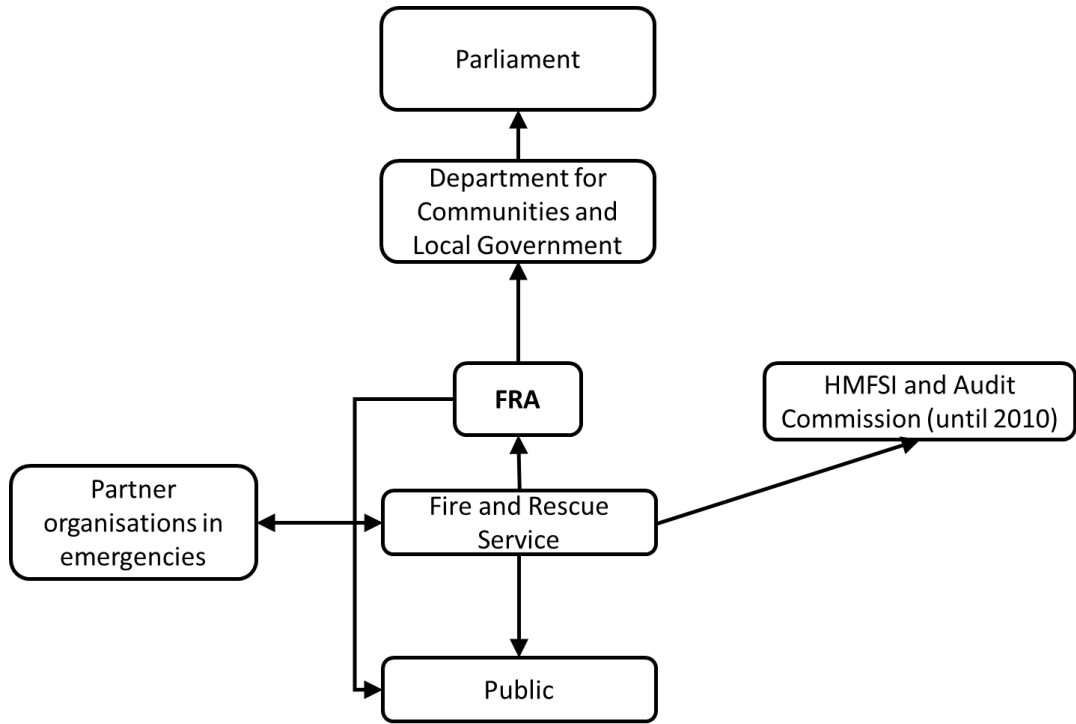
Figure 15: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability relationships in FRA-governed Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation
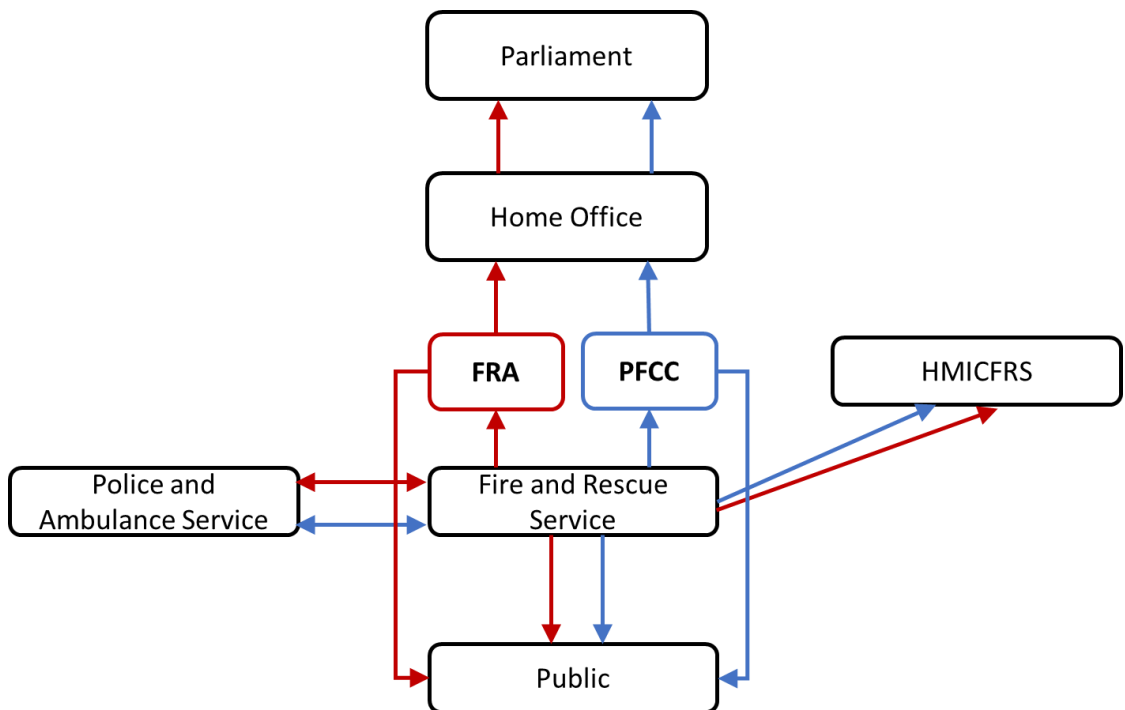
Figure 16: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability relationships in FRA-governed (in red) and in PFCC-governed (in blue) Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

7.2. Accountability arrangements prior to the Policing and Crime Act 2017

7.2.1. Vertical accountability

Legal accountability is primarily interpreted with regard to the vertical direction of accountability. In this section, the sub-themes of statutory requirements, financial compliance, and audit arrangements are discussed within the vertical dimension of legal accountability.

7.2.1.1. Statutory requirements

Fire and Rescue Services' legal accountability is enshrined in the statutory requirements through both primary legislation (see Murphy *et al.* 2020a, p. 19) and secondary legislation. Primary legislation is the principal legislation that has been passed by Parliament, whereas secondary legislation interprets and provides guidance on the implementation of primary legislation. The most significant piece of primary legislation that Fire and Rescue Services have been required to follow is the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It clarifies the duties and powers of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to fight fires, protect and prevent people and properties from fires, rescue people from road traffic collisions, and deal with other emergencies, including flooding and terrorist attacks.

Alongside this legislation, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 outlines the roles, responsibilities, and collaborative arrangements that Fire and Rescue Services (amongst others) must put in place in response to major civil emergencies. Fire and Rescue Services are identified as Category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, together with police, ambulance services, local authorities, the Environment Agency, and NHS bodies (Murphy and Lakoma 2023). Their role is to plan for, prevent, and respond to emergencies at the local level, and to collaborate with Category 1 and 2 responders at larger and more complex civil emergencies, whether at local, regional, or national levels (see section 7.2.2.1.). Fire and Rescue Services have been vertically accountable under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to whoever is the lead agency when in an emergency. The lead agency (whether it is police, fire, or ambulance service) is based on the nature of an incident.

Fire and Rescue Services have also been required to follow secondary legislation, most notably the national framework, first introduced in 2004. This operationalised the Fire and

Rescue Services Act 2004 and imposed detailed objectives, priorities, and requirements on the services.

> *"[We are] directly [accountable] through to the fire minister, and things come from the national framework document, which is our sort of guiding light."*

(Firefighter, Case Study 1)

Subsequent National Frameworks have been introduced over the years to update and replace the priorities for Fire and Rescue Services (Table 15).

Table 15: Fire and Rescue Service National Frameworks prior to 2017

Source: Author and adapted from ODPM (2004a), ODPM (2004b), ODPM (2006), DCLG (2008a), DCLG (2012a)

Version	Title	Content	Department	Publication date	Period
1	The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2004/05	The duty of Best Value and the importance of achieving continuous improvement. Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs).	ODPM	July 2004	1 year
2	The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2005/06	Partnership working with FRAs. Comprehensive Performance Assessment.	ODPM	December 2004	1 year
3	The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006-08	Greater emphasis on the delivery of equality and diversity.	ODPM	April 2006	2 years
4	Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11	Delivery of an enhanced resilience capability. Identification of new threats and challenges.	DCLG	May 2008	3 years
5	Fire and Rescue National Framework for England	Strengthened 'downwards' accountability between Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and local communities. Shifted primary responsibility from the government to the FRAs.	DCLG	July 2012	Open ended

The department overseeing Fire and Rescue Services in England has a duty to produce a policy and operational framework for all English Fire and Rescue Services. The Home Office passed responsibility for the fire service to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) in 2001, which then transferred it to the Office of the

Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in 2003, and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2005 (Raynsford 2016), before being transferred back to the Home Office in January 2016. Senior managers had mixed feelings about these changes at the national level and the ultimate transfer of responsibilities back to the Home Office.

> *"I think… the fire service can experience a little bit of benign neglect coming under the Home Office, because the Home Office is very much around the policing and security agenda, with fire being such a small part of that."*

> (Director of Response, Case Study 4)

The move to the Home Office was not welcomed by Fire and Rescue Services because of its long-term relationship with police services and saw the introduction of similar requirements and similar performance metrics for Fire and Rescue Services as for the police.

Notwithstanding their views on the transfer, Fire and Rescue Services felt accountable to the Home Office, as the government department overseeing the fire sector. Fire and Rescue Services have been required to regularly report to the Home Office. For example, they have been required to submit data and publish statutory documents in accordance with the National Framework, including an annual statement of assurance of compliance, an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), and their financial plans. All three latter documents provided assurance to the government on financial, governance, and operational matters.

Fire and Rescue Services' compliance with the requirements enshrined in the National Framework is reviewed bi-annually by the Secretary of State in a report to Parliament under Section 25 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. This involved checking if all FRA-governed services published the three statutory documents and reviewing general compliance with the National Framework. If a Fire and Rescue Service did not comply with the National Framework, the Secretary of State was required to state any steps taken to achieve compliance. The Secretaries of State have been providing the bi-annual reports to Parliament, but in the 13 years before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, they did not use the legislative power of non-compliance (Murphy and Lakoma 2020).

To comply with the legislative requirements, services have been delegating some legal accountability to individuals, called statutory officers. Statutory officers are accountable

for undertaking their legal roles and responsibilities. However, central government has the power to enforce compliance only on the services rather than individuals.

All standalone FRA-governed services (combined and metropolitan services) have been required to have three statutory officers:

- Chief Executive (known as the Head of Paid Service or Chief Fire Officer),
- Section 151 Officer (usually the Chief Financial Officer or Director of Finance), and
- Monitoring Officer (usually the Head of Legal Services or Legal Advisor).

In county council FRA-governed services, the county council is responsible for appointing these positions.

The Chief Fire Officer's (CFO's) role is to manage the Fire and Rescue Services' staff, services, and equipment for the purpose of delivery of the statutory functions enshrined in the Fire and Rescue Services' legislation (Local Government and Housing Act 1989). The Section 151 Officer is responsible for maintaining the financial integrity of the FRA (Local Government Act 1972), while the Monitoring Officer's role is to ensure that the FRA acts within and through the law (Local Government and Housing Act 1989). County council FRAs are integral part of county councils, which means that Fire and Rescue Services are ultimately accountable to the county council's Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer.

> *"We've never had our own 151 officer... In the big scheme of things under the county council, we didn't have that level of screening, and so it ends up being an element of discretion locally within the department I guess of a bigger organisation."*

> (ACFO 1, Case Study 4)

In practice, county council FRA services had less control over their services as they did not have their own Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, or Monitoring Officer responsible for legally holding the services to account. In some cases, they had not been adequately held to account for the use of their budgets, ultimately resulting in financial problems within their services (Case Study 3 and Case Study 4).

Fire and Rescue Services have also been scrutinised by Parliament, by two select committees of the House of Commons. The first was the Communities and Local

Government Committee until 2015, but became the Home Affairs Committee after the transfer of Fire and Rescue Service responsibilities to the Home Office in 2016, and the second was the Public Accounts Committee (PAC 2016). These committees of MPs have had the right to call ministers, officials, and other individuals to give written or oral evidence. Select committees scrutinise the work of government departments and investigate specific issues. They call for evidence, ask questions, publish reports, and demand responses from ministers and departments. Select committees are seen as mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in government.

Overall, the department in charge of Fire and Rescue Services' policy legally holds the services to account for compliance with the legislation. It represented a legal accountability relationship between two autonomous parties, where the government (and ultimately Parliament) controlled the services and had the right to impose legal sanctions upon them (see section 7.2.1.3.). Legal accountability requirements also cascaded down to those individuals within Fire and Rescue Services responsible for statutory roles, although central government had the power to enforce compliance only on the services rather than on individuals.

7.2.1.2. Financial compliance

Financial compliance implies legally holding a service accountable for their financial activities. Fire and Rescue Services, represented by FRA members, have a fiduciary duty to the council's taxpayers. This meant that FRAs have been required to set a lawful annual budget, matching its income with its outgoings.

Central government was traditionally the primary source of funding for Fire and Rescue Services in the form of central government grants (called "revenue support grants" and "top-up" funds). However, central government financial support has continuously reduced since 2010 as result of austerity localism (see section 3.2.). This meant that FRAs had to mitigate the impact of continually reduced funding from central government and have sought to raise more funding through local council taxes via a precept, which is a portion of council tax allocated to the Fire and Rescue Service, and/or business rates.

"We're responsible to the taxpayer, both nationally and locally, so locally through the collection of business rates and council tax and then also nationally through the receipt of the government grants and the top-up money that we receive from national government where we're obviously accountable to the wider taxpayer as well, right through to the police and fire minister".

(Director 1, Case Study 1)

Senior managers felt legally accountable for how they were spending their funding at both national and local levels, upwards to the central government and downwards to the public. The department overseeing Fire and Rescue Services at the time (DCLG) was responsible for distributing annual funding on behalf of Her Majesty's Treasury via an annual local government finance settlement to all FRAs. Combined FRAs and metropolitan FRAs have been receiving their funding directly from central government, whereas county council FRAs has had their funding allocated by their county council. As separate entities having their standalone budget, combined FRAs (Case Study 1, 5, and 6) and metropolitan FRAs (Case Study 2) were able to set and raise their own council tax precept. In contrast, county council FRAs could not raise their own precept, as their budgets were included within the county council's precept (Case Study 3 and 4). This meant that county council FRAs on occasion had to negotiate and align their budgets to other departments within the county council. This ultimately affected their accountability down to local communities receiving the services.

"Previously, the way we were funded was lumped in with that county council contribution, which covers everything from adult social care, children's social care, highways and all those other things. So very hard really to quantify to the public, this is what you pay for us, and this is what we give you."

(Partnerships Manager, Case Study 4)

Whilst county council FRAs felt less accountable because they could not raise their own precept and ultimately had no direct say on what percentage of the overall precept they receive, the opposite was true for standalone Fire and Rescue Services, as they were in control of setting and raising their own precept.

Fire and Rescue Services governed by combined FRAs and metropolitan FRAs felt more legally accountable towards central government and local communities because they have

been receiving their funding directly from central government and been able to decide on the amount of precept they wish to raise (subject to council tax capping arrangements). In contrast, Fire and Rescue Services governed by county council FRAs felt less accountable to central government and local communities because their funding and precept has been allocated by their county council, which meant that Fire and Rescue Services had only indirect control of their finances.

7.2.1.3. Audit

Legal requirements, in the form of external as well as internal audit, act as mechanisms that underpin accountability. Both forms of audit enable service providers to be held accountable to stakeholders, the government, and the public.

Internal audit in local government has been subject to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, following the Local Accountability and Audit 2014 Act, and involved assessing governance, risk management and internal control systems. The focus on external audit has been twofold. First, it involved an independent opinion about the service's financial health on an annual basis and second, it examined both efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

Before the Local Accountability and Audit 2014 Act, the Audit Commission undertook Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPAs) for all Fire and Rescue Services in England between 2005 and 2008, which were followed by Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) in 2009. The Commission assessed Fire and Rescue Services' strategic and operational performance with an annual direction of travel assessment and a use of resources judgement and published an overall service assessment of the services (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

The assessments were also accompanied by the possibility of government intervention. Government intervention became a possibility when service standards fell below minimum requirements (Martin 2000). Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 states that the department responsible for Fire and Rescue Services should intervene, on behalf of the public, if an FRA fails, or is likely to fail, to deliver its duty of Best Value (the requirement to facilitate 'continuous improvement') or to act in accordance with the National Framework. Between 2005 and 2007, the Audit Commission identified eight FRAs as requiring improvement and support in accordance with the framework (Coleman 2009). Accordingly,

the department overseeing Fire and Rescue Services established an 'engagement' process with each of the eight FRAs, which proved to be successful as all FRAs improved their performance (Coleman 2009).

In 2010, the closure of the Audit Commission and termination of CAAs were announced. Alongside the Audit Commission's demise, the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 introduced a new auditing regime, supposedly to achieve greater local accountability (see section 3.2.). It moved away from reporting to central government and introduced more fragmented arrangements under the policy of austerity-localism (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012). Henceforth, the National Audit Office (NAO) had to provide central government with reports into value for money and financial sustainability in Fire and Rescue Services. Operational performance management became the legal responsibility of local FRAs. FRAs' legal reporting requirements reduced, and reporting focused on services' financial conformance rather than operational performance (Ferry and Eckersley 2015). In addition, the NAO also took over the oversight role for the local public audit of FRAs. External auditors undertook audits and were able to issue Public Interest Reports, as part of the value for money reporting, which informed the public and the Secretary of State about any significant financial matters (Murphy and Lakoma 2021).

Senior managers were acutely aware that Fire and Rescue Services had had a series of different types of auditing regimes and scrutiny arrangements at a national level through different governments throughout the last twenty years. However, this constant churn and uncertainty increased their concerns about the effectiveness of these arrangements.

> *"Every time we did a process, it seemed either a new government got elected or a new idea came along on how those inspections, or those reviews would work… and I think that's has done the damage to the fire service, because there was that void, those years or however long that was, where there was a gap in that consistency around inspections. So, it was almost like it was left to FRAs to run the service as they saw fit."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 4)

Changes in government policies for Fire and Rescue Services contributed to inconsistent and very limited scrutiny arrangements during these years. Some of those interviewed even believed that after the closure of the Audit Commission and before the introduction of the

2017 legislation, there was a lack of Fire and Rescue Services' legal accountability to central government.

> *"When we started with austerity, government removed all interest in stats and outcomes from fire services, we were kind of cast adrift."*

> (CFO, Case Study 1)

> *"The push to localism…at some points has enabled fire services to really do what they wanted, with virtually no accountability to anybody I think."*

> (Director 1, Case Study 1)

> *"I couldn't understand localism…we all do the same thing, we have the same set up, we have the same legislation but there were so many different ways of doing it."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 3)

Although central government remained accountable for Fire and Rescue Services' financial conformance, most senior managers believed that the fire sector had suffered 'neglect' from central government. This is because the scrutiny regime on operational performance was removed, which consequently weakened legal accountability towards central government as result of the policy of austerity-localism. As a result, Fire and Rescue Services had to determine their local standards, response times, and other performance indicators, and become professionally accountable under the sector-led improvement regime (see section 8.1.2.2.).

7.2.2. Horizontal Accountability

In this subsection, legal accountability in the horizontal direction is discussed. It primarily involves organisations working together as result of the existing legislation in place.

7.2.2.1. Legal partnerships

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there was no mandatory legal duty imposed on Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with other emergency services. Although engagements and partnership working had been enabled and encouraged by the

Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Fire and Rescue Services were not legally mandated to collaboratively respond to them with other partners, other than in a major civil emergency.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created local Crime and Disorder Partnerships and made Fire and Rescue Services designated public bodies, multiply and severally responsible for reducing or mitigating crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour) in their local communities.

> *"I think we've got a real good access point into community, and a very trusted brand. So, there's real scope to look at what we're about and how do we release capacity to engage with that sort of work better than we do currently. It's quite aspirational… it's not fire safety, but it's broader community safety work which is done collaboratively."*

> (Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 6)

Fire and Rescue Services along with police and other local authorities were involved in implementing strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder in their local areas. Although Fire and Rescue Services did not indicate whether that partnership was an accountability relationship, they nonetheless shared the same objectives of community safety with other organisations and continued to assist each other with their day-to-day work.

Second, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), which were established by the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000, provided the legal framework for additional horizontal accountability relationships and vehicles for negotiating Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs were agreements between central government and local areas designed to improve locally delivered public services. Fire and Rescue Services, along with other organisations from the local statutory, voluntary, community, and private sectors, addressed local problems and discussed local strategies and initiatives. LAAs generally aimed to encourage joint working and community involvement at the local level, until they too were abolished in 2010.

The third horizontal accountability relationship, in which Fire and Rescue Services have been involved, is based on the provisions of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which addressed major civil contingencies and emergencies. The 2004 legislation established local,

regional, and national risk registrars, resilience forums and collaborative responsibilities on designated Category 1 and Category 2 responder organisations, with Fire and Rescue Services being a designated Category 1 responder.

> *"Local resilience forums exist where we do collaborate, we collaborate from a multi-agency response, so going out to incidents together … I mean we have to do it anyway, but it is a form of collaboration.… there's arrangements in place to enable that to happen, training… we do multi-agency exercises which are training events with the ambulance and the police to make sure that when we do respond together, we can do it in the best way possible."*

(Director of Strategy, Case Study 2)

Fire and Rescue Services have been active members of Local Resilience Forums with other local organisations, which aim to plan and prepare for major incidents and catastrophic emergencies. As a result of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Fire and Rescue Services have been legally obliged to respond to emergencies with other local partners.

7.2.3. Diagonal accountability

Legal requirements that manifest themselves in the form of diagonal accountability include, most significantly, independent inspectorates and external auditing bodies. These are not part of the direct central government controls, but their roles and functions are established by statute, and they independently publish reports to government, Parliament, and the public on services' performance and the meeting of standards. This means that they do not hold the services directly to account, however, they have a significant influence on both individual services and the sector collectively because of who they report to. Inspectorates and external auditing bodies also ultimately provide the relevant information that enables parliamentarians to hold services to account.

7.2.3.1. Independent inspectorate

The origins of the first inspectorate for English fire services, Her/His Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI), date back to 1947 (OPSR 2003, Ewen 2010). The fire inspectorate, however, did not hold fire services to account. Its role was primarily to provide the sector with advice on compliance with fire standards (see section 5.2.3.1.).

Senior managers felt that HMFSI had become outdated and ineffective in providing an accurate assessment of FRAs towards the end of its existence. They perceived it as a weak source of accountability, as it resembled a body that was established to provide the sector with standards rather than directly hold services to account.

> *"The original inspectorate inspections were … just like an old boys' club you know would hold a great big exercise and hope that it didn't go tits up, but the actual testing of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Fire and Rescue Service was just a pantomime really."*

> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

In 2005, the Audit Commission took on the role of external inspection and brought Fire under their national assessment regimes. HMFSI was closed in 2007. After the announcement of the abolition of the Audit Commission, England remained without an independent inspectorate for the fire service for next eight years (Murphy *et al.* 2019c, 2020a). At that time, Fire and Rescue Services did not feel accountable for their performance.

> *"We'd previously been audited by the Audit Commission, so there's been various level of scrutiny about performance of fire services over previous years, but when we got into the period of austerity, government removed quango departments such as Audit Commission and HMFSI, and I guess you've had a perfect storm is a way I'd describe it…. Nobody was looking at efficiency and effectiveness, nobody was holding us to account for that really."*

> (DCFO, Case Study 3)

Following the termination of external inspections, Fire and Rescue Services were subjected to sector-led peer assessments (see section 8.1.2.2.). They were supposed to improve accountability at a local level, but the results were neither robust nor transparent.

> *"So, I was fairly horrified back in 2010 when the Audit Commission was to be … removed…it was replaced with peer review… and they served a purpose, but they were a little bit too cosy, and I missed the independence of an external inspectorate."*

> (CFO, Case Study 6)

Overall, legal accountability in the diagonal direction was very limited and the government resolved to change it. The next section of this chapter moves on to explain understandings of legal accountability following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

7.3. Accountability arrangements after the Policing and Crime Act 2017

7.3.1. Vertical accountability

This subsection discusses understandings of legal vertical accountability in the FRA governance model ('the representation model') and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) model ('the governance model') following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

7.3.1.1. Statutory requirements

Fire and Rescue Services' legal accountability arrangements have remained enshrined in both primary and secondary legislation. Most of the legal provisions remained in place, however, some governance requirements included in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 have been replaced as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 included significant provisions affecting both police and Fire and Rescue Services (see sections 3.4. and 3.6.).

The 2012 National Framework also needed to be replaced to include the provisions enshrined in the 2017 legislation (Murphy *et al.* 2020a). The National Framework was updated in 2018 (Home Office 2018) and continued to provide national policy for all Fire and Rescue Services, albeit continuing with the policy of local governance and local accountability focused on the FRA/PFCC level. This meant that central government continued to play only a limited role in overseeing the fire and rescue sector. Both FRA- and PFCC-governed services have generally remained relatively free to run their services in a way that they considered to be the most efficient and effective (although they are still subject to the duty of Best Value).

Although there was an increasing trend of moving away from national level accountability, the Home Secretary's report on Fire and Rescue Services', compliance with National Framework and the intervention protocol for Fire and Rescue Services have all remained in

place. This meant that the government has retained the power to intervene in services that are failing or likely to fail to meet their duty of Best Value.

The Home Office has continued to be the primary department in charge of Fire and Rescue Services since 2016. As such, the Home Office, and by extension Fire and Rescue Services, have essentially continued to fall under the scrutiny of two select committees of the House of Commons: The Home Affairs Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. Between 2017 and spring 2024, however, neither undertook any inquiries into Fire and Rescue Services.

In FRA-governed services, public reporting requirements have remained the same as before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. However, Fire and Rescue Services that transferred to the PFCC governance model have had their reporting requirements changed (Home Office 2018). In addition to the statutory documents published by FRAs, a PFCC has to produce a Fire and Rescue Plan (or a joint Police, Crime and Fire and Rescue Plan) to set out the strategic vision, priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Services (if joint, for both fire and rescue and police service) and a Fire and Rescue Statement, which replaced the Annual Statement of Assurance. In addition, an internal body, called a Police, Fire and Crime Panel scrutinises the Fire and Rescue Plan (or the joint Police, Crime and Fire and Rescue Plan).

Fire and Rescue Services that experienced a transfer of governance to a PFCC also have to comply with different transparency requirements. Section 11 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) Order 2011 imposed equivalent provisions to those in the Local Government Acts, which include publishing senior officers' salaries, organisational charts, budgets, expenditures, and records of decisions taken.

As with FRA-governed services, PFCCs are required to delegate legal accountability to statutory officers. The requirements for statutory officers are slightly different than in FRA-governed services. Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 states that PFCCs are required to appoint:

- a Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service, who is also designated as the Monitoring Officer, and
- a Section 151 Officer.

The Chief Executive of the PFCC's office holds the role of the Monitoring Officer (Local Government and Housing Act 1989), supports the PFCC and assists in the delivery of all statutory duties. As with the FRA arrangements, the Section 151 Officer acts as a Chief Finance Officer (Local Government 1972 Act) and advises the PFCC on financial matters.

> *"We're being held to account by the 151 officer who doesn't have any problem coming in and waving a big stick if there's a requirement to, but equally is working with the chief to build that portfolio of financial stability and accountability through procurement."*

> (Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

The PFCC, as a governing body of the Fire and Rescue Service, has inherited legal accountability for the service from the former FRA. Interestingly, some PFCCs, according to senior managers, did not explicitly understand what legal accountabilities they had inherited when it came to the transfer of responsibilities under their control.

> *"I don't think before the change the PFCC fully understood the level of responsibility that he had inherited…what the PFCC can't divest is the accountability under that legislation… And I think it was a bit of a shock at the first meeting when we passed the PFCC all that legislation and said, there you go, this is what you've inherited!"*

> (DCFO, Case Study 5)

PFCCs are legally responsible and if anything goes wrong, for example, a firefighter dies, they are the individuals that would be held to account, according to the Corporate Manslaughter and Homicide Act 2007. They are also legally accountable as the Fire and Rescue Services' employer under the following acts: Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Equalities Act 2010 and The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

7.3.1.2. Financial compliance

Fire and Rescue Services have remained accountable to a number of stakeholders for how they manage their funding. Besides publishing financial statements, they have been legally obliged to produce a medium-term financial plan, an efficiency plan, and a reserves

strategy as result of the 2018 National Framework (Home Office 2018). Combined FRAs (Case Study 1), metropolitan FRAs (Case Study 2) and PFCC-governed services (Case Study 4, 5, and 6) need to publish these documents themselves as standalone organisations, whereas county council FRAs (Case Study 3) are required to publish them within the county council's documentation.

Funding has continued to largely originate from council taxes, business rates, and central government grants, making Fire and Rescue Services accountable to their communities as well as the government. Central government funding has continued to be delivered through the annual local government finance settlement in the form of revenue support grant and business rate retention. Combined FRAs, metropolitan FRAs, and PFCC-governed services have been receiving their funding directly from central government, whereas county council FRAs have had their funding allocated by their county council.

As separate entities having standalone budgets, combined FRAs (Case Study 1), metropolitan FRAs (Case Study 2), and PFCC-governed services (Case Study 4, 5, and 6) have been able to set and raise their own council tax precept. County council FRAs have continued to be included within the county council's precept (Case Study 3). In addition, in PFCC-governed services, PFCCs have been required to establish a fire fund to ensure that there are two separate budgets for fire and police.

> *"My concern is…there are different governance arrangements, services operate in different ways, in terms of their income and how their budgets are set, some authorities' budget is set more so via council tax, others … and business rates, others is more set by a central government grant, it … and there's so many variations, I think it dilutes governance to some extent. So, I … personally, I'm a strong believer that they need to set some common governance arrangements."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 4)

Senior managers acknowledged that each governance model received a different proportion of funding streams, which they felt was unsatisfactory. This was particularly the case in county council FRAs, where funding was often suspected of being 'lost' and/or subsidising other council services within the overall county council funding streams. These diverse funding arrangements have had therefore significant implications for accountability: standalone FRAs and PFCC-governed services have been directly accountable for financial compliance to the government and local communities, whereas

county council FRAs have been only indirectly accountable to these actors, because their first relationship is with the county council.

7.3.1.3.   Audit

Legal requirements in the form of external and internal audit have continued to act as mechanisms that underpinned accountability and assurance in the fire sector following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Audit provides an essential part of all accountability arrangements, as it certifies financial propriety. Internal audit in Fire and Rescue Services has remained concerned with assessing governance, risk management and internal control systems. The focus of external audit has remained predominantly financial and short-term (Murphy *et al*. 2023).

> *"We've got internal audit that focuses very much on the governance within the service, how we do our business, and then you've got the external audit of things like the finances and the budgeting, all that kind of stuff. So, exponentially it's got massive effectively as a standalone organisation."*

> (CFO, Case Study 4)

Participants highlighted that standalone FRA-governed services and PFCC-governed services experienced greater auditing requirements than those services that were part of the county council's arrangements. This was because they have been required to be internally and externally audited as standalone organisations, whereas county council FRAs' audits have been included in the county council auditing arrangements.

Fire and Rescue Services' financial conformance continued to be assessed by the NAO and then reported to central government. Operational performance management has not been directly assessed by the central government, however, it has been delegated to the new Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (see section 7.3.3.1.).

7.3.2.   Horizontal Accountability

This subsection deals with horizontal legal accountability and concerns legal partnerships as result of the 2017 legislation that requires Fire and Rescue Services to work with other partners.

7.3.2.1. Legal partnerships

Fire and Rescue Services, as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, have been legally required to collaborate with other emergency services, if it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness. Although many interviewees argued that they had already been collaborating (particularly with the police), they stressed that the 2017 Act has meant that they need to demonstrate this more clearly.

> *"We need to be absolutely clear on some of the legal elements, i.e., collaboration, we do absolutely need to ensure, whereas before it was the right thing to do or a good thing to do, we absolutely need to ensure we can demonstrate our attempts or our actual achievements with collaboration."*

(Finance Director, Case Study 2)

> *"We test and exercise with all our [Local] Resilience [Forum] partners, so that's local authorities, health, all the blue light services as well. So certainly, for me the Act hasn't changed anything in terms of how we collaborate. I think it's just put a focus on the sector and reminded some of those services that maybe haven't collaborated that well in the past that they absolutely should be, and they need to."*

(DCFO, Case Study 2)

Alongside other local organisations, Fire and Rescue Services have remained active members of Local Resilience Forums. Participants pointed out that the 2017 legislation has strengthened and formalised collaboration between emergency services and partner organisations when preparing for local emergencies. It has particularly stressed the need for collaboration for those services that had not collaborated with other organisations before. This was tragically demonstrated in the response to the Grenfell Fire and the Manchester Arena attack, when local emergency services partially failed to respond to the emergencies and ultimately held each other to account for their response. The pandemic was also a catalyst for collaboration as Fire and Rescue Services helped ambulance services by driving vehicles, delivering medications, constructing vaccine stations, and administering vaccines (Murphy and Lakoma 2023). Fire and Rescue Services have also continued to be involved in other legal partnerships, including local Crime and Disorder partnerships, Local Safeguarding Boards and Health and Wellbeing Boards. However,

obligations and opportunities to collaborate under Local Strategic Partnerships significantly reduced following abolition of LSPs and LAAs in 2010 (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2018).

Understandings of legal accountability when collaborating with the police differed across the two governance models. Fire and Rescue Services that transferred to the PFCC governance model felt accountable to the police under the same governing body, as they have been working together to achieve the same objectives and shared similar governance structures. On the other hand, notwithstanding the legal duty of collaboration, those services that remained under the FRA governance model did not feel legally accountable to the police because of different governance arrangements between the two services. However, they did feel professionally accountable to the police (see section 8.2.2.1.). Similarly, Fire and Rescue Services under both governance models did not perceive the relationship with ambulance services as a legal accountability relationship due to different governance structures between the two services.

7.3.3. Diagonal accountability

Legal requirements in the form of diagonal accountability have been strengthened as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which revived a Fire and Rescue Services' inspectorate. In this subsection, the legal accountability from the inspectorate is discussed in more detail.

7.3.3.1. Independent inspectorate

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has enhanced external scrutiny arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services through the establishment of HMICFRS. The inspectorate's role is to individually assess effectiveness, efficiency, and use of people in all 44 English Fire and Rescue Services. Any services that receive an inadequate rating receive a letter from the inspectorate with recommendations on how to improve and a revisit later in the year. Nevertheless, HMICFRS, like the Audit Commission before, is not able to intervene in the services that have been graded as inadequate, as this power is reserved to the Secretary of State (Home Office 2018). Generally, the inspectorate's role is to encourage improvement by inspecting and benchmarking all 44 services and identifying and publishing areas of good or notable practice.

"The legislation 2004 Act tells us what we must do. The framework document tells us what we should do. The HMICFRS criteria, tell us the answers to the exam. They tell us what we should be doing and how we should be performing and what we should be considering as a service. So, it should be seen as an enabling framework for us to deliver against."

(Director of Assurance, Case Study 6)

"I think the legislation reintroducing an inspectorate was essential for the sector, and I think it's essential that the sector has … an independent body that applies a known framework in a consistent manner to all Fire and Rescue Services."

(CFO, Case Study 6)

Fire and Rescue Services believed that establishment of the inspectorate has increased accountability within and outside Fire and Rescue Services, because the inspectorate started to create a national set of expectations that services are expected to meet, which facilitates better benchmarking across services.

Interestingly, Fire and Rescue Services started to feel more accountable to central government because of the national inspection process. This was mainly because of the requirement imposed on Fire and Rescue Services to provide data returns and information as part of the inspection process. The inspectorate uses the data not only to report on individual services performance, but also to inform their national approach and the government's 'reform' agenda. The inspection process has therefore influenced both government policy and the fire sector's direction of travel. However, some interviewees felt that services did not feel directly accountable to the inspectorate, because of its role on services' improvement rather than compliance with regulations.

"They're an independent body that reports into government, and they are here to report back on our progress. So, they are not our masters…We're not accountable to them but we work with them on our improvement agenda, and they independently report against our progress."

(ACFO 2, Case Study 3)

"There's data requirements coming out of our ears from HMICFRS, although those are essentially obligations, not sort of legal requirements."

(Area Manager 1, Case Study 4)

"We have to satisfy them [HMICFRS requirements], but don't want to be slaves to them."

(CFO, Case Study 5)

HMICFRS cannot enforce compliance based upon the results of their inspection reports. However, Fire and Rescue Services are legally obliged to receive any inspection visit from the inspectorate. Fire and Rescue Services felt obligated through the inspectorate to other actors, including the government, other services, and the public based on their inspection results. This is because the inspectorate independently reports and recommends the government on all Fire and Rescue Services in the annual report on the 'State of Fire and Rescue'.

Some participants, however, questioned the independence of the inspectorate (e.g., Area Manager 1, Case Study 1; Area Manager 1, Case Study 4). This is because HMICFRS claimed to be independent of central government. However, senior managers did not feel like there was true independence between the two bodies, because in practice, the government has been responsible for appointing the HMICFRS inspectors and the Chief Inspector.

"The government appoint the HMICFRS inspectors and when they sign the report on the state of the fire report, again it is supposed to be independent, but it doesn't feel very independent, some of the things that they do feel politically motivated."

(Area Manager 1, Case Study 1)

HMICFRS has also its budget and financing determined by the Home Office rather than by Parliament or by an independent body (Murphy 2017, Murphy *et al.* 2020a), and the inspection results are directly reported to the Home Office, rather than to Parliament. This according to participants, undermined the inspectorate's independence.

7.4. Conclusions

This chapter discussed Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Table 16 summarises Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability in relation to vertical, horizontal, and diagonal directions.

Legal accountability within Fire and Rescue Services has been primarily associated with the vertical dimension of accountability, enshrined in the statutory requirements, including primary and secondary legislation focussed upon Fire and Rescue Services. Over the years, the legislation has changed, but the core statutory requirements for Fire and Rescue Services have remained relatively stable. Legal accountability has also cascaded down to individuals within Fire and Rescue Services responsible for individual statutory roles. The introduction of the PFCC governance model has changed statutory requirements to include additional reporting mechanisms to the central government and amendments to statutory officers' roles in the PFCC-governed services.

Fire and Rescue Services have also been accountable for financial compliance and audits. Before 2010, Fire and Rescue Services were accountable for both their operational and financial audits to the Audit Commission. However, legal accountability significantly changed after the abolition of the Audit Commission and the introduction of austerity-localism. In theory, Fire and Rescue Services remained legally accountable to the government solely for financial conformance. Legal accountability for operational performance shifted towards professional accountability under the sector-led improvement regime (see Chapter 8 – Professional accountability). Operational performance was not centrally scrutinised until the 2017 Act and the establishment of HMICFRS, which meant that FRAs became less legally accountable for service outputs and outcomes than was previously the case.

Table 16: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

		Before the 2017 Act	After the 2017 Act	
Directions	**Main sub-themes**	**FRA-governed services**	**FRA-governed services**	**PFCC-governed services**
Vertical (Central govt/auditing bodies – Fire and Rescue Service)	**Statutory requirements**	**Moderate** accountability through compliance with primary and secondary legislation.	**Moderate** accountability through compliance with primary and secondary legislation.	**Extensive** accountability through compliance with additional primary and secondary legislation.
	Financial compliance	**Moderate** accountability to the government and local communities for standalone FRAs. **Limited** accountability to the government and local communities for county council FRA.	**Moderate** accountability to the government and local communities for standalone FRAs. **Limited** accountability to the government and local communities for county council FRA.	**Moderate** accountability to the government and local communities.
	Audit	**Extensive** accountability through operational and financial audits until 2015 (Audit Commission). **Limited** accountability through financial audits since 2015 (NAO).	**Limited** accountability through financial audits (NAO).	**Limited** accountability through financial audits (NAO).
Horizontal (Fire and Rescue Service – other partners)	**Legal partnerships**	**Limited** 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 (Inspectorate – Fire and Rescue Service)	**Inspection, National State of Fire Reports**	**Moderate** accountability under external inspections (1947- 2010). **Limited** accountability under the sector-led improvement (2010-2017).	**Extensive** accountability under external inspections since 2017.	**Extensive** accountability under external inspections since 2017.

Before the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services felt limited legal horizontal accountability to collaborate with other partners, although relatively informal and discretionary collaborative engagements at the local level had been developing since the 1990s. The abolition of LSPs and LAAs, however, weakened horizontal accountability, as it removed partnerships between central government and local areas, in which Fire and Rescue Services were actively involved. This however changed as result of the 2017 Act, which introduced a legal duty on Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with other emergency services, where such agreements would be in the interests of its efficiency or effectiveness. As a result, Fire and Rescue Services felt more legally accountable to collaborate with the police under the PFCC governance model, primarily because of joint governance arrangements with the police. In contrast, FRA-governed services did not feel legally accountable to collaborate with the police, and did not perceive collaboration with ambulance services, as a legal accountability because of the different governance arrangements between the services.

Fire and Rescue Services also felt diagonally accountable via external inspectorates to other stakeholders between 1947-2010 and since 2017. Between 2010 and 2017, there was no external inspectorate to oversee their performance. Instead, they were involved in sector-led improvement initiatives, which ultimately resulted in relatively weak accountability towards other stakeholders. With the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, operational performance accountability has been reinstated diagonally, rather than vertically, through the establishment of HMICFRS.

As result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services generally perceived greater legal accountability at various levels under both governance models introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. However, they had mixed views on whether the legal accountability arrangements that this legislation introduced were as strong as the previous Audit Commission regime.

Chapter 8.   Professional accountability

8.1. Introduction

Professional accountability stresses the power and control in the hands of skilled and expert members of a professional or an expert group who are accountable to agency leaders. Professional bodies and qualifications, such as those that accountants, lawyers, and doctors obtain, demonstrate their belonging to the profession. If professionals fail to meet their professional expectations, the professional body can reprimand them or strike them off.

In contrast to bureaucratic accountability, where the emphasis is on close supervision, professional accountability relies on standards, values, technical knowledge and expertise, but in an unsupervised context (Mulgan 2000b). Close bureaucratic control from outside the organisation is therefore inappropriate in a professional accountability relationship. Professional accountability relationships are similar to those between a layperson and an expert (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Professional accountability is based on a principal-agent relationship with a knowledge asymmetry between the parties (Sharma 1997). The layperson is an individual who has insufficient knowledge about how the expert should do a job. Nonetheless, professionals still have their ultimate accountability to their superiors (Romzek and Dubnick 1987).

Professional accountability is more about individual professionals than the service as a whole. Individuals within Fire and Rescue Services are professionally accountable to a number of stakeholders. Firefighters act as skilled and expert employees who fight and prevent fires and protect their communities by utilising their professional knowledge and experience. They have professional pride in carrying out their job, and at the same time they uphold the ethical standards of the profession. This in turn earns respect from colleagues, the public and other stakeholders, who call them to account based on how the professional standards are operationalised in practice. However, accountability within Fire and Rescue Services does not only apply to firefighters, but also to other professionals who work in management and in the 'back office'.

This section explores Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability. It demonstrates who Fire and Rescue Services feel accountable to in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and diagonal dimensions of accountability ('*accountability to*

whom') and examines how these accountability understandings have changed in the context of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 (see Figures 17 and 18).
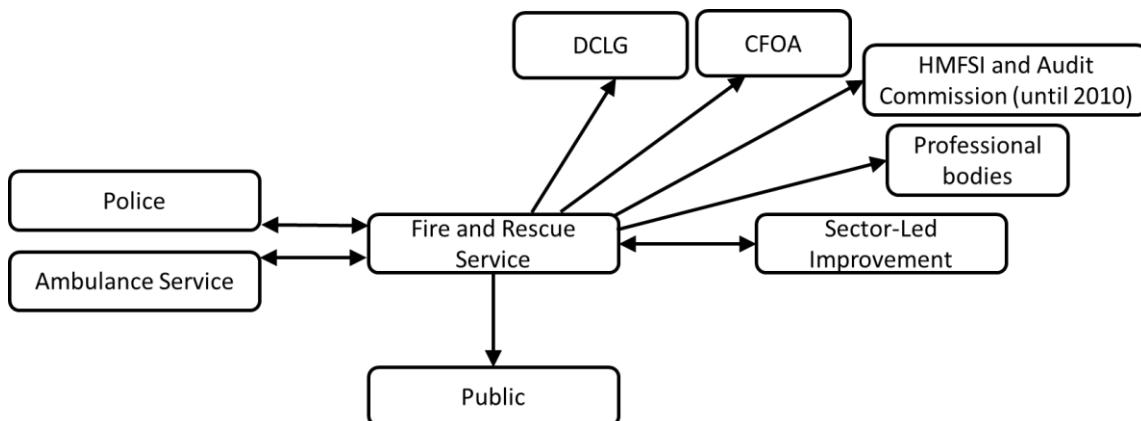
Figure 17: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability relationships in FRA-governed Fire and Rescue Services before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation
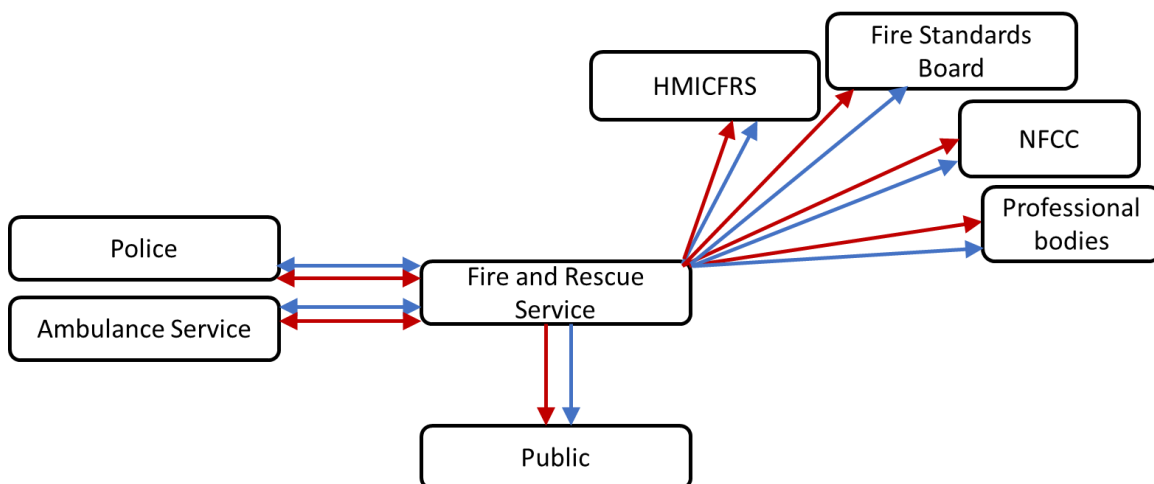
Figure 18: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability relationships in FRA-governed (in red) and in PFCC-governed (in blue) Fire and Rescue Services after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

8.2. Accountability arrangements prior to the Policing and Crime Act 2017

8.2.1. Vertical accountability

This subsection explains how professionalism was operationalised in terms of vertical accountability before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Prior to 2017, professional vertical accountability operated primarily through day-to-day responsibilities and values and principles.

8.1.1.1. Day-to-day responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Services are primarily accountable for carrying out operational duties to local communities. These include fighting fires, protecting and preventing life and property in the event of fire, and rescuing people in case of other emergencies.

> *"At our level, the primary accountability has been to members of the public in providing the service and making sure we're available to go and do our job on a day-to-day basis."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 4)

When responding to incidents, a chain of command operates within the service (Andrews *et al*. 2014). Firefighters, who are at the bottom of this chain, attend incidents and carry out fire safety work with the public. Above them, crew managers and watch managers also attend small incidents, whereas station managers, group managers and area managers attend large scale and major incidents. Senior managers indicated that they felt accountable to their front-line colleagues who respond to emergencies for providing them with the right equipment and making sure that they are competent, professional, and able to respond in a timely manner.

> *"I am the head of paid service, responsible as principal adviser to the FRA [Fire and Rescue Authority] in terms of them discharging their statutory duties. I'm responsible for all the maintenance and management of staff, equipment, operational response, capability, physical human assets."*

> (CFO, Case Study 1)

"[We are accountable] to the service users, i.e., those that require the service, we have a duty of care to make sure that our crew is all competent, professional and able to respond with the right equipment and in a timely manner."

(Head of Assurance, Case Study 6)

In turn, firefighters, who are at the front-line of response, felt accountable for following the standards and utilising the knowledge gained at training when responding to emergencies.

"I think for me personally, accountability comes through the training that I do and my ability to follow procedures and the standards and the training that we receive…if I'm training to a high standard and I'm keeping up those standards when I'm out at a job or at an incident, then I'm accountable for my actions in that way I guess."

(Firefighter, Case Study 3)

Front-line staff indicated that undertaking additional training gave them an advantage of a bigger skillset when responding to emergencies. Technical standards on day-to-day Fire and Rescue Services' operations have been regularly changing because of new innovative approaches and technologies. Training therefore enables firefighters to understand these new technologies and new equipment in their job. Firefighters, as well as higher-level managers, have been educated through various training exercises to make appropriate decisions in extreme emergencies.

Firefighters indicated that they generally relied on their professional knowledge when in emergencies. However, as professionals, they were able to deviate from standard protocols, if necessary, depending upon the nature of the emergency they were responding to.

"You know if I make a decision operationally, I've made a decision based on what I can see, information I receive … what I know in my gut, prior experience."

(Firefighter, Case Study 3)

Prior to the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there were no professional entry requirements in England to become a firefighter (Wankhade and Murphy 2023). A firefighter's job has been mainly physical and requires high levels of fitness rather than

professional qualifications. Newly recruited firefighters begin their job with an intensive training period, which is followed by an ongoing learning and development programme. This culminates in firefighters taking a fitness assessment to ensure that they maintain the standards of physical fitness to perform their role. However, according to the Firefighter Fitness Addendum to the 2012 National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services in England (DCLG 2014), no individual would be dismissed if they failed the fitness assessment, instead they would be given a minimum 6 months to regain the necessary levels of physical fitness. If they did not, the FRA was responsible for finding an alternative employment for the individual. Firefighters' professional accountability was therefore operationalised through training, fitness assessments, and carrying out their operational duties.

8.1.1.2.   Values and principles

As public sector organisations, Fire and Rescue Services and their staff are funded by taxpayers. This means that they are required to follow values and principles that are enshrined in the public service. In England, they are known as 'Nolan Principles of Public Life' (Committee on Standards and Public Life 1995) and include the following: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. Everyone in the public service (see section 2.2.10.), including the staff of Fire and Rescue Services, is expected to abide by them.

Firefighters and senior managers felt professionally accountable in terms of their personal exercise of judgement. If a firefighter made a wrong decision at an incident, this would affect their sense of professional responsibility and pride (notwithstanding any additional sanction they may experience through bureaucratic accountability processes). Discussing what went wrong was a form of an evaluation process for the staff. The basis of this would be the individual's personal sense of morality, involving moral values - the Nolan Principles.

Both firefighters and senior managers indicated that they abide by these values. However, only one participant (senior manager) explicitly acknowledged that they follow the Nolan Principles.

"People should be able to hold me personally to account, both as a role model in the fire service but also a leader delivering an important public service…things like the Nolan Principle, people should read those I think sometimes in terms of their role as in public life. So, I feel accountable all the time."

(DCFO, Case Study 1)

Fire and Rescue Services felt ultimately accountable to communities as they were acting in their interest. They were not only accountable for the operational elements of their job, but also for the professional elements. In most case studies, senior managers, as well as front-line staff, adhered to the Nolan Principles in their day-to-day job by exhibiting them in their own behaviour. This included promoting and supporting the principles, as well as challenging inadequate behaviour. Senior managers felt that they could be challenged by local communities for potential abuse of moral values within the service. This occurred in one case study (Case Study 3) when senior management abused the public's trust, when taking a fraudulent decision in order to gain financial benefits for themselves. This resulted in a number of whistle-blowing complaints about the service and the public's trust, needed to be rebuilt within as well as outside the service.

8.1.2. Horizontal accountability

Professional accountability can also operate horizontally, in that equal parties use their professional experience to operate or collaborate in mutual areas of interest. This subsection explains how horizontal accountability was operationalised before the 2017 legislation at both organisation and individual levels.

8.1.2.1. External and internal collaboration

Before the introduction of the duty to collaborate in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, local Fire and Rescue Services were involved in a number of external collaborations, most notably with the police and ambulance services, but also occasionally with a wider variety of organisations, and consequently had to act in a professional way when collaborating. For example, Fire and Rescue Services felt professionally accountable to other organisations for training and preparing to respond to emergencies using their knowledge and expertise under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Similarly, they were also professionally accountable

to police and other local authorities when providing services or undertaking activities within the provisions of the Crime and Disorder 1998 legislation.

Fire and Rescue Services have also been involved in the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP), established in 2012, to work with police and ambulance services during major or catastrophic events (Daniels 2019). In 2014, the programme changed its name to the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles. Its main aim has been to remove over-bureaucratic procedures and work with other emergency services when training and responding to incidents (Wilsher 2019). Fire and Rescue Services noted that they were mainly involved in the JESIP initiatives at the front-line levels.

> *"We've got JESIP, the information from that gets shared, so any incidents or any training gets shared across all services… I think on the ground, at a general incident we go to, we tend to work quite closely together anyway, we tend to work quite well."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 2)

JESIP formalised multi-agency response to major emergencies and forced individual emergency services to develop plans on how to save lives using their own operational competence, policies, and procedures. However, participants also pointed out that all three emergency services work differently.

> *"Part of our job is to train, so we train all the time, we're still available for calls etc, but it's part of our role, where the police and the ambulance service for instance, when they're on duty, they're dealing with incidents, they've got workloads that don't allow them to train, so their training comes as an addition."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 2)

Participants highlighted that all three emergency services prioritise their workloads and trainings differently, which made it difficult to arrange training sessions together. Nonetheless, horizontal accountability relationships between emergency services at an organisation level continued to develop as Fire and Rescue Services have been designated a core local partner. The increasing complexity of individual incidents and increases in the scale of incidents require emergency services to use their professional experience and collaborate in their response. Fire and Rescue Services felt that engagement in external

collaborations was the right thing to do, because it improved their skills and knowledge, and ultimately helped them to do their jobs better.

Although the theme of accountability through supervision was one of the most recurring in the bureaucratic dimension of accountability (see Chapter 5), a perception of accountability for one's actions was also seen as a distinct theme in terms of professionalism. Professional accountability was evident at the individual level when working together within teams at the front-line. Firefighters used their knowledge and expertise gained through trainings to hold each other to account for how they responded to incidents.

> *"We're all equally as important and responsible for one another's action, how we train and how we develop ourselves, and it's all in our best interests to help each other, be accountable for each other, how we can improve each other."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 3)

Participants also indicated that they felt professionally accountable to their colleagues at the senior management level, as they were working together to achieve the mutual goal of an effective and efficient public service.

> *"I also feel I'm accountable to my staff and colleagues so that as the individual, they can and should hold me to account, and say well you said you'd do this, or you were supposed to look after that and it's about making sure that you uphold what you're there to do. And if you are doing that, then they rightly should be saying you've either not delivered or you've let the side down."*

> (Director of Prevention and Protection, Case Study 6)

Senior managers believed that their colleagues could act as internal peers who can challenge them based on professional knowledge and expertise if their work was insufficiently or inadequately delivered, and consequently they could learn and improve from their feedback.

8.1.2.2.   Sector-led improvement and organisational peer review

Prior to the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services were subject to the Local Government Association's (LGA) peer challenge process, which was part of the sector-led

improvement arrangements introduced in 2010 (LGA 2011, Downe *et al.* 2013). As part of these arrangements, each service could invite another service to undertake an independent review that would conclude in a report identifying which areas needed improvement. The process was voluntary and consisted of a self-assessment and an external peer challenge by a team of fellow professionals from other fire services and the LGA who reviewed the service using their professional expertise (Downe *et al.* 2018). Almost all English Fire and Rescue Services were involved in the process, although participation was not compulsory. The idea was to have an opportunity to invite peer experts to examine the service with a professional expertise and a different 'pair of eyes' over the problems that services might be experiencing and ultimately exchange information on how they could improve in the future.

In all cases, Fire and Rescue Services reported inadequate accountability under the peer challenge regime. Inspected services would typically get a good report because they could choose which other service would carry out the review and pick the areas that they would examine.

> *"It was very rare you didn't get a good report to be honest, because you steered the inspection team down into what you wanted them to see."*

> (ACFO 2, Case Study 4)

Participants found peer assessments to be biased. The LGA approach was expected to strengthen Fire and Rescue Services professionalism. In practice, peer assessments did not contribute to the professional improvement of the service, nor help staff undertake their jobs better. In addition, the findings of peer challenges were not shared at the national level, and they had limited influence internally within the sector.

> *"With a peer review, to some extent it wasn't published as widely, so there wasn't as much awareness of what the outcomes were."*

> (Finance Director, Case Study 2)

The assessments were supposed to improve accountability at the local level (LGA 2011, Downe *et. al.* 2013, 2018). However, the evidence shows that the results of peer challenges were neither robust nor transparent, and after an initial period, when they appeared on the LGA website, they were taken down and were shared only internally. Other Fire and Rescue Services did not hold the reviewed service to account for improvement based on

the recommendations. Although the process relied on the professional knowledge and expertise of a peer service, it proved to be an ineffective tool for holding services accountable, even against metrics and targets that they would set themselves.

8.1.3. Diagonal accountability

While outside professional organisations or inspectorates may diagonally (indirectly) advise the services through inspection reports, education, and professional standards, the source of professional accountability remains internal within the service. This subsection explains how diagonal professional accountability was operationalised before the 2017 legislation in Fire and Rescue Services.

8.1.3.1. Independent inspectorate

Between 1947 and 2006, Fire and Rescue Services were inspected by His/Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) and in 2006 the Audit Commission took on the role of external inspection (see section 7.2.3.1). After the announcement of the abolition of the Audit Commission, England remained without a professional inspectorate for the fire service for next 8 years (Murphy *et al.* 2020a). Professional accountability of Fire and Rescue Services through inspectorates was therefore very limited, particularly after the closure of the Audit Commission.

8.1.3.2. Operational guidance

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services were not obliged to follow mandatory professional guidance or standards within the fire sector. It was a matter for each service to decide whether they wished to adopt and follow the available guidance, although operational guidance did form part of the sector-led improvement process. For example, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), which acted as the professional collective voice of the UK Fire and Rescue Services, published various operational guidance, for instance on managing the physical fitness of firefighters, and on fire and risk assessments. The government also published operational guidance, for example, on creating an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) (DCLG 2008b) to ensure a consistent quality approach across all services. Similarly, other practical reports on operational guidance were published for consideration by Fire and Rescue Services,

including operational risk information (DCLG 2012b) and health and safety at work practices (DCLG 2013). DCLG, as the government's department overseeing Fire and Rescue Services at the time, did not hold responsibility for the application of the guidance, but rather indirectly influenced the services' professional approach, as professional standards were a matter for the services themselves. Many services attempted to adopt voluntary guidance, although most of them ended up with mixed results and performing as they saw fit, rather than according to the published protocols.

8.1.3.3.   Professional qualifications and memberships

Professional qualifications and memberships of other professional bodies have been indirectly influencing the decision making of Fire and Rescue Services. Fire and Rescue Services' staff have been members of various professional bodies, through which they gain professional expertise and knowledge.

Firefighting as a profession does not require individuals to hold specific professional qualifications. Nonetheless, firefighters seek to develop their professional knowledge and expertise of the fire sector by joining professional membership bodies, such as the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE), or Certified Fire Investigator Programme (CFI), which both shape the fire and rescue sector's professionalism around the world.

The Fire Service College was also responsible for providing various courses for senior fire officers. Until 2013, the College was run by the government's department (DCLG), providing a wide range of courses on leadership, management, and operational training. However, in 2013, the college was privatised, and its remit consequently reduced. Similarly, the Emergency Planning College offered various training exercises for large scale civil emergencies, but it was outsourced in 2010, and the UK government reduced its remit.

Fire and Rescue Services have also been delegating professional accountability to professionally qualified support staff in a diverse range of back-office roles, including finance, procurement, estates, human resources, and occupational health. Individuals in these roles attend professional training courses to develop and maintain skills for their specific professions, which offer an accredited level of expertise. Various professional bodies regulate these qualifications and offer international-recognised professional memberships. Senior support staff have been using their professional knowledge and behaviours, gained through professional qualifications and subsequent professional

memberships, to demonstrate their commitment to the professional standards within their fields, and to guide and train more junior colleagues.

8.2.   Accountability arrangements post the Policing and Crime Act 2017

8.2.1. Vertical accountability

This section discusses the understandings of vertical bureaucratic accountability under the sub-themes of day-to-day responsibilities, and values and principles, in the FRA governance model (the representation model) and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) governance model (the governance model) following the implementation of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

8.2.1.1.   Day-to-day responsibilities

Fire and Rescue Services have continued to be professionally accountable for their day-to-day duties, including response to incidents, protection, and prevention after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. According to participants, day-to-day service delivery, in both FRA and PFCC governance models remained relatively the same as before the 2017 legislation. Fire and Rescue Services continued to deliver the service according to professional standards, which are set out in their service delivery plans.

"Again, as far as the accountability goes, I don't think anything's changed at a local level or anything's had a knock-on effect directly to us".

(Firefighter, Case Study 2)

"Day to day wise, I'll be honest to say not a lot [has changed]. Our working practices, how we do our training, how we respond, is pretty much as it was…day to day running really is pretty much the same as it was."

(Firefighter, Case Study 4)

Firefighters also continued to engage in professional development activities, including training courses, to keep up to date with professional advancements in the fire sector. The 2017 legislation has not changed anything with regard to firefighters' training requirements and physical assessments, and firefighters did not notice a change in their day-to-day responsibilities.

However, Fire and Rescue Services have begun to pay increasingly more attention to fire safety after the Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017 (Moore-Bick 2019, Hackitt 2017) and the Manchester Arena Bombings in 2017 (Kerslake 2018, Prosser and Taylor 2020, Saunders 2021, 2022, 2023). Both incidents, according to participants, at both senior management and front-line level, changed the way Fire and Rescue Services operate, plan and train. This in turn meant that policies and training packages needed to be revised as a result of both incidents. This triggered further high-profile debates about proposed changes to the Fire Safety Order legislation and other high-rise buildings regulations.

> *"Grenfell has really sort of had a massive impact on the way we deliver our response to high rise… that's really had an increase in public perception, I suppose on accountability, and something we report on a regular basis now as to how we're sort of improving the service around response to high rises… it's been a real sort of push for us."*

> (ACFO 2, Case Study 4)

Local communities also began to take more interest in fire safety matters. The Grenfell Tower Fire and the Manchester Arena Bombings, which both resulted in high profile and long-running public inquiries (Hackitt 2017, Moore-Blick 2019, Kerslake 2018, Saunders 2021, 2022, 2023), made local communities and the media across England more aware of how they can hold Fire and Rescue Services to account for poor operational responses to incidents. The public started questioning fire safety, especially fire safety in high-rise residential buildings. This had an impact on Fire and Rescue Services' accountability for ensuring that local areas are adhering to fire safety standards. Fire and Rescue Services consequently strived to achieve high standards as a fire service, and therefore aimed at expanding their knowledge on fire safety prevention.

> *"Accountability for me is that the public, you're accountable to the public… but also it's the case of now that what's happened with the media, with Grenfell, the public are asking a hell of a lot more questions about things you know and they're interested in more"*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

"And I would say there's two good examples, Grenfell and the Manchester Arena…The public expect us to do more…There is lots of criticism for the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and the London [Fire Brigade], because when they needed them in their most life-threatening situations, they did not meet public expectations."

(ACFO, Case Study 5)

These major incidents have influenced Fire and Rescue Services' professionalism. They led the government, the media, and the public to expect and demand higher standards of professionalism than had been demonstrated in response to these two incidents.

8.2.1.2.   Values and principles

Fire and Rescue Services' stance on values and principles remained relatively unchanged compared to their views before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Both front-line as well as senior managers have been required to follow the professional values and principles that are enshrined in public service. Fire and Rescue Services continued to be concerned for the public interest and generally follow the Nolan Principles in terms of professional employee's behaviour. This in turn meant that members of the public have had their right to make complaints if they believed that Fire and Rescue Services or particular individuals do not follow the values and principles of public life.

8.2.2.   Horizontal accountability

Fire and Rescue Services continued to be horizontally accountable and mutually dependent, externally on peer organisations and internally on their colleagues after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This subsection explains how horizontal professional accountability has been operationalised since the introduction of the 2017 legislation.

8.2.2.1.   External and internal collaboration

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 articulates a desire for stronger collaboration across emergency services. The 2017 legislation requires all emergency services to actively investigate further opportunities for joint or collaborative delivery of their services. Nonetheless, most fire services had already been collaborating with other emergency

services prior to the 2017 legislation, as result of their legal obligations (see section 7.2.2.1.) and JESIP.

"We were already doing most of the collaboration previously anyway, there have been some new bits we've looked at between police and fire in particular."

(ACFO, Case Study 1)

The 2017 legislation has broadened collaboration with police services into some new areas. Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA governance model have been acting towards other emergency services, especially the police, as professional peers. This is because they have been mutually dependent on each other when sharing expertise and practices to keep communities safe.

"It's [the 2017 legislation] made us more aware of being involved around buying, training and other things. When we do management training, in the past perhaps we wouldn't have thought of each other, whereas now we do, and we share initiatives and try and involve each other and have that cross-pollination of ideas."

(DCFO, Case Study 3)

The 2017 legislation has encouraged Fire and Rescue Services to re-explore all possible approaches to collaboration. Front-line staff thought that Fire and Rescue Services had gained a better understanding of the professional needs of other emergency services since they have started to officially collaborate. This is because in the past, Fire and Rescue Services focused entirely on their individual needs when planning for future emergencies. After the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, this perception changed, as Fire and Rescue Services have been increasingly looking out for greater collaborative approaches with other emergency services and been trying to understand their respective needs.

"As an arson reduction officer, you've got a skill in the police that can assist fire reduction, you've got skills in the fire that can assist anti-social behaviour reduction. So, there's a lot of benefits from combining."

(Area Manager 1, Case Study 3)

Fire and Rescue Services referred to the benefits that they have been able to provide to other services, whilst other emergency services in return have been made more aware of

Fire and Rescue Services' needs to operate better. Consequently, emergency services collaboration has become more efficient and effective than previously. Nonetheless, Fire and Rescue Services believed that there is still scope to help other services. For example, by being involved at low-level police incidents. This would free up capacity for the police to go to more important incidents.

Fire and Rescue Services that moved to the PFCC-governance model also indicated that they have been mutually dependent on police forces when sharing estates or responding to incidents. Fire and Rescue Services have also become engaged in breaking in through people's homes to save lives, and they have also started supporting missing person's enquiries (Case Study 5).

Both the FRA and the PFCC-governed services, however, indicated that working together with the police services was perceived as an organisational culture change for the staff.

> *"The police have got their brand and culture, the fire service have got ours, and I think it's important for both to keep those. We can join up how we work to make those efficiencies and improvements, however from my experience of bringing together a police and fire team on a small scale, it's organisational culture."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 4)

Fire and Rescue Services are much smaller organisations than police forces. Participants feared losing their professional identity when working with the police. This is because the collaboration between the two services mostly relies on Fire and Rescue Services assisting the police, not vice versa. The fear of loss of identity was also expressed by participants when speaking about sharing headquarters with the police. This all contributed to Fire and Rescue Services' reluctance to fully collaborate with police services as they believed that the two services should be equal partners in collaboration.

In both FRA and PFCC governance models, the horizontal accountability relationship between Fire and Rescue Services and ambulance services has been limited. Nonetheless, both services have some activities in common, such as emergency planning through the Local Resilience Forums. Ambulance services are primarily focused on day-to-day response, operate on a regional basis, and have little organisational capacity to carry out training

exercises. This means that they are unable to invest the resources into proactive collaboration with Fire and Rescue Services.

> *"I think we have a very different working relationship with the ambulance service, because the ambulance services obviously operate throughout the region, they are much harder partners to collaborate with. Equally, the ambulance service are virtually 100% focused on response because they don't have enough resources to provide their day-to-day response. What that means is that they have very little organisational capacity left to do proactive or development activities, so they don't tend to be able to invest the resources into collaboration that potentially we can, or the police can."*

> (Director 1, Case Study 1)

Collaboration between the two services has been limited both before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. However, there are some examples of greater collaboration between the two services, such as when Fire and Rescue Services assisted both ambulance services and the NHS to respond to incidents and with the vaccination roll-out during the COVID-19 pandemic (Murphy and Lakoma 2023). However, both front-line officers and senior managers in Fire and Rescue Services acknowledged that there is scope for greater support from their side to support ambulance services in life saving interventions.

> *"We are highly trained up to almost paramedic technician level, all our firefighters are, we carry a lot of first line first aid equipment, and we go to car crashes and significant incidents and give first aid trauma management, we can respond to cardiac arrests, strokes, things like that, and bring people back to life, lots of capacity that we could use to support the ambulance service, who are really struggling with their demands."*

> (ACFO, Case Study 2)

Senior managers argued that Fire and Rescue Services could support already stretched ambulance services' demand and capacity, and ultimately could add more value and help across the emergency services sector. Nonetheless, ambulance services, according to participants, were not convinced that support from Fire and Rescue Services during the pandemic could be sustained in the future. This is because ambulance services are within

the NHS, with different governance arrangements to Fire and Rescue Services, which is seen as a barrier to strengthening collaboration between the two services.

8.2.3. Diagonal accountability

This subsection explains diagonal professional accountability after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It discusses how the independent inspectorate, professional standards and operational guidance, and professional qualifications and memberships have been operationalised in the fire sector since the 2017 legislation.

8.2.3.1. Independent inspectorate

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 established HMICFRS as a new inspectorate for Fire and Rescue Services after eight years of having no professional inspectorate. Senior managers and front-line staff welcomed the creation of the inspectorate, which was intended, *inter alia*, to influence the quality of services through professional knowledge and expertise.

> *"There are no consistent standards in terms of training and performance. HMICFRS bringing that in and feeding back via the state of the fire report is a real welcome one for me. So, if we can professionalise the service, transform it and bring it in to what it needs for the future, all the better."*

> (ACFO, Case Study 2)

> *"The key for it all for me is sharing best practice, so what works in one fire and rescue service may or may not work in another, but if you don't know about it, then you can't make an informed decision as to whether or not it will work in your fire and rescue service."*

> (Watch Manager 1, Case Study 5)

The inspectorate has been created to provide, *inter alia*, high quality professional advice to Fire and Rescue Services, using professional teams, including experienced officers and other fire and rescue experts, to identify best practice in the sector. Senior managers found that the learning and feedback that came from inspection visits and reports did help to improve the quality of services to local communities. Managers indicated that the three pillars of effectiveness, efficiency, and people are particularly useful to understand how services can further improve, based on the inspectorate's professional judgement.

In particular, the assessment of the 'people' part of inspections includes developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, and flexible. The inspection methodology assesses current and future skills requirements and addresses capability gaps within the services. The inspectorate has also been assessing whether the senior leaders of local Fire and Rescue Services are positive role models, and whether this is reflected in the collective behaviour of the workforce (HMICFRS 2024).

The inspection methodology demonstrated that the inspectorate has been professionally influencing Fire and Rescue Services to achieve continuous improvement through learning and development. Participants indicated that the inspectorate brought standardisation of assessment to Fire and Rescue Services, as previously, under the peer review regime, services had greater autonomy under the policy of austerity-localism and there was hardly any accountability to anybody.

> *"The positives of the inspectorate is the standardisation and the ability for the sector to make progress because it brings everybody together and actually localism just meant everyone was going in a different direction, so HMICFRS as an inspectorate allows us all to align and make progress together in one direction."*

> (Area Manager 2, Case Study 3)

The inspectorate has introduced standardisation of assessment for Fire and Rescue Services, irrespective of the governance model. The annual 'State of Fire' report published by HMICFRS (2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a) also contributes to professional improvement of Fire and Rescue Services, as it assesses services individually and nationally, and provides an overall view of the sector with specific national recommendations.

8.2.3.2.   Professional standards and operational guidance

The development of a wider range of professional standards and national operational guidance for Fire and Rescue Services has been a key element of the government's fire reform programme since 2017. The National Framework (Home Office 2018) states that professionalism of Fire and Rescue Services needs to be enhanced through a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards across all areas of Fire and Rescue Services.

Before the establishment of the Fire Standards Board, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) created new National Operational Guidance, which provided operational good practice in response to incidents. Fire and Rescue Services relied on the operational guidance to ensure that they act appropriately.

> *"Our ways of working, our operational training, are all now starting to be developed at a national level, and the aspiration is that fire and rescue services start to align their ways of working… HMICFRS will look specifically as to how services are implementing National Operational Guidance because the aspiration from government obviously is that all fire and rescue services start to do the same thing in the same way."*

> (Director 1, Case Study 1)

> *"If you look at it nationally now, because we're all going to be wearing the same fire kit, we're getting National Operational Guidance, so what they're trying to do is get every fire service singing off the same hymn sheet, doing the same things, using the same things, and if you get that nationally, then I think we'll see more collaboration with closer fire services where you will look at more of a saving and collaborating more with each other because you all do everything the same way."*

> (Firefighter, Case Study 1)

Both senior managers and front-line staff welcomed the National Operational Guidance initiative as it has started the process of standardisation of operational guidance. The introduction of the operational guidance meant that all Fire and Rescue Services in England have been required to follow the professional protocols, which minimise discrepancies between the way that services operate. Fire and Rescue Services also argued that by implementing the national guidance, they might benefit from closer professional collaboration with other Fire and Rescue Services that have adopted the same procedures as well as generate potential savings from sharing good practice.

When it comes to fire standards, some of them have been developed based on previous guidance, where appropriate. However, several new standards have also been introduced. The Fire Standards Board, with an independent chair, has been set up by the NFCC to develop the standards for the fire sector (see section 3.5.). Since then, all Fire and Rescue

Services have been required to adhere to the standards introduced by the Fire Standards Board and the inspectorate has had regard to these standards as part of their inspections. Senior managers felt that the establishment of the new standards body supported the standardisation agenda of the fire sector.

"I think with the fire standards coming in, that will be the measure…like the police, there needs to be that national direction and standards for us to be measured against. And we're just going through that messy transition phase to get to that."

(Area Manager 2, Case Study 4)

Senior managers welcomed the establishment of professional standards, not least as an opportunity to share good practice with all fire services, notwithstanding their differences in governance arrangements. At the time of writing (spring 2024), the Fire Standards Board had approved 16 professional standards, including some operational standards relating to protection, prevention, and risk management (see Table 17). Although the standards have been relatively recently established, Fire and Rescue Services welcomed the change towards coherent and professional priorities for the fire sector.

Table 17: Professional fire standards

Source: Fire Standards Board (2024)[6]

Fire Standards	
Emergency Response Driving	Protection
Operational Competence	Safeguarding
Operational Learning	Fire Investigation
Operational Preparedness	Emergency Preparedness and Resilience
Community Risk Management Planning	Data Management
Code of Ethics	Leading and Developing People
Prevention	Leading the Service
Communication and Engagement	Fire Control

8.2.3.3.   Professional qualifications and memberships

Professional qualifications and memberships continued to indirectly influence the professionalism of Fire and Rescue Services. Professional accountability continued to

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[6] There is currently an ongoing programme that envisages the eventual creation of a suite of 24 standards.

concern both professionally qualified support staff and operational staff. Both the Fire Service College and the Emergency Planning College remained responsible for providing various training courses, although their remit and offering has significantly reduced since privatisation and outsourcing respectively. The scope of professional expertise and knowledge gained through fire education has therefore diminished in the fire sector.

8.3. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the services' understandings of professional accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Table 18 summarises Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability in relation to vertical, horizontal, and diagonal directions.

Fire and Rescue Services before the 2017 Act were vertically professionally accountable to communities for providing them with the fire safety service. They followed professional standards when responding to incidents, protecting, and preventing communities, but also adhered to professional values and principles enshrined in the public service. Fire and Rescue Services' professional accountability has not significantly changed as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. However, major incidents that occurred in 2017 resulted in Fire and Rescue Services paying increasing attention to fire safety within local areas, and ultimately taking a different approach to professional response, planning and training.

Fire and Rescue Services before the 2017 legislation were horizontally accountable and mutually dependent, externally on peer organisations, and internally on their colleagues. Externally, firefighters and managers used their professional knowledge and expertise to collaborate with other Fire and Rescue Services and other emergency services, to ensure public safety and health and wellbeing of communities by addressing different incidents and emergencies. They felt that engaging in external collaborations was the right thing to do, and ultimately helped them to do their jobs better. Nonetheless, peer challenges were viewed as insufficient in holding services professionally to account.

Table 18: Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's interpretation

Directions	Main sub-themes	Before the 2017 Act	After the 2017 Act	
		FRA-governed services	FRA-governed services	PFCC-governed services
Vertical (Fire and Rescue Service - communities)	**Day-to-day responsibilities**	**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.
	Values and principles	**Extensive** adherence to Nolan Principles.	**Extensive** adherence to Nolan Principles.	**Extensive** adherence to Nolan Principles.
Horizontal (Fire and Rescue Service – other fire services/ emergency services/ partners)	**External and internal collaboration**	**Moderate** accountability to other emergency services when addressing different incidents and emergencies. **Extensive** accountability when working together within teams at the front-line.	**Extensive** accountability to the police when addressing different incidents and emergencies. **Moderate** accountability to the ambulance services when addressing different incidents and emergencies. **Extensive** accountability when working together within teams at the front-line.	**Extensive** accountability to the police when addressing different incidents and emergencies. **Moderate** accountability to the ambulance services when addressing different incidents and emergencies. **Extensive** accountability when working together within teams at the front-line.
	Peer review regime	**Limited** professional accountability through peer challenges.	N/A	N/A
Diagonal (Inspectorate/ professional bodies – the service)	**Inspectorate**	**Limited** accountability towards inspection bodies.	**Extensive** accountability towards the inspectorate.	**Extensive** accountability towards the inspectorate.
	Professional standards/ guidance	**Limited** accountability under operational voluntary guidance (limited fire standards)	**Moderate** accountability under the professional guidance and standards (still emerging)	**Moderate** accountability under the professional guidance and standards (still emerging)
	Professional qualifications and memberships	**Extensive** range of professional training opportunities	**Limited** range of professional training opportunities	**Limited** range of professional training opportunities

The introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 formalised the duty to collaborate with other emergency services, particularly the police, and encouraged it into wider areas, including closer working relationship in a form of professional accountability. In the cases of the PFCC governance model, this broadened into joint decision-making with the police. Whilst Fire and Rescue Services extended their collaboration with the police in a number of areas, collaboration with ambulance services (except during COVID-19) remained limited due to the different organisational capacities and governance arrangements between two services. Peer challenges were significantly wound down with the establishment of the new inspectorate. Professional accountability also remained important when working together within internal teams at the front-line as firefighters continued to use their knowledge and expertise to hold each other professionally to account.

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there was relatively limited diagonal professional accountability within Fire and Rescue Services. Historically, Fire and Rescue Services were diagonally influenced by the professional inspection regime that was abolished in 2010. They were also affected by the operational guidance from the fire sector, and professional qualifications and memberships within the service. Generally, they all had limited influence on the professionalism in the fire sector after 2010. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 established a professional inspectorate, *inter alia,* to assess the professionalism as well as the performance of Fire and Rescue Services. In addition, National Operational Guidance and professional fire standards have been created, which indirectly influence the services' practice and mitigate potential discrepancies between the way that services operate across the sector. The scope of professional education through government agencies has, however, reduced as the two government organisations supporting the fire sector professionalisation were privatised. Nonetheless, Fire and Rescue Services felt greater professional accountability under the new regime introduced by the 2017 legislation, as it has brought benchmarks, standardisation, and the potential for the sector to make progress on greater professionalisation within the service.

Overall, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has brought a number of changes in professional accountabilities. Generally, mechanisms to ensure professional accountability have been extended. The changes affected both FRA- and PFCC-governed services with only marginal differences between them. PFCC-governed services clearly engaged in professional collaboration with police as result of new governance arrangements. On the other hand,

collaboration with ambulance services remained limited for both types of governance models, due to the different organisational capacities between the two services.

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to understand how notions of accountability change depending on the way public services are governed. In particular, this study compared Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the governance changes brought about by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, by focusing on the differences between accountability in the new Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) governance model services, in the traditional Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) governance model services, and in the latter after it was refined by the 2017 Act.

The understanding of accountability differed before and after governance reforms in relation to *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability). This chapter examines *how* and *why* Fire and Rescue Services understandings of accountability have changed as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It builds upon previous chapters which focused on what has changed and aims to address the following research objective, by building on the literature review and the empirical findings:

To examine how and why governance reforms affect accountability dynamics within public services.

9.2. Summary of empirical findings

This section summarises the findings from chapters 5-8, which highlighted how Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability have changed as a result of governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Figures 19 and 20 summarise the main findings before and after the Policing and Crime Act 2017, in relation to *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability), in the traditional FRA governance model services (Figure 19) and the PFCC governance model services (Figure 20) respectively.

Accountability for what?

Direction	Bureaucratic accountability	Political accountability	Legal accountability	Professional accountability
Vertical	**Limited** scrutiny from an FRA. **Moderate** accountability from top to bottom through meeting performance targets.	**Limited** ability to dismiss FRA members. **Limited** opportunities for the public to engage with the services. **Moderate** transparency. **Moderate** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Moderate** accountability through compliance with legislation. **Extensive** accountability through operational and financial audits until 2015. **Limited** accountability through financial audits since 2015.	**Moderate** accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training.
Horizontal	**Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services.	**Moderate** level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies.	**Limited** accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services.	**Moderate** accountability to other emergency services. **Limited** professional accountability through peer challenges.
Diagonal	**Limited** accountability towards inspection bodies or peer organisations.	**Moderate** level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making.	**Moderate** accountability under external inspections (1947-2010). **Limited** accountability under sector-led improvement (1947-2010).	**Limited** accountability towards the inspectorate. **Limited** accountability under operational voluntary guidance. **Extensive** range of professional training opportunities.

(Accountability to whom? — vertical label on left)

⬇ **Governance reforms since 2017** ⬇

Accountability for what?

Direction	Bureaucratic accountability	Political accountability	Legal accountability	Professional accountability
Vertical	**Moderate** scrutiny from an FRA. **Moderate** accountability from top to bottom through meeting performance targets.	**Moderate** ability to dismiss FRA members, including the PCC. **Limited** opportunities for the public to engage with the services. **Moderate** transparency. **Moderate** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Moderate** accountability through compliance with legislation. **Limited** accountability through financial audits.	**Extensive** accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training.
Horizontal	**Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services.	**Moderate** level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies.	**Limited** accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services.	**Extensive** accountability to the police. **Moderate** accountability to ambulance services.
Diagonal	**Extensive** bureaucratic scrutiny of the inspectorate focused on performance.	**Moderate** level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making.	**Extensive** accountability under external inspections.	**Extensive** accountability towards the inspectorate. **Moderate** accountability under operational voluntary guidance. **Limited** range of professional training opportunities.

(Accountability to whom? — vertical label on left)

Figure 19: FRA-governed services: Summary of Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's own interpretation of the level of accountability in this study

Accountability for what?

Direction	Bureaucratic accountability	Political accountability	Legal accountability	Professional accountability
Vertical	**Limited** scrutiny from an FRA. **Moderate** accountability from top to bottom through meeting performance targets.	**Limited** ability to dismiss FRA members. **Limited** opportunities for the public to engage with the services. **Moderate** transparency. **Moderate** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Moderate** accountability through compliance with legislation. **Extensive** accountability through operational and financial audits until 2015. **Limited** accountability through financial audits since 2015.	**Moderate** accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training.
Horizontal	**Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with police and ambulance services.	**Moderate** level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies.	**Limited** accountability between fire and police, and fire and ambulance services	**Moderate** accountability to other emergency services. **Limited** professional accountability through peer challenges.
Diagonal	**Limited** accountability towards inspection bodies or peer organisations.	**Moderate** level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on FRAs' decision-making.	**Moderate** accountability under external inspections (1947-2010), **Limited** accountability under sector-led improvement (1947-2010)	**Limited** accountability towards the inspectorate. **Limited** accountability under operational voluntary guidance. **Extensive** range of professional training opportunities.

Accountability to whom? (left side label)

Governance reforms since 2017

Accountability for what?

Direction	Bureaucratic accountability	Political accountability	Legal accountability	Professional accountability
Vertical	**Extensive** scrutiny from the PFCC. **Extensive** accountability through performance-oriented structures within services.	**Extensive** ability to dismiss the PFCC. **Extensive** opportunities for the public to engage with the services. **Limited** transparency. **Limited** level of connections with local areas and communities.	**Extensive** accountability through compliance with legislation. **Limited** accountability through financial audits.	**Extensive** accountability for high quality professional response, planning and training.
Horizontal	**Moderate** accountability relationship when collaborating with police. **Limited** accountability relationship when collaborating with ambulance services.	**Extensive** level of mutual accountability working towards policies and strategies.	**Moderate** accountability between fire and police **Limited** accountability between fire and ambulance services.	**Extensive** accountability to the police. **Moderate** accountability to ambulance services.
Diagonal	**Extensive** bureaucratic scrutiny of the inspectorate focused on performance.	**Extensive** level of influence of political parties and representative bodies on PFCCs' decision-making.	**Extensive** accountability under external inspections.	**Extensive** accountability towards the inspectorate. **Moderate** accountability under operational voluntary guidance. **Limited** range of professional training opportunities.

Accountability to whom? (left side label)

Figure 20: PFCC-governed services: Summary of Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017

Source: Author's own interpretation of the level of accountability in this study

All Fire and Rescue Services generally shared similar understandings of accountability before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, as they were all governed by their local FRAs. However, although, Fire and Rescue Services from combined and metropolitan FRA models had very similar understandings of accountability, Fire and Rescue Services that were governed by county council FRAs had slightly different perspectives on accountability (see Chapter 7 – Legal accountability). This is because combined and metropolitan FRAs acted as standalone governing bodies, whereas those services that were governed by county council FRAs were embedded in the county council's leadership and management structures. Standalone FRAs were therefore directly legally accountable for financial compliance to the government and local communities, whereas county council FRAs were indirectly legally accountable to government and local communities, because their primary relationship was with the county council.

Following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services experienced a number of governance changes. Most notably, some services moved to the PFCC governance model. As a result, Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability have changed as result of the new governance arrangements. Moreover, these changes resulted in different understandings of accountability in FRA-governed services on the one hand, and PFCC-governed services on the other (see Figures 19 and 20 for comparison).

In relation to the vertical direction of accountability, Fire and Rescue Services that remained under the FRA governance model after 2017, felt moderate bureaucratic accountability from their FRA. In contrast, Fire and Rescue Services that transferred to the PFCC governance model experienced extensive bureaucratic accountability from their new governing bodies – the PFCCs. Similarly, Fire and Rescue Services believed that the FRA governance model offered moderate level of political accountability when it comes to dismissing the members of FRAs, whereas PFCC governance model provided extensive political accountability as result of the directly-elected individual overseeing the service. However, the PFCC governance model offered limited political accountability with regard to the transparency of decision-making and the level of connections with local communities, whereas the FRA governance model provided moderate political accountability with regard to these factors. When it came to legal accountability, Fire and Rescue Services that transferred to the PFCC model experienced extensive legal accountabilities of statutory compliance with additional legislation, whereas FRA-governed services felt that their legal

accountabilities remained relatively similar to those before the Act and were therefore moderate. In terms of professional accountability, both FRA- and PFCC-governed services felt extensive accountability to local communities for how they respond, plan and train.

Horizontally, Fire and Rescue Services that remained under FRAs continued to feel limited bureaucratic and legal accountability when collaborating with police and ambulance services, despite the statutory duty to collaborate with other emergency services. In comparison, those services that transferred to the PFCC governance model experienced moderate bureaucratic and legal accountability to the police, and limited bureaucratic and legal accountability when working with ambulance services. PFCC-governed services felt that joint governance arrangements with the police contributed to greater accountability between the two services. All Fire and Rescue Services believed that the different governance arrangements at the horizontal level hindered their accountability to their partners. Similarly, when it came to political accountability, PFCC-governed services felt extensive accountability between politicians and officers holding each other to account, whereas FRA-governed services felt moderate accountability to the local councillors in FRAs. In terms of professional accountability, FRA-governed services felt moderate accountability when collaborating with the police and ambulance services, whereas those services that transferred to the PFCC governance model experienced extensive professional accountability when working with the police, and moderate professional accountability to ambulance services, partially as result of joint governance with the police.

Diagonally, both FRA- and PFCC-governed services experienced extensive bureaucratic, legal, and professional accountability, primarily through the establishment of the inspectorate. This is a change from the situation before the 2017 reforms, when diagonal accountability was relatively limited in bureaucratic, legal, and professional areas. In terms of political accountability, Fire and Rescue Services felt an indirect moderate influence from political parties and representative bodies in FRA-governed services, but more extensive influence in PFCC-governed services.

The findings show that Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability differed before and after governance reforms in relation to *'accountability for what'* and *'accountability to whom'*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those services that transferred to the PFCC governance model experienced greater changes in understandings of accountability as result of the 2017 legislation than those services that remained under the FRA

governance model. However, both FRA- and PFCC-governed services generally felt more accountable to their stakeholders in comparison to the situation before the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

9.3. Interpretation of empirical findings

In recent decades, governments have introduced various reforms to try to improve public accountability (Dubnick and Yang 2011). Although the complex and qualitative nature of both governance arrangements and accountability mean it is difficult to measure the extent to which they have achieved this, studies have nonetheless shown that governance reforms can lead to changes in the various forms of accountability.

One issue associated with investigating accountability under governance reforms is therefore not only understanding whether they enhance accountability or not, but also understanding how accountability is perceived by different actors (Romzek 2000). This thesis has argued that accountability is often perceived in terms of two dimensions – *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability). It has used both dimensions to demonstrate that public services manage combinations of multiple, different, changing, and often conflicting and overlapping expectations within and outside their organisations (Acar *et al.* 2008, Willems and Van Dooren 2011).

Romzek (2000) argues that in times of reform there are usually calls for a reliance on a 'different kind' of accountability. For example, Romzek and Dubnick (1987) found that the space shuttle Challenger tragedy in 1986 happened because of over-reliance on political and hierarchical (bureaucratic) accountabilities, rather than adequate or sufficient professional accountability. Similarly, Kim (2005), in a study of non-profit community mental health centres, found that excessive legal and hierarchical (bureaucratic) accountability may have a detrimental effect on professional and political accountabilities. These examples demonstrate that satisfying multiple accountability demands can prove to be highly challenging.

Both the UK government and Fire and Rescue Services claimed that Fire and Rescue Services (and the FRAs) required significant reforms as result of poor governance and ineffective structures. This study finds that the government over-relied on horizontal professional

accountability in the fire sector between the 2010 and 2017 reforms. The findings suggest that these horizontal forms of accountability were not adequate for ensuring control and maintaining performance. As a result, services had too much autonomy and too little scrutiny of their service delivery. This is because, *inter alia,* these horizontal forms of accountability offered limited or zero sanctioning options (Schillemans 2008, 2011). Sanctions under the sector-led improvement regime were practically non-existent as the peer review regime offered a lack of formal scrutiny and hardly any accountability (Downe *et al*. 2018, Murphy and Ferry 2018). Fire and Rescue Services did not robustly hold each other to account for improvement based on the peer review recommendations. Although the process relied on the professional knowledge and expertise of a peer service, it proved to be an inadequate tool for holding people and organisations accountable, even against metrics and targets that they set themselves. In addition, since 2010, Fire and Rescue Services had been without an independent external inspectorate or other external scrutiny arrangements, meaning there was inadequate bureaucratic and professional accountability.

As result of these inadequacies, the government proposed to introduce new reforms within Fire and Rescue Services. The government intended to deliver a radical programme of governance reforms to improve accountability within the fire sector. These included provisions enshrined in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and other related reforms (see sections 3.4.-3.6.)

First, the 2017 legislation intended to enhance political accountability and the community responsiveness of Fire and Rescue Services by establishing directly-elected PFCCs. The previous FRA governance model largely corresponded to the bureaucratic type of accountability, operating in a 'committee' style when scrutinising Fire and Rescue Services. English Fire and Rescue Services had no directly-elected element in their traditional FRA governance model. The 2017 reforms aimed to re-establish a direct relationship between Fire and Rescue Services and the communities they serve by introducing a directly-elected individual specifically responsible for local Fire and Rescue Services. It was clear that the government originally envisaged that PFCCs would eventually be the predominant form of governance across the sector. Since English Fire and Rescue Services previously had no directly-elected element, PFCCs were therefore portrayed as almost a panacea for the previous inadequate governance structures.

In practice, this did not happen, and the new arrangements have largely failed to provide communities with adequate communication channels. This thesis has found that new reporting arrangements under the PFCC governance model have been less transparent than under the FRA governance model, and PFCCs were generally less responsive to their local communities than FRAs. Additionally, the public's interest in Fire and Rescue Services and the PFCCs' elections have been limited. This was reflected in relatively low voter turnout, e.g., in in the 2021 PFCC elections with Essex 50.6%, Northamptonshire 24.9%, Staffordshire 28.2%, North Yorkshire 24.9% (Danechi and Tunnicliffe 2021), and in the recent 2024 PFCC elections with Essex 24.9% (Colchester City Council 2024), Northamptonshire 19.62% (West Northamptonshire Council 2024), Staffordshire 19.23% (Staffordshire Commissioner 2024), and Cumbria 21.17% (Cumberland Council 2024), North Yorkshire had no election. This shows that the direct political accountability did not necessarily help to reconnect Fire and Rescue Services with their local communities and the level of public's engagement in Fire and Rescue Services has remained relatively low.

The controversies around transferring the democratic mandate from FRAs to PFCCs also contributed to the negative perceptions of Fire and Rescue Services regarding the implementation of the PFCC governance model. However, the government has been a strong advocate of the PFCC governance model and provided financial support to nine Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to help them develop their business cases (Home Office 2017, Eckersley and Lakoma 2022). Nevertheless, by spring 2024, after seven years of government support and encouragement, only five Fire and Rescue Services (Essex, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire, North Yorkshire, and Cumbria) had transferred to the PFCC governance model. In three of these areas, Essex[7], Northamptonshire[8] and Cumbria[9] extraneous or abnormal factors were a significant influence on the success of the business cases for transfer.

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[7] In 2015, Essex Fire and Rescue Service had been subjected to an independent review which found the service to be a failing organisation with a toxic organisational culture (Lucas 2015).

[8] In 2018, an independent report labelled Northamptonshire County Council as a 'failing organisation' with 'significant financial challenges' (Caller 2018).

[9] Cumbria County Council together with its district councils were re-organised in 2023 (The Cumbria (Structural Changes) Order 2022) with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government establishing a PFCC, albeit against a popular opinion and vote (Cumbria Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner 2022).

Other potential cases faced significant local opposition and as a result, the vast majority of Fire and Rescue Services remained under the FRA governance model. This suggests that the implementation of the PFCC governance model has not been carried out as originally intended by the government. Nonetheless, the government remains committed to extending the remit of directly-elected individuals overseeing Fire and Rescue Services, and this now includes the transfer of local Fire and Rescue Services' governance to PFCCs or directly-elected mayors (Home Office 2022, 2023), as part of the government's wider vision of transferring responsibilities to single-person governance models.

Second, both the government and Fire and Rescue Services now acknowledged that too much unjustified reliance was placed on horizontal professional accountability under the sector-led improvement regime before 2017. Not only was there a need for more robust and extensive accountability arrangements, but also a better balance between professional, bureaucratic, political, and legal accountabilities in Fire and Rescue Services. Prior to 2017, the sector argued for a re-introduction of a number of measures of bureaucratic and legal accountability, including the establishment of an external inspectorate focused on supporting improvement. As a result of the 2017 legislation, His/Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has been providing diagonal bureaucratic, legal, and professional accountability, albeit with no direct consequences for Fire and Rescue Services. The legal and bureaucratic accountability arrangements, that the 2017 legislation introduced, were not as powerful as the pre-2010 Audit Commission regime that previously held Fire and Rescue Services to account. The inadequacies of Fire and Rescue Services' accountabilities were further illustrated by the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena Bombing inquiries, where both professional and bureaucratic accountabilities were insufficient to hold Fire and Rescue Services to account (Moore-Bick 2019, Hackitt 2017, Kerslake 2018, Saunders 2022a, 2022b) and suggested a need for a greater scope of mechanisms to hold Fire and Rescue Services to account.

Third, the government also introduced a legal duty on emergency services to collaborate, if it is in the interests of public safety or their efficiency or effectiveness. This specific provision of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 was primarily intended to enhance two types of accountability – legal accountability and bureaucratic accountability. First, it introduced potential consequences for services not following the statutory duty. In practice, Fire and Rescue Services felt limited legal accountability to collaborate with other emergency services partners, because they shared this duty (and accountability) with them. However,

Fire and Rescue Services did not feel that the compliance with the duty to collaborate was adequately scrutinised by any of the other actors holding Fire and Rescue Services to account. Furthermore, it was intended to make Fire and Rescue Services bureaucratically accountable for efficiency and effectiveness when collaborating with other emergency services in pursuance of greater public safety. This did happen for PFCC-governed services and their accountability relationships with the police, in that the new model enabled joint decision-making and discussions about potential efficiencies resulting from the collaboration. In addition, it enabled emergency services to be mutually accountable to each other when sharing professional expertise and practices to keep communities safe. However, this was largely limited to relationships with the police under the PFCC governance model. Collaboration between FRA-governed services and the police, and all Fire and Rescue Services and the ambulance service remained relatively limited. Different governance arrangements between Fire and Rescue Services and ambulance services remained a significant barrier to horizontal bureaucratic accountability relationship between the two services.

The changes introduced from a professional perspective (the establishment of HMICFRS, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), and the Fire Standards Board) started to address the previous limited accountability mechanisms prior to the 2017 legislation, including sector-led improvement initiatives, limited professional qualifications and other recognitions within Fire and Rescue Services. Fire and Rescue personnel ultimately felt the need for more external reassurance that they were doing a good, professional job. The establishment of new professional organisations has indirectly influenced the decision-making of Fire and Rescue Services through education and professional standards. However, as with diagonal accountability, professional accountability remained largely internal within the services, as the new organisations were able to offer their professional expertise but were not able to enforce compliance. Hence the extent of professional accountability of Fire and Rescue Services, in both FRA-governed and PFCC-governed services remains very similar, with scope for development and improvement in both.

The 2017 legislation and government reforms were intended to introduce more extensive accountability mechanisms in Fire and Rescue Services. The empirical findings, however, reveal that a different pattern of accountability types and accountability directions emerged than the government intended, and to varying degrees. In practice, the establishment of the inspectorate has had an extensive legal, bureaucratic, and professional influence across

all Fire and Rescue Services, whereas political accountability of newly established PFCCs has clearly not been as influential or as widespread as anticipated. Seven years after their introduction, only a small number of Fire and Rescue Services have transferred to the PFCC governance model and been subject to direct elections within their areas. On the other hand, all Fire and Rescue Services reported extensive accountability changes as result of the indirect influence of HMICFRS in bureaucratic, professional, and legal accountabilities. The establishment of the inspectorate brought back a stronger focus on performance management into the fire sector, although initially without taking sufficient notice of the need for professionalisation of the sector. The government's aim was to improve the sector's performance by making Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to an external inspection regime (Power 1997). However, this has proved more difficult than expected, as the inspectorate's initial approach has relied heavily on the current policing inspection model. The inspection framework has, however, been continuously developing as the inspectorate better understands the way in which fire sector operates and is governed. Nevertheless, inadequacies in fire and rescue professionalism remained and the sector (and government) supported a renewed focus on professional accountability, by establishing a professional standards body and transforming the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) into the NFCC.

The empirical findings reveal that the governance reforms and changes in the organisational landscape, changed the balance of different types and directions of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services, and ultimately resulted in a complicated and overlapping set of different accountabilities. They show that the government's vision of accountability in the fire sector differed from the Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability. The 2017 reforms did introduce a number of new accountability mechanisms, however, their practical implementation has been perceived by Fire and Rescue Services to be different to the original vision proposed by the UK government. This suggests that understandings of accountability depend not only on governance arrangements but also on perceptions of the involved parties. The UK government is still not content with the fire and rescue sector's accountability as it recently proposed further changes to improve professionalism, governance, and performance in the fire sector (Home Office 2022, 2023), which confirms that the 2017 reforms have not delivered all of the anticipated results.

9.4. Theoretical implications of empirical findings

In this section, the theoretical implications of this study are discussed in relation to the literatures on governance and accountability in the public sector.

9.4.1. Theoretical shifts of accountability as result of governance reforms

Governments in most Western countries have experienced increasing pressure to improve public services, which often lead them to introducing governance reforms (see Table 5 in Chapter 2). Amongst other things, these reforms often promise to provide greater public accountability (Dubnick and Yang 2011). In line with the previous literature (Romzek 2000, Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Kim 2005), such reforms tend to focus on certain types of accountability, while often de-emphasising or accentuating others, and ultimately change the balance of different types of accountabilities within and upon an organisation.

Figure 21 presents a framework, which illustrates *how* and *why* accountability might change as result of governance reforms in public services. It builds on Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) accountability typology and extends it by focusing on why governments might seek to introduce reforms to address different types of accountability. It uses the two critical factors initially introduced by Romzek and Dubnick (1987) and later refined by Romzek (2000) – *'the source of agency control'* and *'the degree of autonomy over agency actions'* - to explain how reforms that aim to address specific type(s) of accountability may affect the balance of different types of accountabilities within a public service – and why governments might seek to introduce these changes. *'Source of agency control'* identifies whether the ability to define and control expectations is held by some specified entity inside or outside the agency (the public service), and '*the degree of autonomy over agency actions'* explains the level of autonomy that the entity is given over defining those expectations (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Romzek 2000).

For example, governments may be concerned about exerting too much or too little control over a public service (scenario a or b below), and/or the degree of autonomy that an individual agency or service can exercise (scenario c or d below). Figure 21 builds on Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) original framework to show *how* and *why* such concerns could lead to ministers introducing governance reforms that shift the focus of accountability from one type to another, in an attempt to redress the balance. Although the four quadrants in Figure 21 represent ideal types of accountability that almost certainly

overlap in practice, the diagram can act as a useful heuristic to illustrate how governance reforms may ultimately affect the way in which an organisation is held to account by various stakeholders.
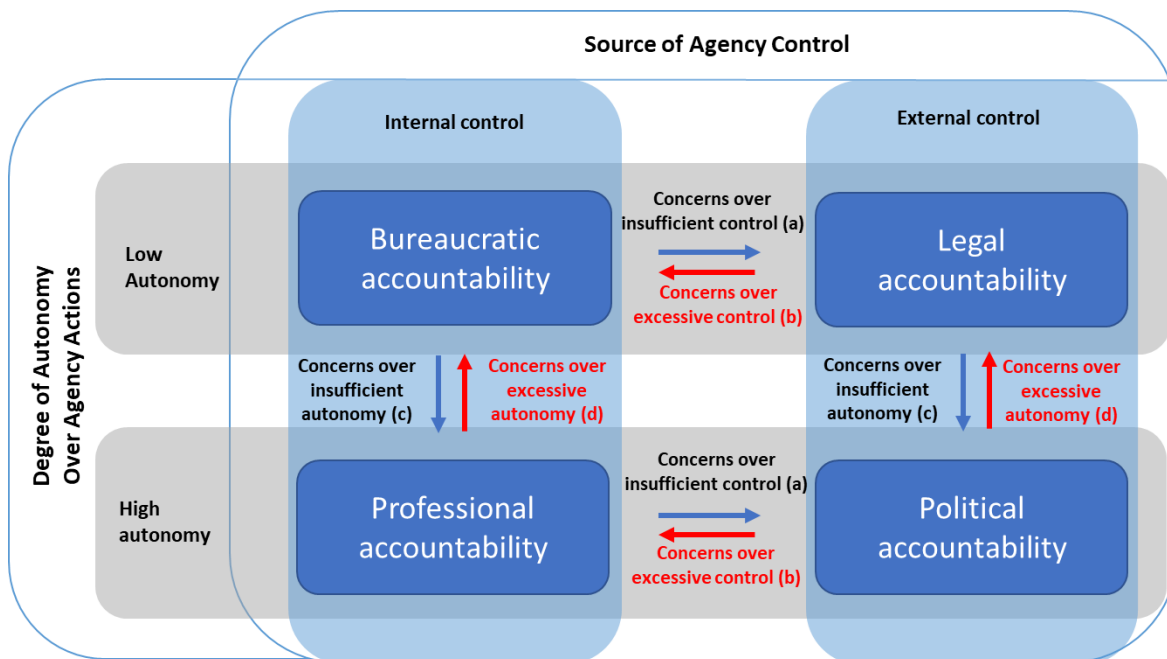
Figure 21: How and why governance reforms might affect different types of accountability

Source: Author and adapted from Romzek and Dubnick (1987), Romzek (2000)

The following section explains the theoretical scenarios (a, b, c, and d) in which a government responds to perceived accountability issues by introducing governance reforms that either extend or reduce control over the organisation, or increase or decrease the organisation's autonomy. This then shifts the focus of the public service's accountability from one type to another (We would also expect accountability to change after simultaneously shifting both of the critical factors).

a. *Concerns over insufficient control of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to exercise more external control over the service)*

If a government feels that it has insufficient control of a public service, it may introduce a reform to try to increase it, thereby resulting in a shift to more **legal accountability** versus **bureaucratic accountability** and/or more **political accountability** versus **professional accountability**, depending on the degree of autonomy (see Figure 21).

b. *Concerns over excessive control of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to exercise less external control over the service)*

If a government is concerned that it exerts too much control over a public service, it may pull a lever to try to reduce this, which could result in a shift to more **bureaucratic accountability** versus **legal accountability** and/or more **professional accountability** versus **political accountability**, depending on the degree of autonomy (see Figure 21).

c. *Concerns over insufficient autonomy of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to increase the public service's autonomy)*

If a government is concerned that a public service has insufficient autonomy over its actions, ministers may seek to reduce their level of scrutiny over the service by introducing reforms that result in a shift to either more **professional accountability** versus **bureaucratic accountability** and/or more **political accountability** versus **legal accountability**, depending on the source of control (see Figure 21).

d. *Concerns over excessive autonomy of a public service (i.e. governments feel they need to decrease the public service's autonomy)*

If a government feels that a public service has too much autonomy, it may seek to limit the service's freedom and increase the level of scrutiny provided by governing bodies and other monitoring agencies. This would result in a shift towards either more **bureaucratic accountability** versus **professional accountability** and/or more **legal accountability** versus **political accountability**, depending on the source of control (see Figure 21).

Overall, the theoretical framework helps to understand *how* and *why* accountability in public services may change as result of governance reforms – and, moreover, why governments might seek to introduce these reforms in the first place. The reasons include governments either extending or reducing control over the organisation, and/or increasing or decreasing the organisation's autonomy, often in response to perceived accountability issues. These changes result in shifting from one type of accountability to another, based on the accountability typology proposed by Romzek and Dubnick (1987), and they ultimately affect the balance of different types of accountabilities within an organisation, which may have profound effects on understandings of accountability of the actors involved.

9.4.2. Empirical shifts of accountability as result of governance reforms

The theoretical framework can be further explained by using the example of English Fire and Rescue Services. The following section provides two empirical examples for each of the scenarios (a, b, c, and d), in which accountability shifts from one type to another one, depending on the nature of the critical factors.

a. *Concerns over insufficient control of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to exercise more external control)*

In this scenario, accountability may be largely located in the **bureaucratic accountability** quadrant), and therefore government may seek to shift its focus towards **legal accountability** to exercise more external control over the service. For example, after the Grenfell Tower fire and its public inquiry, which showed that the building did not comply with building regulations, the government introduced new fire safety regulation in high-rise buildings (The Building Safety Act 2022) to hold responsible persons to account for fire safety. Alternatively, accountability could be largely located in the **professional accountability** quadrant), and therefore government may seek to shift its focus towards **political accountability** to exercise more external control over the service. As this study showed, the UK government sought to reduce the impact of internal professional control over Fire and Rescue Services by accentuating the role of governing bodies (i.e., FRA or PFCCs), which represent the service and are ultimately responsive to the needs of public and other outside stakeholders who hold the service to account.

b. *Concerns over excessive control of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to exercise less external control over the service)*

In this scenario, accountability may be largely located in the **legal accountability** quadrant, and therefore ministers may seek to shift the focus towards **bureaucratic accountability** to exercise less control over the service. This happened under the policy of localism, when the UK government increased the importance of local FRAs in order to rely on local leadership and scrutiny, whilst maintaining strategic responsibility for national resilience (DCLG 2012a). Alternatively, accountability could be largely located in the **political accountability** quadrant, and therefore government may seek to shift its focus towards **professional accountability** to exercise less control over the service. Recent proposals by the Home Office (2020, 2022) to confine operational responsibilities to Chief Fire Officers (CFOs)) illustrate how this might play out in Fire and Rescue Services.

c. Concerns over insufficient autonomy of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to increase the public service's autonomy)

If accountability is largely located in the **bureaucratic accountability** quadrant, ministers may wish to reduce reliance on supervision and performance measures, and shift towards greater **professional accountability** (i.e. the expertise of Fire and Rescue Services). This happened when the UK government abolished the legal and bureaucratic control of the Audit Commission over Fire and Rescue Services and introduced improvement through peer-led assessments and working in partnership with other organisations (DCLG 2012). Alternatively, if the services' accountability is largely located in the **legal accountability** quadrant, ministers may seek to involve outside stakeholders (such as the public) more in governance arrangements, through governing bodies such as FRAs or PFCCs. In such cases, we can see how the focus would shift from **legal accountability** towards **political accountability.** This happened when the government introduced PFCCs to directly involve the public in electing the individual overseeing their local Fire and Rescue Service.

d. Concerns over excessive autonomy of a public service (i.e., governments feel they need to reduce the public service's autonomy)

In this scenario, accountability is largely located in the **professional accountability** quadrant, and ministers wish to extend their reliance on supervision and performance measures and shift towards more **bureaucratic accountability.** For example, this happened when the Policing and Crime Act 2017 established HMICFRS in order to bring external independent scrutiny to the fire and rescue sector following the sector-led improvement era of inadequate peer assessments. Alternatively, if accountability is largely located in the **political accountability** quadrant, ministers may wish to extend the reliance on legislation and move towards **legal accountability.** This occurred when the government decided to introduce legislation after the Manchester Bombing Attack that focused on keeping people safe from terrorism in public places.

In the case of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms in Fire and Rescue Services in England, the UK government responded to perceived accountability problems and simultaneously affected all four types of accountabilities. The example of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms shows that the government decided that the priority for English Fire and Rescue Services was greater political accountability through newly established PFCCs, greater professional and bureaucratic accountability via HMICFRS, and greater

bureaucratic and legal accountability through collaboration with other emergency services. The 2017 reforms did introduce a number of new accountability mechanisms, although, their practical implementation has been perceived by Fire and Rescue Services to be different to the original vision proposed by the government.

The UK government was concerned over FRAs' insufficient control of Fire and Rescue Services. However, it also claimed that Fire and Rescue Services' greater accountability needed to be exercised at a local level through governing bodies by giving them greater autonomy. The government therefore shifted to **more political accountability** versus **bureaucratic accountability** by extending the PCCs' remit to include fire services. By introducing PFCCs, the government intended to enable local communities to directly scrutinise the governing body overseeing their local Fire and Rescue Service. In practice, the 2017 reforms did not significantly change the political accountability of Fire and Rescue Services, however, the introduction of PFCCs have had implications for other types of accountabilities. For example, bureaucratic accountability strengthened in both FRA- and PFCC-governed models as the introduction of PCCs/PFCCs brought improved scrutiny of the services. In addition, the governing bodies, responsible for providing political accountability to local communities, could also rely more on the bureaucratic mechanism of inspection reports to scrutinise the services. Political measures of accountability have also affected legal accountability, as the introduction of the PFCC model of governance imposed additional legal responsibilities for services that transferred to the PFCC governance model. Finally, in the services that had transferred to the PFCC governance model, professionalism has increased as they started to collaborate more with police services. The collaboration improved their skills and professional knowledge, and they ultimately become more effective in their roles.

The UK government became concerned over Fire and Rescue Services' increased or excessive autonomy during the sector-led improvement regime. It believed that Fire and Rescue Services' accountability needed to shift to **more bureaucratic accountability** versus **professional accountability** by establishing external bodies to bureaucratically scrutinise all Fire and Rescue Services. Nonetheless, the creation of HMICFRS, the Fire Standards Board and the NFCC have also had implications for Fire and Rescue Services' professional accountability, as they indirectly influenced the professionalism of Fire and Rescue Services. Fire and Rescue Services started to feel greater professional accountability when the HMICFRS was established because the performance assessments included new

professional benchmarks and the potential for the sector to make progress on greater professionalisation within the service. The establishment of a performance management regime through HMICFRS has also influenced the area of legal accountability as it has legally imposed external inspections on services. The increased bureaucratic accountability measures also had an impact on political accountability as it enabled the governing bodies (either FRAs or PFCCs) to hold the service to account for performance based on HMICFRS inspection reports.

The UK government was also concerned over excessive autonomy and insufficient control of collaboration between emergency services. It claimed that Fire and Rescue Services' accountability needed to shift to **more bureaucratic and legal accountability** versus **professional accountability** by introducing the legal duty for emergency services to collaborate, if it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness or the interest of other services. These changes have also had implications for other types of accountability. Fire and Rescue Services have increasingly been required to comply with the duty of collaboration as they are ultimately bureaucratically scrutinised by the inspectorate. These changes have also affected legal accountability as collaboration was introduced as a statutory duty for all Fire and Rescue Services. The introduction of the statutory duty to collaborate has also had implications for political accountability as it enhanced FRAs and PFCCs scrutiny on compliance with the duty of collaboration. In addition, Fire and Rescue Services strengthened their professional accountability when collaborating with their partners, which improved their skills and professional knowledge, and how they collectively and collaboratively respond to emergencies.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has affected all four types of accountabilities to a different extent. This study shows that the Act and the government has focused on some types of accountability more than others. Nonetheless, this thesis found that a change in one type of accountability has had implications for each of the other types of accountability in Fire and Rescue Services. It demonstrates the complicated and overlapping nature of different accountabilities in Fire and Rescue Services. The prospect of further reforms (Home Office 2022, 2023) confirms that the government is still dissatisfied with the post-2017 situation. This may be because ministers cannot agree with the fire and rescue stakeholders on what elements of accountability are important, and therefore how to get the balance between them right, suggesting that accountability in English Fire and Rescue Services remains a contested concept.

9.4.3. Accountability mechanisms

Previous studies have primarily focused on explaining Romzek and Dubnick's accountability types (1987) in relation to the traditional vertical direction of accountability. This study has, for the first time, identified accountability mechanisms in relation to all three accountability directions and Romzek and Dubnick's accountability typology (Table 19). Specifically, it has shown how reforms to the UK public sector, including to Fire and Rescue Services in England, have affected traditional vertical accountability relationships and also created new horizontal and diagonal directions of accountability (Schillemans 2008, 2011).

Table 19: Summary of accountability mechanisms in relation to accountability types and directions

Source: Author

	Bureaucratic	**Political**	**Legal**	**Professional**
Vertical	Overview and scrutiny, performance.	Elections, decision-making, responsiveness to communities.	Legislation, government intervention.	Expertise, values, and principles.
Horizontal	Effective and efficient collaboration.	Working relationships.	Legal partnerships.	Peer review, professional collaboration.
Diagonal	Performance, inspections.	Political parties and representation bodies.	Legal inspections.	Expert scrutiny, professional advice.

Vertical bureaucratic accountability relies on overview and scrutiny, as well as performance metrics. Vertical political mechanisms of accountability include direct or indirect elections, and organisation's decision-making and responsiveness to communities. Vertical legal accountability revolves around compliance with primary and secondary legislation, with the threat of government or legal intervention in cases of non-compliance. Vertical professional accountability relies on organisations' expertise, values and principles when being held to account. This suggests that vertical mechanisms of accountability show a clear hierarchical definition of authority between the organisation and the stakeholders holding the organisation to account.

This thesis has also found that accountability mechanisms are activated in the horizontal direction between parties operating or collaborating in the same areas of interest (Michels

and Meijer 2008). In bureaucratic accountability, parties can hold each other to account for effective and efficient collaboration. In political accountability, parties are accountable to each other when working together to deliver policies and strategies for the organisation. In legal accountability, parties are legally obliged to work in contractually based partnerships. In professional accountability, parties are involved in professional and peer collaboration. These mechanisms, although stressing different types of accountability, show that actors involved in horizontal accountability relationships get the opportunity to become actively involved at a similar level of decision-making, although they tend to do it without a clear hierarchical definition of authority.

This study has also found a number of diagonal accountability mechanisms in relation to the accountability types. Diagonal accountability relationships operate in the shadow of hierarchy (Bovens 2007), with a two-step relation to a forum, in which a third party is independent from the agent and the principal (Schillemans 2008). In bureaucratic accountability, inspection bodies report to the government and the public on the activities and performance of public services. In political accountability, political parties and representative bodies are the third parties that indirectly influence the organisation's decision-making. As with bureaucratic accountability, legal accountability operates when inspection bodies undertake a mandatory legal inspection on an organisation. In professional accountability, professional bodies and inspectorates report on the organisation's professional conduct.

In practice, horizontal and diagonal accountability mechanisms act as extensions of traditional vertical accountability and operate '*in the shadow of hierarchy*' (Schillemans 2008). They do not substitute vertical accountability mechanisms, but instead serve as an addition to traditional forms of accountability (Schillemans 2008, Michels and Meijer 2008, Schillemans 2011, Kettl 2015). Previous research has primarily focused on explaining accountability types in relation to the traditional vertical directions of accountability. This study expands the focus of enquiry by analysing all three directions of accountability to generate a more complete understanding of complex governance arrangements and their potential impact on accountability in public sector settings.

9.5. Practical implications of empirical findings

In this section, the practical implications of this study are discussed in relation to the existing research on accountability in Fire and Rescue Services and the literatures on accountability of single-person governance models.

9.5.1. Accountability in Fire and Rescue Services

Accountability in Fire and Rescue Services has received relatively little academic attention. Additionally, this literature predominantly pre-dates the Policing and Crime Act 2017, when governance arrangements for English Fire and Rescue Services significantly changed (see section 3.3.2. for a detailed analysis of available studies). Subsequent studies focus on the prospects for future integrated governance systems in emergency services (Ashworth 2019), and the implications for policy development, service delivery, and public assurance (Murphy *et al.* 2019a, 2020a). Despite the Act's explicit intention to improve accountability in Fire and Rescue Services, no previous studies have examined it empirically from this perspective. This thesis has investigated accountability empirically to identify the influences of institutional structures on individuals' understandings of accountability. It shows how governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 have increased the number of mechanisms through which Fire and Rescue Services can be held accountable.

This thesis is also the first empirical study that has looked at the impact of the new inspectorate for Fire and Rescue Services. The findings demonstrate that the establishment of the inspectorate has had a more significant influence on accountability than any of the other mechanisms introduced through the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The HMICFRS inspection process has informed not only the individual services that are held to account for performance, but it has also informed the national approach and the government's reform agenda for the service (HMICFRS 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, Home Office 2022, 2023).

Another finding from this study is the fact that central government (i.e., the Home Office) has increased its control over Fire and Rescue Services as result of the 2017 reforms. The Home Office became the central government department directly overseeing Fire and Rescue Services in 2016 and holding them legally to account for compliance with statutory duties. It also maintains financial control over Fire and Rescue Services through budgets

and audit. However, the findings of this study show that the Home Office has also gained more indirect control and influence over Fire and Rescue Services through the establishment of HMICFRS. This is because of the inspectorate's affiliation with the Home Office, and its budget control which limits its independence (Murphy 2017, Murphy *et al.* 2020a). This had direct implications for accountability, as it made Fire and Rescue Services feel more accountable to central government through the national inspection process, which in turn is heavily influenced by the policing inspection model.

Contrary to the government's intentions, however, both the PFCC governance arrangements and the duty to collaborate with other emergency services have had only a limited impact on the service and its accountability. Nonetheless, the government in its recent White Papers on Fire Reform (Home Office 2022, 2023) is still strongly influenced by the 'police' model for future governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services, as it actively encourages PCCs and mayors to take on the oversight of fire governance, where their areas are co-terminus with police forces and/or combined authorities. The government is also willing to adapt the policing model of operational independence of Chief Constables from PCCs to the fire sector. This proposal would mirror the policing structures, by making CFOs operationally independent from the FRAs/PFCCs. Another addition to the governance landscape would be the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue, mirroring the existing College of Policing. All these potential arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services reflect the already existing arrangements for police forces. Clearly, the government wishes Fire and Rescue Services to be governed in a similar way to the police, which might potentially bring Fire and Rescue Services closer in terms of their accountability relationships with the police forces, as was observed in PFCC-governed services during this study.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms did not change the Fire and Rescue Services' accountability to the public in terms of keeping them safe from fires. However, the Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017 (Moore-Bick 2019, Hackitt 2017) and the Manchester Arena Bombings in 2017 (Kerslake 2018, Saunders 2021, 2022, 2023) have changed the way Fire and Rescue Services feel responsive to local communities. Since these major incidents and subsequent and consequential legislation, Fire and Rescue Services have tried to pay more attention to fire safety, and changed the way Fire and Rescue Services operate, plan and train, which has affected their professional accountability to the public. These incidents

and subsequent inquiries have triggered further high-profile debates about changes to the Fire Safety Order legislation and other high-rise buildings regulations.

Overall, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has made Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to a number of stakeholders, including the government and the inspectorate. The findings of this study contribute to the limited literature on accountability in Fire and Rescue Services, but also have relevance to other emergency services, particularly the police services who work more closely with Fire and Rescue Services in England.

9.5.2. Accountability of single-person governance models

More decentralised leadership arrangements, including the directly-elected single-person model of governance, have recently been gaining traction in English local government after a long period of traditional local authority 'committee' or 'board' style representational governance. Many countries outside of the UK have already established directly-elected individuals, especially directly accountable mayors (Eckersley and Timm-Arnold 2014). The single-person governance models, including directly-elected mayors, PCCs, and recently PFCCs, have been implemented in the UK to try to enhance decision-making and improve political accountability to citizens (Fenwick *et al*. 2006, Lister and Rowe 2015). These governance changes were specifically intended to enhance local accountability, as they enabled the public to directly hold the elected individuals to account through elections and referendums (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012, Lowndes and Gardner 2016). Similarly, the extension of the PCC governance model into the PFCC governance model was also intended to improve the relationship between the services, the politicians, and more importantly, the public. However, earlier studies found that more local referendums and public consultations have rejected the single-person governance model than have favoured it (Rallings *et al.* 2014, Sandford 2022). In addition, recent studies indicate that the public have often no clear understanding of the directly-elected individuals' roles and responsibilities (Murphy *et al.* 2017, Ferry and Sandford 2022).

The results of this study largely support the findings of previous studies as they demonstrate that the PFCC governance arrangements, brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and promoted by central government, were largely opposed by local communities and other key Fire and Rescue Services' stakeholders. Ultimately, in those places where they were implemented, the arrangements did enable communities to have a direct say on

who is responsible for the governance of their local Fire and Rescue Services, however, they have provided only limited responsiveness to communities. In contrast, the FRA governance model, based on representative democracy in a traditional 'committee' style, continues to provide greater opportunities for the communities to speak with their local councillors. Nevertheless, despite limited responsiveness to communities, PFCCs have been able to streamline the accountability process by providing a single point of contact for Fire and Rescue Services and potentially improve scrutiny of their local services.

This study demonstrates that although PCCs have been powerful individuals (Eckersley and Lakoma 2022), their influence has been largely limited in the fire sector because only a small number of Fire and Rescue Services have transferred to the PFCC governance. It argues that the PFCC model has some of the weakest accountability arrangements in subnational governance in the UK due to its party-political allegiance and inadequate responsiveness to local communities. Nonetheless, this thesis provides additional theoretical insights to the literature on single directly-elected individuals, including the US literature on sheriff governance, which has been long established and often politicised (Sampson 2012, Baldi and LaFrance 2013). It extends the understanding of single-person enforcement arrangements at a local level as the US sheriffs do not have a specific police, fire, or crime mandate, and their responsibility is generally to hold public sector agencies to account (Mawby and Smith 2013). However, to fully understand the single-elected governance model, further research, including research from the public's perspective, is needed to examine the impact of directly-elected governance and the varieties of its arrangements on accountability.

9.6. Recommendations for policy and practice

The safety and security of local communities, the public, Fire and Rescue staff and the staff of their key delivery partners have and will be affected by changes in governance and accountability as result of changing government policies. The findings of this study suggest several courses of action for the UK government, the representative bodies and Fire and Rescue Services, if they wish to improve governance and accountability arrangements for the fire sector at national, organisational, and individual levels.

9.6.1. Recommendations for the government and representative bodies

This thesis identified a number of inadequacies arising from the provisions enshrined in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 and suggests several recommendations for the UK government and representative bodies to improve governance and accountability arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services.

First, English Fire and Rescue Services currently operate under various governance models. The findings suggest that having multiple governance models creates complex and varying accountability arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services. A solution to current discrepancies among different models would be the introduction of common governance arrangements across all services. Local Fire and Rescue Services would therefore have the same governance, funding, and accountability arrangements, which would enable greater collaboration, benchmarking and sharing good practice between the services. This recommendation underpins the current UK government's agenda (Home Office 2022, 2023), which aims to standardise the governance arrangements in English Fire and Rescue Services. The government's preference is clearly towards directly-elected individuals overseeing fire services in the foreseeable future, including combined authority mayors and PCCs (although this would not align them with the governance models in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland). This research recommends a single model of governance rather than multiple variations of models. It suggests that a single-person, more apolitical model with extensive transparency and effective scrutiny arrangements could provide more effective accountability to the public and other stakeholders. This is because this study found that a single point of accountability has been more effective in scrutinising services rather than a 'committee' style board of individuals. However, the findings of this study also demonstrate that the proposed single point of accountability (i.e., an individual) ought to be a person that is not affiliated with any political party and be above party-political influence to ensure apolitical decision-making within the service. In effect, such individuals would have to comply with and be added to Schedule 1 of the Local Government Officers (Political restrictions) Regulations 1990. The recommended governance model would also have to provide extensive transparency measures and responsiveness to communities' obligations, both of which would enable local communities to scrutinise their local services.

Second, it is more effective to introduce mutual and several legal duties to collaborate when parties have similar governance arrangements, responsibilities, structures, and scrutiny arrangements, and cover the same geographic area. This study has shown that collaboration between services that are governed at different levels (e.g., national, regional, or local) remains a significant barrier to improving collaboration. This was the case of collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services and ambulance services, which remained limited following the introduction of the legal duty to collaborate due to the different organisational capacities and governance arrangements between the two services. This study found that Fire and Rescue Services did not feel horizontally accountable to ambulance services. It suggests that having the same governing body (e.g., a PFCC) enables services to collaborate more together and become more accountable to each other. Policymakers and practitioners who wish to facilitate greater collaboration between emergency services should consider introducing reforms such as common governance arrangements, as a way to help achieve this objective.

Third, governing bodies responsible for public service's strategy should ideally be operating in line with the organisational and the public interests. This study revealed that politicians sitting on governing bodies sometimes take decisions that are politically motivated and potentially not in the best interest of services and communities. All participants agreed that emergency services decision-making should be as apolitical as possible, properly scrutinised, and should be focused on maintaining or improving public safety and providing the best service to the public, with minimal political influences. This study found that politicians often felt indebted to their party leaders for their positions and aligned themselves with party-political positions. This enables them to indirectly introduce and implement more of their party-political agenda into local public service delivery. One solution would be to have independent, non-partisan politicians that are not affiliated with any political party, overseeing local public services (independents). In this scenario, the individuals would be selected based on their skills and sector-specific knowledge to oversee a public service, rather than political party affiliation.

Finally, there is a greater scope to improve Fire and Rescue Services' accountability through the national bodies involved in representing Fire and Rescue Services, including the HMICFRS, the NFCC, the Fire Standards Board, the Fire Sector Federation, and the Fire Brigades Union. Fire and Rescue Services welcomed the introduction of professional standards, more robust data, and benchmarking, which, according to the participants,

started to improve professional and bureaucratic accountability in the fire sector. However, there is still greater scope to improve their accountability arrangements. This includes the sector's commitment to strengthening professional standards and data within Fire and Rescue Services, but also greater clarity regarding a separation between the role of the CFO and the governing body (FRA/PFCC). More specifically, this study suggests introducing the operational independence of CFOs (as currently supported by both government and Fire and Rescue Services), with CFOs responsible for making operational decisions and ultimately being held to account for performance of their Fire and Rescue Service by their governing bodies, acting as the strategic oversight body.

This thesis demonstrates that continued efforts are needed to improve current governance and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services in England, and in public services more generally. In particular, political accountability of local governing bodies needs to be strengthened to provide extensive transparency measures and more responsiveness to communities' obligations. Professional and bureaucratic accountability also requires further improvements in terms of more robust data in the fire sector and benchmarking with other services. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates that accountability in English Fire and Rescue Services remains a contested concept that potentially leads to future reforms, because the government cannot agree with the fire and rescue stakeholders on what elements of accountability are important, and therefore how to get the balance between them right.

Taken together, the recommendations above, if implemented, could have a positive impact on performance of Fire and Rescue Services and ultimately improve the safety and security of local communities, Fire and Rescue staff and the staff of their key delivery partners. These are recommendations that apply to English Fire and Rescue Services, however, they also extend to other public sector organisations with similar governance arrangements (such as the police, local authorities, or health and social care system) where improved operational performance and more robust financial arrangements have regularly been called for (e.g., Murphy *et al.* 2023, Wankhade and Murphy 2024). They will also have resonance and relevance for Fire and Rescue Services in the devolved administrations.

9.6.2. Recommendations for Fire and Rescue Services

This thesis also suggests how Fire and Rescue Services can improve their accountability arrangements within their organisations. The table below makes some practical recommendations for local Fire and Rescue Services on how they could focus on each of the accountability types to improve accountability within their organisations. They include recommendations that can be implemented at both the organisational level as well as the individual level.

Table 20: Practical recommendations for Fire and Rescue Services

Source: Author

	Characteristics	Practical recommendations for Fire and Rescue Services
Bureaucratic accountability	Scrutiny on performance of delegated duties	• Implement accountability mechanisms focused on robust performance management regimes throughout the organisation, • Establish effective communication channels between senior management and front-line staff, • Systematically review and improve service performance based on HMICFRS inspection outcomes and external audits, with independent quality assurance of the improvements.
Political accountability	Representing local communities and being responsive to their needs	• Engage local communities in planning service design and delivery, • Establish a robust accountability relationship with clear operational/strategy division between senior management and FRA/PFCC.
Legal accountability	Following statutory legislation	• Assign legal accountabilities at an individual level within an organisation and include as appropriate on the organisational risk register, with periodical reviews by the monitoring officer and potential escalation to the governing body.
Professional accountability	Using expertise and knowledge to deliver services to local communities	• Collaborate with other emergency services to improve co-ordination, skills and professional knowledge within and across the organisations, • Improve professional knowledge based on HMICFRS inspection outcomes and organisational development initiatives, • Regularly and formally assess technical skills and professional knowledge within the organisation and undertake gap analysis.

Overall, this thesis provides practitioners, including policymakers, the government, representative bodies, as well as local Fire and Rescue Services and the individuals working within the fire sector, with recommendations on how to build and maintain an organisational culture of accountability whilst meeting the statutory obligation to continuously improve. It recommends several courses of actions at the national level and at the organisational level to improve accountability arrangements, whilst maintaining the

most appropriate accountability balances specific to Fire and Rescue Services. Although these recommendations are tailored to English Fire and Rescue Services, they also extend to other organisations operating in the public sector with similar governance arrangements.

9.7. Conclusions

This chapter set out to discuss the findings of this study. It summarised and interpreted the empirical findings, which was followed by an analysis and discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. It then provided recommendations for the fire sector and other public services.

It has shown that the changing nature and pattern of governance arrangements has significant implications for accountability. It has demonstrated that understandings of accountability change depending on the way public services are governed. It also discussed *how* and *why* they might change using Romzek and Dubnick's typology (1987). By extending or reducing control over a public service organisation through governance or management reforms, and/or increasing or decreasing the organisation's autonomy, the government can alter the balance of different types of accountabilities, which can have profound effects on how key actors understand how accountability operates.

The 2017 legislation clearly demonstrated that the government reforms aimed to introduce more extensive political accountability mechanisms in Fire and Rescue Services. The empirical findings, however, reveal that the accountability types and accountability directions envisioned by the government have only been realised to limited and varying degrees. In practice, they resulted in a different 'blend' of all different types of accountabilities within the sector.

This study has also shown that that there is no ideal trade-off between all types of accountabilities, as perceived by governance actors, because they have different understandings of the concepts involved. Accountability therefore remains a contested concept that often leads to re-interpretation and further reforms. However, in order to reduce the discrepancies between the government's plans for public services and those of the delivery organisations, all stakeholders' perceptions ought to be taken into account by the government when it comes to new legislation for public services. The next chapter will discuss the main conclusions, the limitations to the study, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 10.   Conclusions

10.1. Introduction

By employing the theoretical concepts of governance and accountability, particularly in the context of public management reforms, this thesis set out to understand how the way public services are governed affects their understandings of accountability. It has examined the case of governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 in Fire and Rescue Services in England. Given the complexity and number of interpretations of accountability in the literature, this study has been concerned with understanding the concept of accountability from viewpoints within the Fire and Rescue Services. Specifically, it has compared Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability before and after the governance changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, while focusing on the differences between accountability in the new Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) governance model services, in the traditional Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) governance model services, and in the latter after it was refined by the 2017 Act.

This chapter addresses the overarching research question and the six research objectives and outlines the contributions to knowledge and practice. This is followed by the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter concludes with areas for further research that this thesis recommends.

10.2. Research question and research objectives

This thesis posed an overarching research question together with six research objectives. The overarching research question that this study aimed to answer was:

How and why might governance changes affect understandings of accountability in public services?

Changing the nature of governance arrangements in public services has significant implications for accountability. By contrasting the situations in PFCC-led and FRA-led Fire and Rescue Services, this study has highlighted how different governance arrangements influence the relationships that organisations and individuals are involved in. It has also shown that governance reforms often result in changes to a complicated and overlapping set of different accountabilities in public services. Although it is difficult to measure the concept of accountability (because quantitative measures do not reflect the complexity of

governance arrangements within public services), it nonetheless has shown that governance reforms can lead to changes in different nature and dimensions of accountability.

Based on a synthesis of Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) and Bovens' (2007) accountability typologies, this thesis has proposed a new approach to analysing accountability understandings in public services as result of governance reforms. It has argued that accountability is often perceived in terms of two dimensions– *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability) - and has used both to explain the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability. The framework helps to identify how both dimensions may change as it elucidates accountability understandings before and after the governance reforms.

The overarching research question was broken down into the following six research objectives to examine understandings of accountability in English Fire and Rescue Services as a result of governance reforms.

Research Objective 1: To examine the background and context of the governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced a number of major changes to how Fire and Rescue Services in England are governed. First, it provided an alternative governance model for Fire and Rescue Services, in which Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) - single, locally and directly-elected politicians - can take on responsibilities for the governance of their local FRAs and become PFCCs. The Act also changed the fire and rescue organisational landscape by establishing an external inspectorate and a strengthened focus on collaborative working across emergency services partners.

Overall, all these changes brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, and parallel related changes in the organisational landscape (including the transformation of Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) into the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the establishment of the Fire Standards Board) were intended to have a major impact on improving accountability in Fire and Rescue Services.

The introduction of the PFCC model of governance was portrayed by the government as a way of making Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to the public (May 2016). By giving the public an opportunity to directly elect an individual in charge of their local Fire and Rescue Service, the government intended to move away from the indirect political accountability of the FRA governance model to a more democratic institution of the PFCCs. As with the earlier establishment of PCCs, the PFCC model of governance intended to bring direct political accountability, where the public can directly elect an individual responsible for their local Fire and Rescue Service. The government's intention has been to establish PFCCs in as many services as possible as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, and the Act has been followed by various government statements in continuous attempts to increase the initial numbers of PFCCs (Home Office 2020, 2022, 2023). The 2017 legislation has also enabled local PCCs to be represented on local FRAs to strengthen the traditional FRA governance model and help bureaucratically scrutinise the service's performance.

The establishment of Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) primarily aimed to have a bureaucratic impact on the accountability of Fire and Rescue Services. The government intended to bring an external scrutiny body to assess services based on consistent and relevant criteria that is publicly available. This is a form of diagonal accountability, as HMICFRS cannot directly enforce compliance on services, but it signposts or advises them in the way they should be developing. Similarly, the establishment of the Fire Standards Board was clearly intended to affect the sector indirectly, as it introduced professional standards for all Fire and Rescue Services in the UK. Both HMICFRS and the Fire Standards Board were introduced to improve upon the previous sector-led improvement and performance regime, which focused on accountabilities of a horizontal nature. In sector-led improvement, professional accountability focused on learning, improving, and increasing professional standards in a less formal regime than a typical inspection regime (Downe *et al.* 2018).

Third, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has also introduced a legal duty to collaborate with other emergency services, if it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness. This corresponds to a horizontal type of legal as well as bureaucratic accountability, where organisations might face consequences for not following the legislation, but where fire services share this duty with other emergency services partners. Before the introduction of the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services were not legally obliged to collaborate with partners, other than in the case of large-scale civil emergencies. This suggests that they were

theoretically not accountable for collaboration, even though, in practice, they had collaborated extensively with other emergency services and other partners for many years. The government's intention in the 2017 legislation was therefore to encourage emergency services to officially collaborate through signing formal agreements.

Finally, although the transformation of the CFOA into the NFCC and the establishment of the Fire Standards Board were not enshrined within the Policing and Crime Act 2017, they occurred around the same time, had complementary objectives, involved a similar core set of stakeholders, and were intended to have an impact on both professional and bureaucratic accountability in the fire sector. The establishment of the NFCC extended previous roles of the CFOA by the additional obligations to drive improvement and develop the leadership of the fire sector. Similarly, the establishment of the Fire Standards Board (upon which both government and the NFCC were represented) was clearly intended to affect the sector's professionalisation indirectly.

By introducing the Policing and Crime Act 2017, the government's intentions were to enhance and focus on different types and directions of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services. The subsequent research objectives address whether and how the reforms may have strengthened all four types of accountability.

Research Objective 2: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of bureaucratic accountability.

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services were vertically bureaucratically accountable to their local FRAs. Fire and Rescue Services felt limited accountability from FRAs, who had responsibility for the strategic direction, scrutiny, and oversight of the services. The 2017 legislation has enabled local PCCs to be represented on local FRAs and has strengthened the FRA governance model through an additional bureaucratic scrutiny of the service's performance. In comparison, the PFCC governance model brought more extensive accountability as result of having a single individual overseeing the service and new performance management arrangements implemented throughout the organisations.

Bureaucratic accountability, and more specifically overview and scrutiny, within Fire and Rescue Services have cascaded down from governing bodies and management hierarchies

to front-line staff in all Fire and Rescue Services, but particularly under the PFCC model. Fire and Rescue Services' staff have therefore been accountable for meeting performance targets internally within their services and teams before, as well as after, the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 has also introduced a formal duty to collaborate externally with other emergency services. Despite this obligation, under the reformed FRA governance model, Fire and Rescue Services have continued to perceive the relationship with either police or ambulance services to have no direct accountability element, due to there being different governance arrangements in place. In contrast, PFCC-governed services have developed closer working arrangements with the police services as result of being scrutinised by the same individual, and believe they are bureaucratically accountable to the police when working together towards the same goal – namely that of ensuring public safety.

Before the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, there was limited diagonal bureaucratic accountability within Fire and Rescue Services, as there was no external body that could hold the fire sector to account for its performance. The establishment of HMICFRS has strengthened bureaucratic accountability of Fire and Rescue Services and has introduced a transparent set of criteria, which makes both the FRA- and PFCC-governed services more accountable through publicly available inspection reports.

Research Objective 3: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of political accountability.

Political accountability has changed much more for those services that have adopted the PFCC governance model. Previously, residents had limited powers to hold decision-makers to account. Following the 2017 legislation, in those services that have adopted the FRA representation model, communities have been able to directly elect their PCC, who sits on the FRA. The FRA governance model has also enabled communities to have direct communication channels with their local councillors who actively represent the communities' needs. In those services that have adopted the PFCC governance model, political accountability has been more direct, as residents play a central role in choosing

who governs their local Fire and Rescue Service. Nonetheless, this has not resulted in improved communication between the local communities and the PFCCs.

Political accountability relationships between Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) and leaders of FRAs have clearly been important, both before and after the 2017 legislation, as they provide collective leadership of Fire and Rescue Services through the mutual goal of maintaining effective service delivery and keeping local communities safe. In those services that transferred to the PFCC governance model, the accountability relationship between CFOs, Chief Constables and PFCCs has become even more significant, as these individuals mutually hold each other to account for their decisions.

Fire and Rescue Services also continued to operate within a political environment through FRA and PFCC governing bodies that are accountable to political parties and representative bodies. Although political parties and representative bodies have no direct powers to enforce compliance on Fire and Rescue Services, the consequences arising from their actions were seen as significant, and has often had an indirect impact on Fire and Rescue Services' decision-making, particularly in PFCC-governed services.

Research Objective 4: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of legal accountability.

Fire and Rescue Services' legal accountability arrangements are enshrined in the statutory requirements of both primary and secondary legislation. Those services that have moved to the PFCC governance model were given additional reporting requirements stipulated by a new National Framework (Home Office 2018) and other primary legislation, aligning them with equivalent arrangements in the police. Fire and Rescue Services continued to be vertically accountable to central government and Parliament, as central government has continued to provide national direction and funding for all FRA-governed and PFCC-governed services, with the support of the external inspection regime established by the 2017 legislation.

In terms of the legal duty to collaborate with other partners before the 2017 legislation, Fire and Rescue Services had limited legal accountability to other partners, although extensive informal and discretionary collaboration opportunities at the local level had been increasing since the 1990s. As result of the 2017 legislation, Fire and Rescue Services

became increasingly legally accountable and mutually responsible when collaborating with other emergency services after agreeing formal contracts. It was notable that the services operating under the PFCC model have been more legally accountable to the police than their FRA counterparts, because they are governed by the same individual and are working together to achieve the same objectives under shared governance structures.

Legal requirements in the form of external inspections have acted as mechanisms that underpin accountability, as they enable Fire and Rescue Services to be held accountable to key stakeholders. Legal accountability moved away from the national level after the closure of the Audit Commission and the passing of the Localism Act 2011, which gave Fire and Rescue Services more flexibility and freedom in terms of service delivery. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 also established an external inspectorate for the fire sector, which has the legal right to inspect all Fire and Rescue Services and report the results to the government and the public. As a result of the inspection process, Fire and Rescue Services have become more accountable to central government and have increasingly been making decisions that are strongly influenced by the individual inspectorate's recommendations to services and the Chief Inspector's annual State of Fire reports to the government.

Research Objective 5: To critically examine the implications of the governance reforms brought in by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of professional accountability.

Fire and Rescue Services have been professionally accountable to communities for providing them with the fire safety service. Following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, Fire and Rescue Services' professional accountability remained primarily about statutory day-to-day activities and following professional standards when responding to incidents, protecting and preventing harm to their communities. However, they have been obliged to pay increasingly more attention to collective fire safety after the Grenfell Tower fire in London in 2017 and the Manchester Arena Bombings in 2017.

Fire and Rescue Services also continued to be involved in collaboration with other partners, which improved their skills and professional knowledge, and ultimately helped them to be more effective in their roles. They primarily collaborated with the police when sharing operational expertise. Although professional collaboration with the ambulance services increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, since then it has remained limited,

due to the different organisational objectives, capacities, and governance arrangements between the two services.

In the period before the introduction of the 2017 Act, Fire and Rescue Services were subjected to sector-led improvement assessments, which were supposed to improve accountability at the local level but were demonstrably weak and ineffective in holding services professionally to account. Instead, Fire and Rescue Services started to feel greater professional accountability when the Fire Standards Board and HMICFRS were established, as this has brought professional benchmarks and the potential for the sector to make progress on greater professionalisation within the service.

Research Objective 6: To examine how and why governance reforms affect accountability dynamics within public services.

As with the previous literature (Romzek 2000, Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Kim 2005), this study has also shown that governance reforms tend to focus on certain types of accountability, while often de-emphasising or accentuating others. This thesis has proposed a framework, which illustrates *how* and *why* accountability changes as result of governance reforms.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis builds on Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) accountability typology and extends it by focusing on the reasons behind *how* and *why* accountability in public services may change as result of governance reforms (Romzek and Dubnick 1987, Romzek 2000) – and, moreover, why governments might seek to introduce these reforms in the first place (see section 9.4.1). The reasons include governments either extending or reducing control over the organisation, and/or increasing or decreasing the organisation's autonomy, often in response to perceived accountability problems. These changes result in the accountability focus shifting from one type of accountability to another, based on the Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) typology. As such, although reforms might focus on a specific type(s) of accountability, they will also have theoretical (and practical) implications for the other types, potentially de-emphasising or accentuating their importance, and ultimately changing the balance of different types of accountabilities within an organisation.

10.3. Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the public administration scholarship by examining the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability in the public sector, and also addresses the gap in the Fire and Rescue Services' literature on accountability, by examining it empirically in the English context, following the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It also contributes to the research and widening discourse on directly-elected individuals, as it investigates the impact of the development and extension of PCCs into the sector via the PFCC governance model and consequent changes in accountability.

10.3.1. The impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability

Changes in governance arrangements directly affect the understandings of accountability. Although it is difficult to measure the concept of accountability, this thesis, nonetheless, has shown how governance reforms can lead to changes in different dimensions of accountability, – specifically in terms *'accountability for what'* (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability) and *'accountability to whom'* (vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, and diagonal accountability) in English Fire and Rescue Services. Most notably, those services that transferred to the PFCC/single-person governance model experienced greater changes in understandings of accountability as result of the 2017 legislation than those services that remained under the traditional FRA 'committee' style governance model. However, all services generally felt more accountable to their stakeholders in comparison to the situation before the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This thesis has therefore provided empirical support for the idea that governance arrangements ultimately affect the way the stakeholders perceive accountability within public services.

Although the existing literature has primarily focused on explaining accountability types in relation to the traditional vertical directions of accountability, this study has for the first time identified different accountability mechanisms in relation to Romzek and Dubnick's accountability typology (1987) and has extended it to investigate the three accountability directions (Bovens 2007). These directions and mechanisms underpinned a framework to help understand complex governance arrangements and their potential impact on accountability in public sector settings (see section 9.4.3.).

10.3.2. Accountability in Fire and Rescue Services

Prior to this study, accountability in Fire and Rescue Services had received relatively little academic attention. Despite the Act's explicit intention to improve accountability in Fire and Rescue Services, no previous studies had examined it empirically from this perspective. This thesis has addressed this gap by examining how the reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 have affected understandings of accountability within the fire sector.

This project is also the first academic empirical study to investigate the impact of the establishment of external inspection for Fire and Rescue Services. It found that the establishment of HMICFRS has had the most significant influence on accountability out of all the changing mechanisms imposed on Fire and Rescue Services as result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The inspection process has helped individual services to be held externally to account for service performance, and has also informed the national policy and delivery, and the government's reform agenda (HMICFRS 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, Home Office 2022). The findings have also shown that the Home Office, as the government department overseeing Fire and Rescue Services, has gained more indirect control over Fire and Rescue Services through the establishment of HMICFRS. This is because of the HMICFRS's close affiliation with the Home Office, its financial sponsorship and reporting arrangements, but also reduced independence from the government (Murphy 2017, Murphy *et al.* 2020a).

Overall, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 has made Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to a number of stakeholders, including the government, the inspectorate, and the public. The findings of this study contribute to the limited literature on accountability in Fire and Rescue Services, but also extend to other emergency services. In particular, they have implications for police services, which work closely with Fire and Rescue Services in England.

10.3.3. Accountability of single-person governance models

The evidence from this study also suggests that although the introduction of PFCC governance arrangements did change the nature of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services, their impact was much more limited than anticipated in the governance of the sector. Some previous studies of accountability have focused on public bodies, for which senior decision-makers are directly-elected, such as local councils or government

departments. Since most English Fire and Rescue Services had previously had no directly-elected element, this has changed the nature of their accountability relationships with local authorities, central government, other emergency services, and the public.

This study has shown that making directly-elected individuals responsible for a public sector organisation changes accountability relationships in the following ways. First, it can add a new scrutiny dimension from a single individual, who can, in effect, streamline or make the accountability process more efficient. Second, it can enable the public to directly hold the politicians to account in elections. However, the individual's party-political allegiance can, in turn, ultimately influence the service's strategic decision-making process. Third, it is possible for a single-person governance model to result in a reduction of accountability to local communities, in comparison to the model based on representative democracy in a traditional 'committee' style.

Overall, this suggests that the introduction of directly-elected individuals responsible for providing support and overseeing public services has profound effects on accountability relationships within and outside the services, which contributes to the UK, European and US debates on directly-elected individuals (Raine and Keasey 2012, Sampson 2012, Baldi and LaFrance 2013, Davies and Johnson 2016, Fenwick and Johnston 2020, Eckersley and Lakoma 2022, Lakoma 2024).

10.4.   Contribution to practice

This study has focused on Fire and Rescue Services and discussed how governance reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 have changed the balance of different types of accountabilities within Fire and Rescue Services. This thesis has also identified some inadequacies arising from the provisions enshrined in the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

The UK government has recently acknowledged that the fire sector still requires further reforms (Home Office 2022, 2023), as it is not yet content with Fire and Rescue Services' governance and accountability. This acknowledges that the 2017 reforms have not delivered the desired improvements in accountability and more reforms to improve accountability are proposed.

The findings of this study suggest several courses of action for the UK government to improve governance and accountability arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services and other public services (see section 9.6.1). First, this thesis recommended a single model of

governance instead of multiple variations of governance models across the sector. More specifically, it suggested that a single-person, apolitical model with extensive transparency arrangements and effective scrutiny arrangements could provide more effective accountability to the public and other stakeholders. Second, it recommended that greater efforts, including common governance arrangements, are needed to facilitate greater collaboration between emergency services. It indicated that collaboration between services that are governed at a different level remains a significant barrier to collaboration. The proposed recommendations of this study are relevant to policymakers who could use these findings to advocate for policy and delivery changes in Fire and Rescue Services.

This study has also contributed to practice by making recommendations to the national bodies involved in representing or delivering Fire and Rescue Services (the HMICFRS, the NFCC, the Fire Standards Board, the Fire Sector Federation, the Fire Brigades Union) regarding what, according to Fire and Rescue Services, can improve accountability within the sector. These recommendations include greater scope for more professional standards and greater professionalism in the service, more robust data, and clarity regarding strategic and operational boundaries between CFOs and FRAs/PFCCs. In addition, although HMICFRS and its inspection model has had a significant impact within the sector, it would clearly be worth investigating how this model could potentially be improved as it has attracted considerable critical comment from both academics and from participants in this study.

The thesis has also made some practical recommendations for local Fire and Rescue Services on how they can improve accountability within their organisations by focusing on specific types of accountabilities (bureaucratic accountability, political accountability, legal accountability, and professional accountability). They include recommendations that can be implemented at both the organisational level as well as the individual level (see section 9.6.2.).

Overall, this thesis has provided practitioners, including policymakers, the government, representative bodies as well as local Fire and Rescue Services with recommendations on how to build and maintain a culture of accountability within the sector, whilst meeting the statutory obligation to continuously improve. The conceptual framework, that this project is based upon, is universal and can be adapted by other public services experiencing governance reforms. It can assist practitioners in understanding inadequacies of accountability in their organisations and generate recommendations on how to improve

specific types of accountability. At the same time, it helps highlight that the different types can at times overlap and/or complement each other, and suggests that government, public services, and sectors should seek to identify the most appropriate balance of accountabilities in their circumstances.

10.5. Limitations

The empirical results reported in this study should be considered in the light of some limitations. The first limitation concerns the limited number of PFCC-governed services at the time of data collection. This project examined six case studies, three cases of the PFCC model of governance and three cases of the reformed FRA model of governance. The case selection targeted the presence of the PFCC-type governance model (see Chapter 4 – Methodology, methods and ethics). At the time of data collection (2020-2021), there were only four PFCC-governed services (1 former county FRA and 3 former combined FRAs), despite the government encouraging its more widespread adoption. The study had originally intended to target 1 former county/unitary FRA, 1 former combined FRA, and 1 former metropolitan FRA to maximally differentiate between the former FRA governance models. This approach would have enabled easier comparison with the chosen FRA-governed services that were selected as follows: 1 county/unitary FRA, 1 combined FRA, and 1 metropolitan FRA. However, this was not possible because no metropolitan FRA services had transferred to the PFCC governance model.

Notwithstanding the lack of former FRA metropolitan services, metropolitan FRA arrangements (with the exception of London and Manchester), have similar governance arrangements to those of combined FRAs. In both governance models, the FRA is standalone and is made up of members that are appointed by the leaders of the constituent councils. In comparison, in county FRAs, the governance structures are different as the council is the FRA and the Fire and Rescue Service is a committee of the council. Therefore, metropolitan FRAs and combined FRAs have relatively similar governance arrangements. The findings of this study have demonstrated that they also have more similar understandings of accountability, in comparison to understandings of accountability in county council FRA services. This means that replacing a former metropolitan FRA with a former combined FRA does not considerably affect the research design and keeps the research design of this study coherent.

The second limitation concerns examining understandings of accountability from a single perspective of Fire and Rescue Services. The study focused on collecting data from Fire and Rescue Services' personnel to understand how their roles and understandings of accountability had changed due to the Policing and Crime Act 2017. It involved both senior management as well as front-line staff to gain better understandings of perceptions of accountability at different organisational levels. However, the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms affected not only the Fire and Rescue Services, but indirectly other stakeholders, including local communities and politicians responsible for local Fire and Rescue Services. Nonetheless, this project did not involve other stakeholders for a number of reasons. It did not include perceptions of PFCCs, as they would not have known the situation before the 2017 legislation and therefore could not have contributed towards a comparison of the *ex-ante* and *ex-post* situations. Despite this, future research into how they perceive accountability to be operating within their organisations would be extremely worthwhile. Similarly, collecting data from local councillors on FRAs was not part of the study because the individuals sitting on FRAs might have changed as result of local government elections and therefore might have been unaware of the circumstances before the 2017 reforms. However, the study could have engaged with local communities, who have been directly affected by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 reforms, to gather their understandings of accountability. This would have enhanced and complemented this study, but would have required additional time and alternative methods (e.g., a survey). Nonetheless, the primary focus of this study was on the understandings of the senior officers and front-line firefighters as this is what the 'felt accountability' literature suggest is important (Overman and Schillemans 2022).

The third limitation of this study is that the data were collected in 2020-2021, and the study did not include a more recent round of interviews and focus groups. While conducting follow-up interviews and focus groups would have enabled the researcher to assess whether the participants' changes of their understandings of accountability were temporary or permanent, the researcher did not pursue a further round of data collection. This was due to constraints on time and resources (partly because of studying part-time), as well as the practical challenges of arranging interviews with participants who might have had since changed occupations. Despite this, it is acknowledged that more recent empirical data on accountability within Fire and Rescue Services could provide a more nuanced

understanding of the long-term implications of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on understandings of accountability in the English fire sector.

Another limitation of this project was the lack of previous studies in the area of accountability in Fire and Rescue Services. The literature review is an important part of any research project because it helps to identify the scope of publications and builds upon them to develop the research objectives. In this study, the topic was very contemporary and related to an evolving research problem manifested by the introduction of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This meant that prior research on accountability and governance of Fire and Rescue Services was relatively limited. There were no other empirical studies investigating the outcomes of the 2017 Act and very limited research into public accountability within the sector. This made it difficult for the researcher to evaluate how the findings of this study relate to previous accountability and governance literature of Fire and Rescue Services. Despite the limited research, this project discussed the findings against the limited Fire and Rescue Services' literature, but also evaluated them against broader research areas to extend the narrow research scope from fire services through emergency services management to local government accountability.

The study attempted to overcome these limitations by addressing the research question using the available literature and data. Nonetheless, if the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of accountability in Fire and Rescue Services needs to be developed. This suggests that future research should also address some of the methodological limitations of this study. A more detailed account of the proposed future work is suggested in the following section.

10.6. Future research

As a result of the study, further research could be conducted to paint a more complete picture of the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability in public services. This study recommends examining accountability as result of governance reforms from other stakeholders' perspectives. This includes local communities directly affected by governance changes, as well as local politicians involved in governance arrangements (if they experienced the situation before and after the reforms). This would provide a more comprehensive and richer overview, and determine whether the public services'

understandings differ from those of other stakeholders involved in the governance arrangements.

Further research might also explore accountability understandings as result of governance reforms in other public services, including other emergency services (police and ambulance services) as well as local authorities. More studies from different perspectives would help to establish if other public services experiencing governance reforms perceive accountability in a way similar to English Fire and Rescue Services.

The issue of the directly-elected individual governance models and their impact on accountability should also be moved forward internationally to better understand the implications on accountability relationships in public services. This would enable us to examine the varieties of directly-elected individual governance arrangements across other countries, and determine whether and how understandings of accountability under single-elected politicians vary internationally.

10.7. Summary and final conclusions

Overall, this thesis has illuminated the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability in public services. More specifically, it has empirically identified the impact of the UK government reforms introduced in the Policing and Crime Act 2017 on English Fire and Rescue Services' understandings of accountability. It has explained how the government's intentions on improving accountability differed from the actual understandings of accountability within Fire and Rescue Services'.

Theoretically, it has developed a conceptual framework based upon a synthesis of Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) and Bovens' (2007) typologies to understand how accountability types and directions of accountability change as result of governance reforms. In addition, it has extended the Romzek and Dubnick's (1987) typology to discuss *how* and *why* accountability understandings might change based on the organisation's '*source of control'* and '*the degree of autonomy'* over the organisation's actions. It has therefore shown that governance reforms will ultimately result in changes to the nature and pattern of the organisation's accountability relationships within the sector and between the key stakeholders.

It has also provided practitioners, including policymakers, the government, representative bodies, as well as other stakeholders, with recommendations on how to build and maintain a culture of accountability within the sector. Finally, it has demonstrated that continued efforts are needed to fully recognise the impact of governance reforms on understandings of accountability in public services by exploring single directly-elected governance models and extending the scope of research to different stakeholders and other public services.

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12. Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 21: Governance models in 44 English Fire and Rescue Services as of 2020-2021 (during the data collection)

Source: Adapted from Home Office (2022)

FRS Name	Governance model	FRS Name	Governance model
Avon	Combined	Isles Of Scilly	County or Unitary
Bedfordshire	Combined	Kent	Combined
Berkshire	Combined	Lancashire	Combined
Buckinghamshire	Combined	Leicestershire	Combined
Cambridgeshire	Combined	Lincolnshire	County or Unitary
Cheshire	Combined	Merseyside	Metropolitan
Cleveland	Combined	Norfolk	County or Unitary
Cornwall	County or Unitary	North Yorkshire	PFCC
Cumbria	County or Unitary*	Northamptonshire	PFCC
Derbyshire	Combined	Northumberland	County or Unitary
Devon and Somerset	Combined	Nottinghamshire	Combined
Dorset and Wiltshire	Combined	Oxfordshire	County or Unitary
Durham	Combined	Shropshire	Combined
East Sussex	Combined	South Yorkshire	Metropolitan
Essex	PFCC	Staffordshire	PFCC
Gloucestershire	County or Unitary	Suffolk	County or Unitary
Greater London	Metropolitan** (London)	Surrey	County or Unitary
Greater Manchester	Metropolitan*** (Mayor-led FRA)	Tyne and Wear	Metropolitan
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	Combined	Warwickshire	County or Unitary
Hereford and Worcester	Combined	West Midlands	Metropolitan
Hertfordshire	County or Unitary	West Sussex	County or Unitary
Humberside	Combined	West Yorkshire	Metropolitan

*Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service moved to the PFCC governance model in April 2023

** The London Fire Commissioner is a corporation sole and the FRA for London. It is a functional body of the Greater London Authority. The Mayor of London sets its budget, approves the London Safety Plan, and can direct it to act.

*** The Service forms part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), which is run jointly by the leaders of the ten councils, and the Mayor of Greater Manchester. The Mayor is responsible for the overall governance, strategic and financial management of the Fire Service.

Appendix 2

Table 22: Interviews - participants

Source: Author

	Case study	Role	Uniformed/non-uniformed	Interviewee code	Length (min)
1	CS1	Area Manager 1	Uniformed	01INT.U	33
2	CS1	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	02INT.U	38
3	CS1	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	03INT.U	48
4	CS1	Area Manager 2	Uniformed	04INT.U	32
5	CS1	Director 1	Non-uniformed	05INT.NONU	53
6	CS1	Director 2	Non-uniformed	06INT.NONU	26
7	CS2	Director of Strategy	Non-uniformed	07INT.NONU	61
8	CS2	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	08INT.U	45
9	CS2	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 1	Uniformed	09INT.U	45
10	CS2	Finance Director	Non-uniformed	10INT.NONU	47
11	CS2	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 2	Uniformed	11INT.U	58
12	CS2	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	12INT.U	43
13	CS3	Area Manager 1	Uniformed	13INT.U	33
14	CS3	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	14INT.U	48
15	CS3	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 1	Uniformed	15INT.U	39
16	CS3	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	16INT.U	47
17	CS3	Area Manager 2	Uniformed	17INT.U	40
18	CS3	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 2	Non-uniformed	18INT.NONU	40
19	CS4	Area Manager 1	Uniformed	19INT.U	59
20	CS4	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 1	Uniformed	20INT.U	57
21	CS4	Assistant Chief Fire Officer 2	Uniformed	21INT.U	43
22	CS4	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	22INT.U	70
23	CS4	Partnerships Manager	Non-uniformed	23INT.NONU	31
24	CS4	Area Manager 2	Uniformed	24INT.U	44
25	CS5	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	25INT.U	55
26	CS5	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	26INT.U	60
27	CS5	Watch Manager 1	Uniformed	27INT.U	50
28	CS5	Watch Manager 2	Uniformed	28INT.U	51
29	CS5	Director of Prevention and Protection	Uniformed	29INT.U	50
30	CS5	Watch Manager 3	Uniformed	30INT.U	37
31	CS5	Director of Response	Uniformed	31INT.U	53
32	CS5	Director of Finance	Non-uniformed	32INT.NONU	52
33	CS6	Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	33INT.U	71
34	CS6	Director of HR	Uniformed	34INT.U	69
35	CS6	Managing Director	Non-uniformed	35INT.NONU	61
36	CS6	Deputy Chief Fire Officer	Uniformed	36INT.U	62
37	CS6	Head of Assurance	Uniformed	37INT.U	37
38	CS6	Director of Prevention and Protection	Uniformed	38INT.U	56
				Average length	**49 min**

Appendix 3

Interview schedule

1. How and when did you first become aware of the Policing and Crime Act 2017?
2. The 2017 Act has brought in new governance arrangements.
   - HMICFRS – external scrutiny
   - Collaboration
   - Introduction of PFCCs

   What impact has this new legislation had on your organisation? What impact has it had on day to day running the service?
3. What in your opinion has been the effect of the introduction of new governance arrangements generally across English Fire and Rescue Services?
4. As you know, Police Fire and Crime Commissioners have been portrayed as a way to make Fire and Rescue Services more answerable and accountable to the public through an elected head. How do you perceive accountability within your service? How your service is accountable?
5. What has been the impact of the governance arrangements brought in by the 2017 legislation on accountability in your organisation?
6. Who, in your view, is your service accountable to and what for?
7. Accountability relationships.
   - How would you explain/describe your organisation's accountability to the **general public** before the 2017 legislation and now? What if anything, has changed?
   - Do you think that accountability relationship between the **Chief Fire Officer** and your organisation has changed following the 2017 legislation?
   - How would you explain/describe your organisation's accountability to **the FRA/the PFCC** before the 2017 legislation and now? What if anything, has changed?
   - Could you explain the accountability relationship between your organisation and **HMICFRS**? How has the introduction of new inspectorate changed the way your organisation is accountable?
   - How has the accountability relationship between the **PCC/PFCC** and your organisation has changed following the 2017 legislation?
   - Do you think that accountability relationship between **Police and Ambulance Services** and your organisation has changed following the 2017 legislation?

   8. Are there any other internal or external factors that have been influencing your organisation's accountability relationships?

   9. Have there been any positive or negative consequences arising from the new governance arrangements in your organisation?

Appendix 4

Table 23: Focus groups – participants

Source: Author

Case study code	No of participants	Participants' roles	Length (min)
CS1	4	Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, Firefighter 3, Watch Manager.	98
CS2	3	Watch Manager, Crew Manager, Firefighter.	50
CS3	4	Watch Manager, Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, Firefighter 3.	66
CS4	5	Watch Manager, Firefighter 1, Firefighter 2, Crew Commander, Firefighter 3.	73
CS6	4	Watch Manager, Firefighter 1, Crew Manager, Firefighter 2.	58
		Average length	**69 min**

Appendix 5

Focus group schedule

1. A piece of legislation, known as the Policing and Crime Act 2017, has brought in new governance arrangements, including:
   - The creation of HMICFRS as an external scrutiny
   - The duty to collaborate with other emergency services
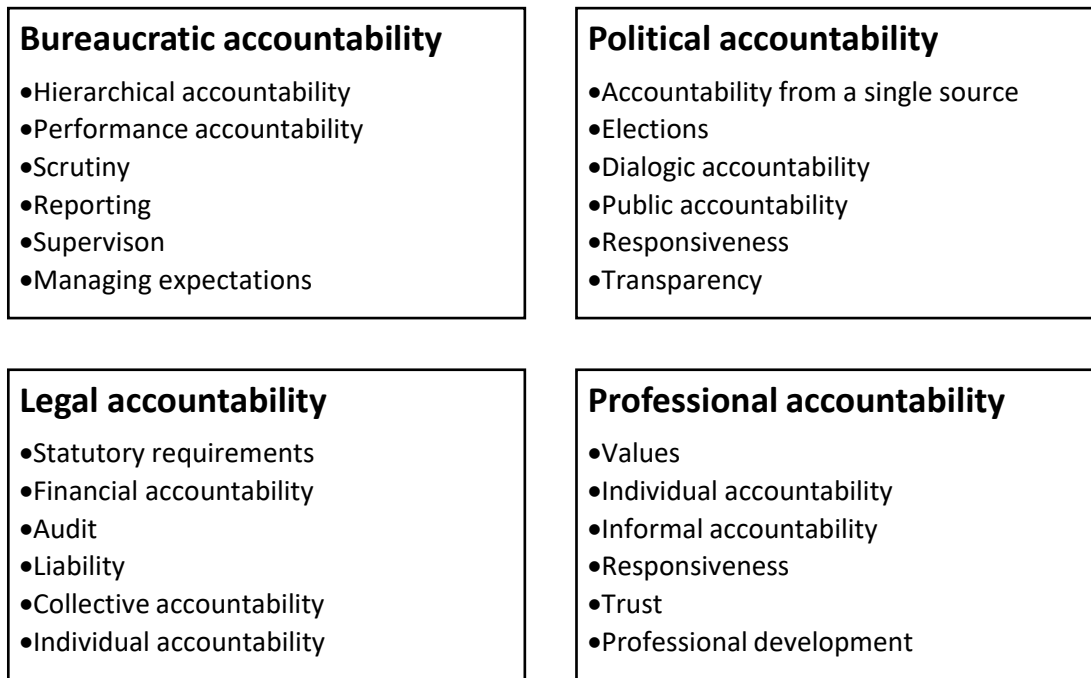   - Introduction of PFCCs who are able to take over governance of Fire and Rescue Services

   When did you first become aware of these new governance arrangements in your service? What were your first thoughts on it?

2. What impact have these governance changes had on your day to day working practices?

3. Do you think that current governance arrangements are effective? What would be your preferred model of governance in your organisation?
   - Do you think that governance arrangements (either a single-person governance model or FRA with a number of councillors) actually affect you at the front line?
   - What would be/are your concerns regarding the mayoral/PFCC model?

4. What in your opinion has been the effect of the introduction of PFCC taking over FRSs generally across English Fire and Rescue Services?

5. Police Fire and Crime Commissioners have been portrayed as a way to make Fire and Rescue Services more accountable to the public through an elected head. How is your organisation accountable?

6. What has been the impact of the governance arrangements brought in by the 2017 legislation on accountability in your organisation?

7. Who, in your view, is your service accountable to and what for?

8. Fire and Rescue Services' accountability relationships.
   - How would you explain your organisation's accountability to the **governing body (FRA/PFCC)?** Has anything changed in that accountability relationship since the 2017 Act?
   - How would you explain your organisation's accountability to the **general public** before the implementation of the 2017 legislation and now? What if anything, has changed?
   - Do you think that accountability relationship between the **Chief Fire Officer** and your organisation has changed following the 2017 legislation?
   - Could you explain the accountability relationship between your service and **HMICFRS**? How has the introduction of the new inspectorate changed the way your organisation is accountable?
   - Do you think that accountability relationship between **Police and Ambulance Services** and your service has changed following the 2017 legislation?

9. Are there any other internal or external factors that have been influencing your organisation's accountability relationships?
10. Have there been any positive or negative consequences arising from the new governance arrangements in your organisation?

Appendix 6

Bureaucratic accountability	**Political accountability**
•Hierarchical accountability •Performance accountability •Scrutiny •Reporting •Supervison •Managing expectations	•Accountability from a single source •Elections •Dialogic accountability •Public accountability •Responsiveness •Transparency
Legal accountability	**Professional accountability**
•Statutory requirements •Financial accountability •Audit •Liability •Collective accountability •Individual accountability	•Values •Individual accountability •Informal accountability •Responsiveness •Trust •Professional development

Figure 22: Thematic coding example – Case Study 6

Source: Author

Appendix 7

Ethics forms

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the project: An examination of the governance of collaboration: the case of the Fire and Rescue Service in England

Main investigator: Katarzyna Lakoma, PhD researcher & Research Associate, Accounting and Finance Department, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University. 50 Shakespeare St, Nottingham NG1 4FQ. Contact tel: 0115 84 82395. Email: katarzyna.lakoma@ntu.ac.uk

Project supervisors: Dr Peter Eckersley, Dr Nestor Valero-Silva, Professor Peter Murphy. Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University. 50 Shakespeare St, Nottingham NG1 4FQ. Professor Peter Murphy contact tel: 0115 84 88092. Email: peter.murphy@ntu.ac.uk

Please read and confirm your consent to being interviewed for this project by ticking the appropriate box(es) and signing and dating this form.

1. I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview/focus group process without giving any reason and without any implications for my legal rights. This includes withdrawal of data on your responses up to the scheduled date for analysis (01/07/21). ☐

3. I am aware that after 01/07/21 my information will have been combined with other sources and will not be disaggregated after this date (please see 'Section 5: What happens when the research study stops?' as explained in the Participant Information Sheet). ☐

4. I give permission for the interview/focus group to be recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the recording will be destroyed at the end of the project. ☐

5. I confirm that I have had the nature, scope, and intended outcomes of the study explained to me in satisfactory detail and I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of respondent   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of researcher taking consent   Date   Signature

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

An examination of the governance of collaboration: the case of the Fire and Rescue Service in England

Participant Information Sheet

Main investigator: Katarzyna Lakoma, PhD student & Research Associate, Accounting and Finance Department, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University. 50 Shakespeare St, Nottingham NG1 4FQ. Contact tel: 0115 84 82395.

Project supervisors: Dr Peter Eckersley, Dr Nestor Valero-Silva, Professor Peter Murphy. Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University. 50 Shakespeare St, Nottingham NG1 4FQ. Professor Peter Murphy contact tel: 0115 84 88092.

You have been invited to participate in a research project. Before you agree to take part, it is important for you to understand what the purpose of the research is and what participation involves.

Please ensure you read this information sheet carefully. Please feel free to ask a member of the research team if it is not clear or if you require any further information. Please take your time in deciding whether you wish to participate in the project.

Many thanks for considering our project.

Purpose of the project

This research aims to explore governance arrangements within English Fire and Rescue Services. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 makes provision for greater integration among emergency services. As well as requiring greater integration, the government has encouraged and enabled Police and Crime Commissioners to take on responsibilities for local fire services through the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The potential replacement of Fire and Rescue Authorities by elected Police and Crime Commissioners will have significant implications for governance and accountability arrangements in Fire and Rescue Services, and ultimately for the delivery of services to, and safety of, the public.

This research addresses these emerging governance arrangements and investigates their consequences for accountability and transparency. As these are new arrangements, the findings will make an important contribution to our knowledge and understanding of collaborative governance arrangements in emergency service management and may provide new insights into the collaborative process across other public services.

Researcher profiles

This study is part of a research project supported by Nottingham Trent University. It is being led by Katarzyna Lakoma, a PhD researcher and research associate at Nottingham Business School. Katarzyna's research interests include public policy and management of Fire and Rescue Services. The research is being supervised by Dr Peter Eckersley, Dr Nestor Valero-Silva, and Professor Peter Murphy. Between them, these three individuals have a long research track record in areas such as; public policy, local government, performance management, and Fire and Rescue Services.

Their staff profiles are available at:
https://www.ntu.ac.uk/staff-profiles/business/peter-eckersley
https://www.ntu.ac.uk/staff-profiles/business/nestor-valero-silva
https://www.ntu.ac.uk/staff-profiles/business/peter-murphy

1. Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you are a key stakeholder in the Fire and Rescue Service. You will be one of approximately 30 stakeholders invited to participate and comment on various aspects of the new proposals to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to take on responsibilities for local fire services.

2. Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary and will be much welcomed. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw at any time during the interview process without penalty or loss of benefits and you are free not to answer individual questions if you so choose. You will be asked to sign a consent form but you will still be entitled to withdraw at any time during the interview process until the date scheduled for analysis (1 July 2021).

3. What will I have to do if I agree to take part?

You will be asked to take part in a 1-2-1 interview or a focus group. Katarzyna Lakoma will conduct all interviews and focus groups (both the interviews and the focus groups will have a core set of questions, but additional follow-up questions may be asked, based on what emerges from the discussion). Under current circumstances (COVID-19), Katarzyna expects to conduct these interviews and the focus group remotely by Microsoft Teams/Skype or telephone. Interviews will last between 30 mins and an hour, and focus groups around 90 mins. You will be asked to give express permission for the interviews and the focus groups to be audio recorded either by Skype for Business or on a password-protected Dictaphone and stored on the Nottingham Trent University server. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, an interview or a focus group will be recorded via note taking. You can ask for the audio recording to be stopped or erased at any time. Only members of the research team will have access to your data. Each interview and each focus group will be allocated a unique reference code to ensure confidentiality.

4. What information will be required?

You will be asked about your views on the new proposals on Police and Crime Commissioners taking on responsibilities for local fire services and their impact on governance, accountability and transparency in Fire and Rescue Services. Your comments will be kept confidential and you will have the opportunity to review what you have said before it is used in the research. Your institution will not be identified or identifiable. I will exercise all possible care to ensure that you and the organization you work for cannot be identified by the way I write up the findings. There is a slight chance that you or your organization will be identifiable by the nature of the quote in the PhD thesis or subsequent publications.

5. What happens when the research study stops?

The information given by you and other participants will be used to develop a model to consider the impact of the new collaborative governance arrangements on accountability and transparency within the Fire and Rescue Service. The information will be used to produce a PhD thesis and it might be used in academic and professional journal articles. We may use direct quotes from the interview in our publications, but they will be anonymized and not linked to your name in any way.

The transcripts and recordings will be kept securely, password protected, and in line with the university's data protection policies. All data will also be held in a secure and confidential environment during the study and destroyed at the end of the project (PhD), unless further research involving the use of this information (with appropriate permissions and ethical approvals) is conducted.

You may withdraw your data at any time during the interview process without giving any reason and without any implications for your legal rights. This includes withdrawal of data on your responses up to the scheduled data for analysis (1 July 2021). Please note however, that after 1 July 2021, the information you give will have been aggregated and it will not be possible to remove it.

6. **Who is organising and funding the research?**
Nottingham Business School at Nottingham Trent University is sponsoring and funding the research.

7. **Who has reviewed the project?**
The Business, Law, and Social Sciences College Research Ethics Committee of Nottingham Trent University has approved this project.

8. **What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted or if I have questions?**
If you have any further questions, please contact Katarzyna Lakoma on katarzyna.lakoma@ntu.ac.uk or on 0115 84 82395.

Nottingham Trent University (the research sponsor) has a formal procedure to facilitate complaints in the event that anything untoward or unsatisfactory occurs in the carrying out of the research. If you have any concerns, you should address them to Professor Peter Murphy (Head of Research at Nottingham Business School) who is a member of this research team.