



**OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

**Fire Health & Safety Directorate
Fire Research Division**

**FIRE SERVICE EMERGENCY COVER:
PRESENTATION STRATEGY TOOLBOX**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of FSEC is to provide protection to the public against the hazard of fire, given that a fire has occurred, whilst at the same time making provision for those other types of incident to which the Fire Service is expected to respond. The whole approach to risk assessment based FSEC needed extensive evaluation in a series of 'Pathfinder' trials, before it could be adopted nationally. One clear conclusion from these trials was that brigades might encounter resistance to any such changes, unless sufficient resources were committed to planning and undertaking appropriate consultation with the Fire Service's stakeholders. Market researchers MVA Ltd were tasked to develop a Toolbox of guidance on how this should be done.

As the first stage, a number of workshops and interviews were held with Pathfinder brigade managers, staff and union representatives. The aim of this stage was to engage in discussion with staff from different levels and types of job within the fire service to understand the views of people with varying degrees of experience of Pathfinder, to explore issues of communication, to understand what experience and resources might be available to brigades and to identify relevant stakeholders.

The second stage involved a series of focus groups held with members of the public and other selected stakeholders. Representatives came from London, Reading, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Hartlepool and Hamilton. The aim of these focus groups was to explore the participants' understanding of the fire service and their attitudes to risk and communications issues.

This study has identified many pointers on how various stakeholders might be expected to view the introduction of the proposed new Fire Service Emergency Cover planning process. It also suggests where brigades may need guidance and support if they are to convince these stakeholders that the positive aspects of the process outweigh those aspects, which they might consider less desirable. Work will now commence on developing this guidance, identifying what information needs to be conveyed when and to whom, and suggesting ways in which this could be done.

Summary

In response to a report by the Audit Commission, arrangements for the planning and provision of Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) have been reviewed. The review resulted in a series of risk assessment 'toolkits' and a technique for response planning that will give brigades more flexibility in how they achieve the FSEC standards.

The new approach to risk assessment was tested in a series of 'Pathfinder' trials, one conclusion of which was that there may be difficulty in securing stakeholders' support for the outcomes without sufficient and appropriate consultation with them. As a first stage, market researchers MVA Ltd were tasked to develop a Toolbox of guidance on how to do this.

The first stage involved workshops and interviews with Pathfinder managers, staff and union representatives. The purpose was to explore the views of staff and others with varying degrees of experience of Pathfinder and understand issues of communication, including what experience and resources might be available to brigades. The next stage involved focus groups with members of the public and other stakeholders to explore their understanding of the fire service and their attitudes to risk and communications issues.

This work improved our understanding of how various stakeholders might be expected to view the introduction of the proposed new FSEC planning process. It also suggested what guidance and support brigades might need to plan and implement a communications and consultation programme. The findings of the first two stages of the work have been presented in an earlier report. This report provides the guidance, identifying what information needs to be conveyed when and to whom, and suggesting ways in which this could be done.

The guidance is divided into three parts. The first covers the work necessary to set up a communications and consultation process. It discusses the following stages:

- informing the Fire Authority;
- informing the fire service unions;
- appointing a person to act as 'Communications Co-ordinator' to lead the communications and consultation activities;
- auditing communications and consultation resources and enhancing them where necessary;
- working in partnership with other organisations;
- identifying local stakeholders and setting up a database to help manage communications with them; and
- preparing the communications and consultation plan.

This section also signposts the way towards some of the many good practice guides, toolkits and case studies that are already available to help to develop the plan and to implement it.

The next part of the report covers the work that needs to be done in preparing materials to use during the exercise. It explains that there are many positive messages that can be conveyed about the FSEC review process and its likely outcomes. It recommends using 'Plain English' and where help with that may be found. It also discusses what might be included in early communications materials. The section also contains a summary of the report on the Pathfinder trials in order to explain the background to the FSEC review and point out its benefits. That report was written for a knowledgeable audience so there are

suggestions for how it can be explained to those who are new to it. Some examples are included in an Appendix. The section concludes with advice on using the Web.

The fifth chapter is about turning the plan into action. It describes:

- ways to keep staff fully informed and take account of their views;
- communicating with other stakeholders in the political, business, voluntary and other sectors;
- communicating with the wider public and using the media
- advice on effective public consultation; and
- evaluating the communications and consultation process in order to improve it.

The report concludes that although the communications and consultation process will present many challenges they can be overcome with a well designed, well implemented and well resourced communication and consultation plan. Conveying the positive message of the FSEC review will ensure that the fire service continues to receive the trust of the communities it serves.

Chapter	Page
1 Introduction	1
2 Time-Line	3
3 Setting Up	5
3.1 Inform the Fire Authority	5
3.2 Inform the Fire Service Unions	5
3.3 Appoint a Champion – the Communications Co-ordinator	6
3.4 Audit Communications and Consultation Resources	7
3.5 The Value of Partnerships	8
3.6 Identify Local Stakeholders	9
3.7 Set Up A Database of Stakeholders	11
3.8 Prepare a Communications and Consultation Plan.	11
3.9 Contents of the Plan	14
3.10 Sources of Guidance	16
4 Preparing Materials	19
4.1 Positive Messages.	19
4.2 Using Plain English	19
4.3 The Content of Early Communications Materials.	19
4.4 The Background to the FSEC Review	20
4.5 Some Examples of Materials	23
4.6 Using the Web	23
5 Communicating and Consulting	25
5.1 Introduction	25
5.2 Internal Communications: Talking To The Staff	26
5.3 Communicating with Other Stakeholders	29
5.4 Communicating With the Wider Public: Media Campaigns	30
5.5 A Dialogue with the Public	31
5.6 Dialogue Means Consultation	33
5.7 Public Meetings	33
5.8 One To One Meetings With The Public	34
5.9 Evaluation	34
6 Conclusion	36
Appendix A	37
An Example of Leaflet Content for Staff	37
An Example Of Leaflet Content For The Public/Media	40
An Example Of Material For Local Politicians	43

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1 Introduction

In its report 'In the Line of Fire', the Audit Commission drew attention to inadequacies it perceived in existing arrangements for the planning and provision of Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC).

The purpose of FSEC is to provide protection to the public against the hazard of fire, given that a fire has occurred, whilst making provision for those other types of incident to which the Fire Service is expected to respond. This is achieved by first estimating the likelihood of an incident occurring in a given location and its severity by the time of arrival of the first attendance, and then providing the type and weight of intervention likely to be required.

A series of risk assessment 'toolkits' has been developed, together with a technique for response planning, giving brigades more flexibility in how they achieve the FSEC standards. A brigade's performance will be assessed on its ability to hold risk below nationally prescribed limits, and to drive down risk where it is possible to do so without incurring disproportionate costs.

The whole approach to risk assessment based FSEC needed extensive evaluation before it could be adopted nationally. A range of brigades undertook this in a series of 'Pathfinder' trials, to ensure that likely problems were encountered before any decision is taken on whether to proceed.

Implementation of the proposed new FSEC process may result in very little being changed but, equally, it could result in changes in the locations of fire appliances and in the crewing patterns required for them.

One clear conclusion from these trials was that brigades might encounter resistance to any such changes, unless sufficient resources were committed to planning and undertaking appropriate consultation with the Fire Service's stakeholders. As a first stage, market researchers MVA Ltd were tasked to develop a Toolbox of guidance on how this should be done.

The research aims were to develop a greater understanding of people's perceptions on the fire service and to inform the development of guidance on the implementation of the FSEC. The first stage involved a series of workshops and interviews with Pathfinder managers, staff and union representatives. The aim of this stage was to:

- explore the views of staff from different levels and types of job within the fire service;
- understand the views of people with varying degrees of experience of Pathfinder;
- explore issues of communication;
- understand what experience and resources might be available to brigades; and
- identify relevant stakeholders.

The second stage was a series of focus groups held with members of the public and other stakeholders. The aim of these focus groups was to explore the understanding of the public and other stakeholders of the fire service, attitudes to risk and communications issues. We described the views of the various people we spoke to in a previous report.

The research on which this report is based took place in the summer of 2003. That was before the firefighters' pay dispute and the publication of the Bain report created considerable publicity about the role of the fire service and the way in which it operates. Because of that publicity, the views of the public may have changed from those that were revealed by the research. It will be advisable to update this part of the report when the

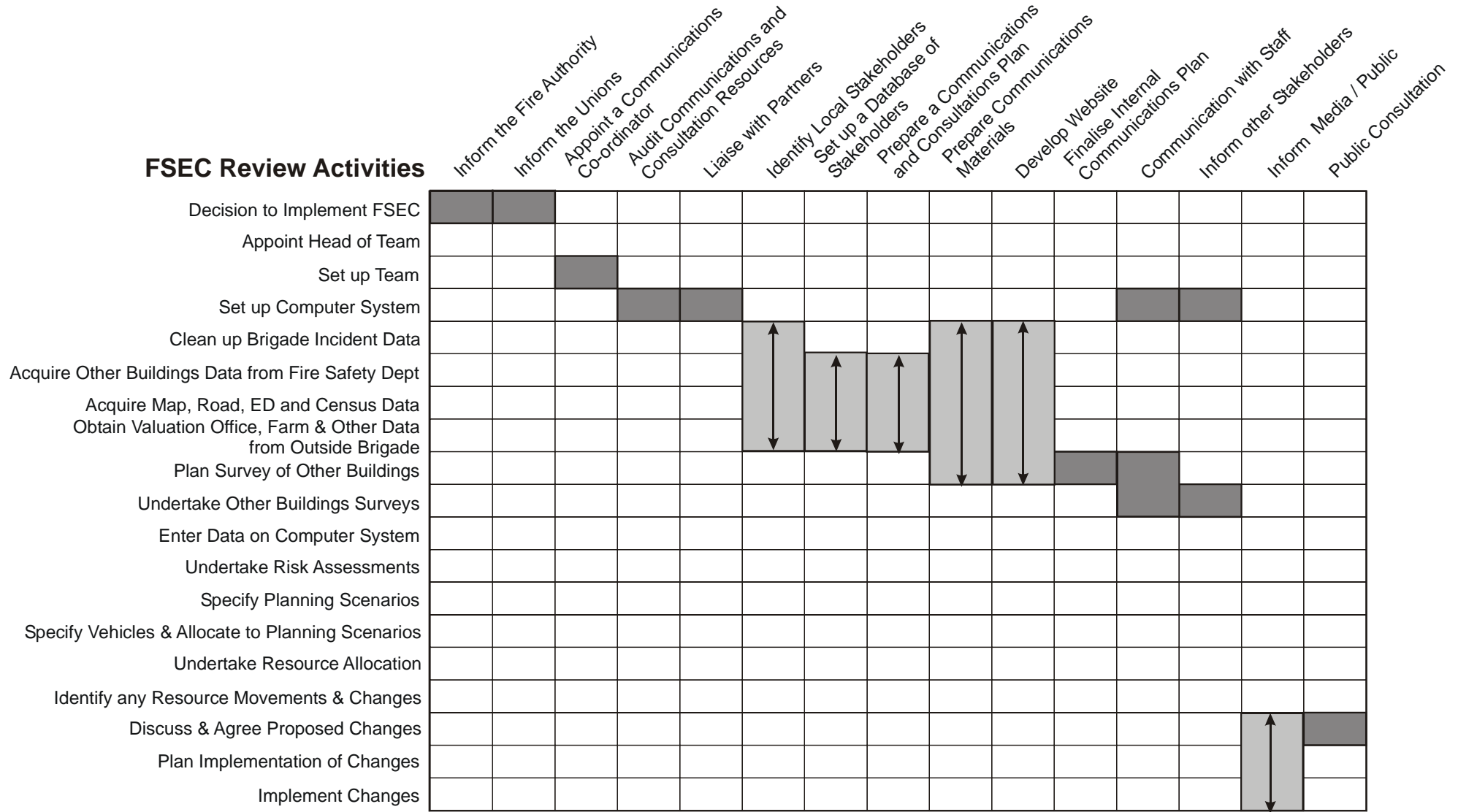
issues are resolved and comment in the media has died away. It may also be necessary to update the work with staff, managers and other stakeholders.

2 Time-Line

This study has identified many pointers on how various stakeholders might be expected to view the introduction of the proposed new Fire Service Emergency Cover planning process. It also suggests where brigades may need guidance and support if they are to convince these stakeholders that the positive aspects of the process outweigh those aspects, that they might consider less desirable. The remainder of this report provides that guidance, identifying what information needs to be conveyed when and to whom, and suggesting ways in which this could be done.

First, though, Figure 2.1 relates the Fire Service Emergency Cover Time-Line, produced by the Fire Research Division, to the communications and consultation tasks that will need to be done at different stages of the work. The next three Chapters discuss each of the communications and consultation tasks in order, giving guidance on each and giving references to other sources of advice.

Communications Timetable



3 Setting Up

3.1 Inform the Fire Authority

As soon as the FSEC process is initiated, the CFO will inform the Fire Authority that it is taking place. It is likely that this will generate some media interest and interest from Local Authority members. The FSEC team may not be fully in place at this time and any response to press or public enquiries may have to be done through existing communication channels. Press and PR officers will need to be briefed in advance.

Although at this stage the FSEC review team may not be in place it is not too early to give some thought to the level of resource that will be required to implement both it and the communications and consultation process. The experience of Pathfinder has shown that the process flows much more smoothly if resources are not stretched. In our research, Pathfinder managers suggested that brigade public relations departments were not big enough to cope with the level of support that would be required. They themselves felt that they did not yet have either the appropriate skills or the expertise to carry forward a consultation. We discuss these issues later in this report.

3.2 Inform the Fire Service Unions

The various staff unions; namely the FBU, the RFU and the GMBU are an important audience as they have a very great influence on staff attitudes. The Chief Officers Association is also an important audience. As soon as the review begins, the unions must be informed that it is taking place, what the objectives are, what the process is and how long it is likely to take.

Securing the support of the unions for the FSEC process will be extremely important as they have such a strong influence on the attitudes of their members. Firefighters and other staff will have an input to the FSEC process but they will also have views on it. Their views will influence members of the public, many of whom will trust firefighters more than they will trust Fire Service Managers, and certainly more than they will trust politicians. The arguments used by firefighters against the recommendations of the Bain report give an idea of what might happen.

It is not surprising that during an industrial dispute there is a considerable degree of distrust of management but the distrust predates the dispute that began in 2002. In research carried out as part of the development of this toolbox, front line staff who had heard of the FSEC review were generally wary of it. They generally believed that the motives of the management are to save money and cut jobs. However, they did draw a distinction between the process, which they generally supported, and the outcomes, of which they remain suspicious. The industrial dispute and the publication of the Bain report will have heightened the suspicion.

The culture of the service itself presents a barrier to the acceptance of change. Firefighters work for the majority of their time in the same small group and are mainly interested only in what affects their immediate environment. The 'old' public service culture of an unchanging job for life is still in existence across many parts of the service, although there are many areas of rapid change and reorganisation. The service is characterised by strong team loyalties, reinforced by a generally insular environment based on tradition and hierarchy. Change, sometimes substantial change, has occurred but often against opposition. The challenge is to work with, not against, the culture of the organisation.

Part of working with the culture of the fire service will involve bringing unions into the consultation and communication process. Unions have significant influence over their members and if union representatives were in favour of the FSEC review, staff would be much less suspicious. Unions will primarily represent the interests of their members, but could also be a valuable communication channel if they are convinced of the benefits of the process.

It is not possible to foresee the outcome of the review, so the exact effects on firefighters will not be known for some time. Unions will reserve judgement until they see the outcome but if their support for the process in principal can be secured early on, it will have very beneficial results.

One encouraging fact is that unions had been sceptical and suspicious of Pathfinder at first, but the more they learnt, the more they realised its benefits. They supported the principles, particularly the changes in the risk assessment to reflect an emphasis on life rather than property. They also supported taking special services into account and the inclusion of staff safety issues. These will be seen as positive features of the FSEC review. However, unions would be concerned about reductions in the size of the fire service establishment and redistribution or relocation of resources and appliances.

With the changes in the role of the firefighter, staff and unions need to be reassured that the FSEC review will not be simply a cost cutting exercise. The communications strategy should take note of their perceptions and respond to them but should do so honestly. If the messages are perceived to be at odds with the reality then mistrust will be reinforced and the whole communications process called into question. It would be seen as an exercise in deception and dissimulation.

If there was no attempt to make cuts as a result of the FSEC review, and perhaps even some increase in cover, then the unions would be happy to assist in communicating the message to the staff and the public. However, if the process were used differently then unions would argue the other side and would be confident of the support of the public. Endorsement of the process by unions would strongly help to bring staff on board and in turn the various wider stakeholder audiences.

3.3 Appoint a Champion – the Communications Co-ordinator

It is essential that the FSEC team gains ownership of the FSEC communication strategy from the very start. To do so it will be necessary to have a person who has overall responsibility for driving it forward. We have called this person the 'Communications Co-ordinator'. The person will have to be chosen carefully. The main role of the Communications Co-ordinator will be to oversee and co-ordinate all aspects of the communications and consultation process. He or she should be motivated and supported in this role and given sufficient resources to see it through.

The Communications Co-ordinator should be a communications professional yet able to grasp the complexities of the FSEC process. To appoint a traditional press officer, perhaps with a background in journalism is unlikely to be fully effective unless the person has other qualities to bring to the job. This is because the role will have a much broader remit covering public relations, consultation and corporate communications.

The person doing the job will have to take a strategic as well as an operational focus. He or she will have to work at a high level with accountability and access to the CFO and senior managers within the brigade and in partner organisations. He or she will need strong project and person management skills and will need to be an advocate for FSEC across the brigade as well as outside it. The person will need sufficient knowledge of the fire service and operational issues to be credible when communicating with all levels of fire service staff.

Although the Communications Co-ordinator will have the primary responsibility for FSEC communications and consultation, they will also have to work through others as it is inconceivable that they can, or should, be the only source of information on FSEC. They will thus have to promote a corporate approach to all communications activities to ensure that conflicting messages do not emerge from the brigade. This will require an ability to work closely with people in areas such as IT and Human Resources, who will have expertise to contribute.

The Communications Co-ordinator will not necessarily be the FSEC Review Team Leader, although that is possible. The post does not necessarily have to be full-time and certainly in smaller brigades the person doing it could combine these responsibilities with others within the brigade. The workload will determine how much time needs to be devoted to it.

Consultation will have already taken place at national level and the Communications Co-ordinator will need to inform themselves of its outcome. It is to be hoped that there will be some kind of official launch of the FSEC review so that the FSEC team can use this to place their work in context when they communicate with stakeholders. It will help them if they can demonstrate that they are part of a wider process of modernisation.

Much has to be done and the job requirements could be daunting. We found that those who had been involved in Pathfinder were convinced of the merits of the process. However, they thought that the task of communicating it to others would be difficult, and one that they were not sufficiently trained or resourced to undertake. The enthusiasm of Pathfinder managers depended on their experience of the process, which in turn had been influenced by the resources that had been devoted to it within their brigade. That is why we recommend the appointment of a specialist within the FSEC team with access to the necessary skills and resources.

3.4 Audit Communications and Consultation Resources

Adequate resourcing will be needed to ensure that the communications and consultation requirements can be achieved within the required timescale. The process may require a different level of resource at different times, or it may require a different nature of resource at different times. The team may need to draw on external support at times when they are overloaded or if there is a requirement for a specific skill that they do not possess to the necessary degree. The team will have to identify which consultation and research they can conduct wholly in-house and which requires external support, and plan accordingly.

The purpose of this toolbox is not to improve the communication skills of fire brigades. Neither is it a review of how the service is managed. However, brigades should consider their existing communications and consultation capacity and rectify any shortcomings in relation to the FSEC process.

You will need many things. They may include all or some of these:

- People able to prepare and deliver convincing presentations;
- Graphic design capabilities;
- Printing and other production capabilities;
- Multi-media capability;
- Video production capability;
- A website;
- Web authoring software and someone who can use it;
- Survey research capability;
- Qualitative research capability, including people able to facilitate workshops;

Some of these will exist within the FSEC team. The Communications Co-ordinator will have many of the necessary skills. Others will be found in other departments of the brigade.

For example, consultation is one of the components of Best Value. Thus the brigade's Best Value Team will have acquired the necessary experience or can point to where you may obtain it. Neighbouring brigades who may be working jointly on FSEC may be able to contribute some resources, as may partner organisations. When the FSEC review starts to be implemented it may be that some resources will have been developed centrally. And of course, all of these resources and skills are available from commercial providers in either the public or the private sectors. Many companies specialise in one or more of these areas. Your brigade will probably have procurement rules and you should follow these if you are intending to outsource any activities. There is a useful guide to commissioning many of the consultation activities you might need to undertake on the website of the Social Research Association. It is called "Commissioning Social Research" and will be found at www.the-sra.org.uk.

Once you have completed your audit of the resources that you will need to implement your communications and consultation plan you will need to determine how to fill any resource gaps. This may involve training, recruitment, secondment, outsourcing or partnership working.

3.5 The Value of Partnerships

Several neighbouring brigades may decide to work together on the FSEC review. This may be a useful way of pooling resources and could greatly facilitate the process. Even if several brigades jointly undertake the technical work of FSEC, it is likely that each will wish to keep control of their own decision making. This may cause them to want to communicate the outcome of the process themselves.

Even so, the central team will have built up a vast understanding of the process and will be in the strongest position to know why certain outcomes have emerged. They are therefore best placed to consult and communicate about them. Their expertise should be made available to all partner brigades, and should be welcomed and used.

There may also be other partner organisations, such as local authorities, which can provide expertise. Local authorities have a duty to consult on issues such as Best Value and on Community Strategies and many of them have developed considerable expertise in this area, which could greatly help FSEC. In a later chapter, we give links to some examples that have been designed to offer detailed guidance on each step of the communications and consultation process.

In your area there may be a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). LSPs are intended to include all sectors of society (public, private, community and voluntary) with a remit to work together to improve the quality of life in a particular locality. The Government sees them as the main mechanism for the co-ordination of delivery of better local services. Local Authorities are not obliged in all instances to set up an LSP, but many have. The Local Authority should take the lead in the LSP but does not 'own' it.

On the IDeA Knowledge website at:

<http://eshtw01.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/bp/bp.nsf/httpPublicPages/Local+strategic+partnerships>

there is a toolkit on LSPs that describes good practice in partnership working. Some of the challenges that it identifies such as issues of accountability, respective roles and culture and the effective use of people, skills and resources, are particularly relevant in relation to communications.

The Audit Commission published a report "A Fruitful Partnership: Effective Partnership Working" in 1998 to guide and support people engaged in inter-agency working. The

report is not downloadable from the Audit Commission's website but can be ordered by telephone on 0800 502 030.

The Audit commission also published "Developing productive partnerships: District Audit A Bulletin" in October 2002. Again, the report has to be ordered from the Audit Commission but there is a press release on its website which focuses on three critical areas that are deemed to affect many partnerships: performance, inclusion and probity. It says of these:

Performance: the bulletin highlights the need for partnership bodies to question whether the work they carry out adds value to the work they already undertake independently. It is essential to have systems in place that track performance, and resources (in terms of both money and people) need to be used in the best way. Yet another crucial factor is developing relevant and meaningful indicators that satisfy the overall purpose of a partnership.

Inclusion: inclusivity, says the summary, can be defined on many levels. It can mean involvement through regular consultation, through to encouraging representatives from stakeholder groups to become actively involved in decision making by the partnership. Partnerships need to consider what they are trying to achieve through inclusion. Thought also needs to be given to how best to interact with lobby and interest groups.

Probity: good practice reveals that all members of a partnership should be responsible for ensuring they meet the highest standards of governance. Currently, most partnerships nominate one member as the main accountable body. Developing Productive Partnerships stresses the need for the roles and responsibilities of the accountable body and partnership to be formally recorded, a memorandum to be in place, decisions taken at the appropriate level and transparent procedures for dealing with any conflicts of interest.

These reports, and others that can be found on these websites, highlight the key ingredients for successful partnership working. They state that partnerships need:

- clear, shared objectives;
- a realistic plan and timetable for reaching these objectives;
- commitment from partners to take the partnership's work into account within their mainstream activities;
- a clear framework of responsibilities and accountability;
- a high level of trust between partners; and
- realistic ways of measuring the partnership's achievements.

3.6 Identify Local Stakeholders

Stakeholders will include people and organisations in the following categories. You need to set up a database, which will include their contact details and other relevant information. We have described the features of the database in the next section.

Different brigades have described their local stakeholders to us and the list has been remarkably consistent from place to place. However, this does not exclude special circumstances that mean one brigade includes some stakeholders that others do not. On balance, it is better to be over-inclusive than omit some important group. It would be damaging to have them say at a later stage that the fire service did not consider their views.

The following are stakeholder groups that you should consider. There may be others relevant to your local circumstances. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Fire brigade staff and managers;
- Members of the public;
- MP's / MEPs and local politicians;
- Local action groups;
- Charities, for example Age Concern, the Salvation Army;
- Elected local representatives;
- Industry / Industrial forums / Safety officers in industrial premises / Consultative forums. Those specifically mentioned in our research include the rail industry and the water industry;
- Business communities, those specifically mentioned in our research include BAA, insurance companies, and small businesses;
- Trade unions;
- Business organisations such as CBI, LCCI;
- Local Heritage organisations;
- The Health Service / Health Authorities;
- Environment agencies;
- Housing corporations;
- Local governments and authorities;
- Local Strategic Partnerships;
- Local authority organisations. They might include the LGA, ALG, COSLA etc
- Regional Planning Bodies;
- The Fire Protection Association and Loss Prevention Council;
- Other emergency services;
- The armed services;
- Builders and developers;
- The Health & Safety executive;
- Parish and Community Councils;
- The media.

3.7 Set Up A Database of Stakeholders

The database should be an active tool not just an address book. There are many contact management systems available commercially and the software is cheap. You should look for one that has:

- easy input of data;
- full address details including email and web addresses;
- the ability to set up an unlimited number of user defined fields that enable the stakeholder to be classified and described;
- advanced search facilities;
- the ability to generate letters, faxes and emails;
- a facility to add an unlimited number of descriptive notes to record events such as mailouts, conversations, correspondence received, meetings attended etc;
- the ability to view the data in different ways;
- automatic logging of the date, time and duration of telephone calls
- automatic logging of date and time of letters and emails and completed appointments;
- database analysis;
- group editing facility;
- security settings;

You should classify stakeholders (other than fire service staff and members of the public) into audience types in the database. The classification should help you target appropriate communications to these audiences. The way you classify stakeholders will depend on your local circumstances but you may find it useful to identify:

- political audiences (MPs, MEPs, AMs, MSPs, local politicians);
- economic audiences (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations, local businesses);
- voluntary organisations (e.g. charities, environmental campaigners).

3.8 Prepare a Communications and Consultation Plan.

The Communications Co-ordinator will have to prepare a communications and consultation plan. This will be one of his or her first tasks. The elements of the plan will vary from brigade to brigade, as each will have to deal with their own local situation. You will need to decide who you are who trying to communicate with and why. That helps you set your objectives.

At the outset and throughout the FSEC review, the objectives of the communication and consultation strategy should guide the work. The overall aim is to:

- keep stakeholders informed of relevant aspects of the review;

- enable them to express their views and feel that they have been listened to; and
- assist the progress of the review by overcoming misunderstanding and misinformation, responding to concerns expressed by stakeholders and so minimising dissent and reducing opposition to the changes, from whatever source.

To achieve its objectives the consultation and communications programme should:

- have clearly identified management responsibility;
- be of a high standard;
- be inclusive;
- be informative;
- address the internal audience as well as the external ones;
- be adequately resourced;
- make effective use of the media;
- provide feedback to stakeholders;
- make use of existing community links;
- be tailored to local circumstances; and
- draw on best practice from elsewhere.

Each of these is discussed below.

3.8.1 Clearly Identified Management Responsibility

The Communications Co-ordinator in each FSEC team should act as liaison officer on all matters relating to communications. He or she should be responsible for developing the communications and consultation plan and for implementing it. An early task for the Communications Co-ordinator will be to identify existing communications and consultation resources, review existing methods and approaches and improve them where necessary. This will help to ensure that the FSEC team prepares its communications requirements in good time.

3.8.2 High Standard

The aim should be to achieve the highest possible standards of communications and consultation. To do so the brigade will have to communicate in a professional manner with all audiences. It will need to identify and use those communications channels that are the most cost effective. If the work is done well, it will have the additional benefit of building the capacity of the organisation in the areas of consultation and communication.

3.8.3 Inclusive Consultation

To achieve 'inclusive' consultation the brigade should consult and inform all relevant stakeholders. It will be necessary to embrace the widest cross-section of the community. This includes people who are members of groups that are sometimes described as hard to reach. Such groups will include people who suffer from one form of social exclusion or another.

Hard to reach groups are often defined in terms of some identifiable characteristic such as members of minority ethnic groups, young people or old people, or people with disabilities etc. In reality, groups that are this easily identifiable are not difficult to reach, although some may be more costly to reach than others. Those who are really difficult to reach are those who are disenchanted with the normal mechanisms of democratic decision making, those who feel that their opinion is of little value or will be disregarded, those who feel that they lack expertise, those who are intimidated by public meetings etc. Some people may find it difficult to participate because they have difficult shift patterns or caring responsibilities. The brigade should emphasise its determination to take its messages to groups not always included in public debates.

3.8.4 Informative Communications

An important aim is to improve communication with the public and other stakeholders. One of the findings of the public focus groups was that the public has a very limited awareness of what the fire service actually does and how it operates. After the FSEC review, it would be wrong to revert to this state of affairs. One objective could thus be to permanently improve public access to information about the brigade and its activities. This will enhance the image of the brigade in the community and help overcome the poor public understanding of it.

It is also likely that in the course of implementing the communications plan some individual members of staff have the opportunity to improve their personal skills in this area. This too is a valuable side effect and could be used in the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS). You should consider how to bring this to the attention of the human resources department.

3.8.5 Address the Internal Audiences as Well as the External Ones

Improved communications within the brigade could be a valuable spin-off of this process. Because internal communications are so important, they ought to receive much attention throughout the FSEC review process. It is difficult to imagine that this will not lead to enhanced communications on other matters as well. A culture of improved communications is likely to develop and there will also be advances in internal communications technology through the further development of web, internet, intranet and email services throughout the brigade.

3.8.6 Provide Feedback

There should also be mechanisms to report to stakeholders with a summary of the views that have been expressed. Stakeholders will also benefit from reports on progress with the FSEC review.

The person responsible for the FSEC communications and consultation programme will need to establish systems for disseminating information gained from the consultations to the FSEC team and to other managers. The brigade should realise that putting such feedback to good use within their organisation will improve many aspects of their customer service. The FSEC team should establish a mechanism to indicate on their reports what consultation and information dissemination has taken place.

It will not be just the FSEC team who will be engaged in 2-way communication with stakeholders. Many managers are frequently in contact with stakeholders for a variety of reasons. Brigades should establish a mechanism for sharing knowledge derived from all forms of consultation. Sharing good practice, within and between brigades should also be a priority.

3.8.7 Adequately Resourced

We have already said that an audit of communications and consultation resources should be carried out at the start of the FSEC review. If there are any shortfalls then these should be dealt with appropriately. We have suggested that they may be found within the brigade or its partners, be developed through training, supplied by recruitment or secondment or outsourced. All of these involve cost but the consequences of being inadequately resourced could be severe.

3.8.8 Make Use of Existing Community Links

Various community organisations can play a part in spreading the message if they are brought into the process in a positive way. The team could encourage visits by community groups to fire stations, once staff have been fully informed of the process. Organised school and college visits are also useful, as it has been found that children pass on the messages to their parents.

3.8.9 Make Effective Use of the Media

Brigades should have a high level of media awareness, and many already do. The FSEC team should encourage this. News releases should be of high quality, and focussed on positive messages and human-interest stories. The team should keep editors and reporters fully briefed with background material and information on policy issues and activity. Developing long term good working relationships with media personnel is important. The aim is to improve the profile of the brigade and the FSEC review in particular.

The FSEC team should encourage a professional approach to and high standards in dealing with the media. They should identify those best able to represent the brigade and speak on FSEC issues and give them suitable training where necessary.

Broadcast and printed media are not the only channels of communication. There should be a policy in respect of attendance at public events and shows and a timetable of involvement in these should be determined.

3.8.10 Be Tailored to Local Circumstances

The guidance in this toolbox is not prescriptive. Local circumstances are very different and general principles should always be adapted to the reality on the ground. This will not be the first time the brigade has consulted stakeholders or communicated with them. Lessons can be learned from these past events.

3.8.11 Draw on Best Practice From Elsewhere

There are many sources of advice and guidance on consultation and communications issues in the public sector and we have listed many of them in the next section. They are of high quality. There is no point in duplicating good material that is already available and so we have not done so. Parts of this report draw on these sources of information and we are pleased to acknowledge the help that we have found there. However, you should consult the originals.

3.9 Contents of the Plan

Your plan should contain the tasks and actions you need to undertake in respect of each audience and the timescale (both in terms of when you need to undertake certain activities and the time that each will take). It should also give an estimate of how much the work programme is likely to cost and who is responsible for the overall plan and each component of it. You will need to keep your plan under constant review and adapt it to circumstances. There are various software applications that help project managers keep track of and control all the many activities for which they are responsible (e.g. Microsoft Project).

Your plan should adapt the guidance given in this document (and in the others to which it directs you) to your own local circumstances. The plan should include a budget so that you make the plan's resource implications clear at the start. You will not achieve your objective without the means of doing so. For the same reason, your plan should take into account the audit of communications and consultation resources. Your plan needs to consider both what to communicate, how to communicate it and when to communicate it.

3.9.1 What to Communicate

It will be important to deal proactively with the various audiences, especially the media, rather than being faced with a rushed response to negative messages about emergency cover. For example, the Audit Commission's report, which led to the review, included recommendations for enhancement of public protection from fire and a primary focus on addressing the risk to life rather than to property. Thus the messages should acknowledge the fears of stakeholders and the public about perceived levels of cover but stress that the aim is to improve safety. At the same time, we would recommend an open and honest statement of the methods used to consult stakeholders.

3.9.2 How to Communicate

Suitable material is likely to include leaflets, posters, web site content, news releases and media briefings, open days for the public and much face-to-face contact with stakeholders.

It may not be practical or cost-effective to distribute a leaflet to every household in the area, but you should make such literature freely available to those who wish to receive it. This may mean placing leaflets in libraries, doctors' and vets' surgeries, council offices and police station reception areas and in retail outlets such as DIY stores selling smoke alarms and fire extinguishers. Leaflets may also be made available as downloadable .pdf files via fire brigade and local authority web sites. Wherever possible, it is advisable to offer literature in several languages, such as Welsh, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu. Large print or Braille versions should be available to those who require them.

To ensure consistency of response to enquiries, it will be important to limit contact with the media to one or two representatives per brigade. We understand the Fire Service has in place a structure of one or two media contacts per county.

Pro-active measures, such as news releases, interviews with journalists and syndicated articles containing local case studies are also helpful to put across the right message. Many local authorities periodically distribute their own magazine and may be persuaded to include useful editorial, along with a web address for more information.

Advertising in local newspapers (a week or so in advance of consultation) is useful in encouraging mailed, faxed or emailed responses on issues of importance to the public.

3.9.3 When to Communicate

Given the sensitivity of the issues involved, it is likely that the media will learn of the project and begin to express an interest almost immediately the review begins. A dialogue should be allowed to develop that emphasises the importance of consultation at all stages and encourages the public to respond in a constructive manner.

You will need to communicate with different audiences at different times. Consult the timeline in this document and relate your communications plan to the stages in the FSEC review.

It will take time to arrange staff and stakeholder meetings, and you should allow for this in the plan.

3.10 Sources of Guidance

There are many good practice guides, toolkits and case studies that can help you both to develop your plan and to implement it. Sources include:

3.10.1 Connecting with Communities

This is a site accessed via the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) 'Knowledge Network'. Its purpose is to spread best practice in helping local authorities communicate with their local communities. The [ODPM](#), the [LGA](#), the [IDeA](#) and the [Audit Commission](#) have joined to provide this good practice toolkit offering comprehensive communications support to local authorities. Although local authorities are its primary audience, there is much useful information and guidance here and a number of case studies that will be very relevant to the FSEC review. You will need to register with the IdeA Knowledge Network before you can access information on this site, but this is easy and free. Do so at:

<http://eshtw02.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/registration.nsf/frmHomepage?OpenForm>

Follow the link for 'connecting with communities' for the good practice toolkit offering comprehensive communications support. It discusses, amongst other things:

- communications strategies
- communicating with residents
- communicating with the media
- internal communications

3.10.2 National Community Fire Safety Centre Toolbox

This gives guidance on Public Relations, consultation and partnerships and on working with minority communities. It also has sections on press and news media, paid publicity and sponsorship. Its website is at: www.firesafetytoolbox.org.uk. Many brigades will already have experience of working with this toolbox.

3.10.3 Viewfinder: a Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement

A very good source of information and guidance is "Viewfinder: a Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement" produced by the Cabinet Office. It describes itself as a "practical resource to help policy makers at all levels improve policy design through undertaking public involvement initiatives. It introduces policy makers to the issue of public involvement and provides practical advice on principles, planning activities and selecting methods". It can be downloaded as a pdf file from:

<http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/servlet/DocViewer/docnoredirect=279/Viewfinder%201%202.10.022.pdf>

This document also contains an extensive bibliography on consultation and the relationship between public organisations and citizens and another bibliography on guidance on involving diverse groups in decision-making processes.

3.10.4 Other Advice from the Cabinet Office

How to consult your users?

Another Cabinet Office document is:

Cabinet Office (1998) *How to consult your users?*

<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/guidance/users/index.htm>)

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

This is another Cabinet Office consultation website.

<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/Consultation.htm>

This has links from where you can download copies of the Code of Practice on written consultation and a checklist that helps when using it. Other links from here give guidance on research into public opinions and consulting ethnic minorities. There is guidance on:

- consultation principles
- timing of consultation,
- communicating with different groups
- where to get advice,
- undertaking surveys.

3.10.5 The Moray Council Consultation Toolkit

This is a local government (Moray) produced consultation toolkit on all aspects from determining methods to carrying out a consultation through to analysis of the responses. It is a link to a downloadable pdf file.

http://www.moray.gov.uk/Consultation/Consult_Toolkit.pdf

3.10.6 Lambeth Council: Informing and Involving the Public

Link to a strategic review of informing and involving the public produced by Lambeth Council as part of its Best Value Review.

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/intradoc/groups/public/documents/report/011034.pdf>

3.10.7 Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association.

A new guide to help local authorities and other organisations consult and communicate effectively with disabled people has just been published by the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA).

The guide is called "Getting It Right: Including Disabled People in Communication and Consultation". It aims to help public, private and voluntary organisations understand the importance of including disabled people in consultation exercises and how to go about this in the most effective way. Details are at: http://www.laria.gov.uk/public_f.htm . The guide costs £30 (or £25 if your brigade is a corporate member of LARIA).

3.10.8 Institute of Internal Auditors: The Good Consultation Toolkit

Setting Up

This is a link to 'The Good Consultation Toolkit', which "offers many practical techniques that have been tried and tested by the author (Frank Smith) and his colleagues". It is a downloadable Word document.

http://www.iaa.org.uk/knowledgecentre/keyissues/generalinternalaudit.cfm?Action=1&ARTICLE_ID=398

4 Preparing Materials

4.1 Positive Messages.

Obviously, there will be an ongoing need to prepare materials such as press releases, presentations, standard letters, posters, web content etc. Although you can base them on the guidance in this document and the others to which it directs you, you will have to tailor them extensively to local circumstances. Each brigade could have different local audiences and will be able to allocate different levels and types of resource to addressing them.

The support for the FSEC review process amongst those who have gained an understanding of it indicates that there are many positive messages that you can communicate. Stakeholders, including members of the public and staff, will be more inclined to support the process if they understand how risks to life and property and other risks are being explicitly addressed.

In all your materials you should emphasise the protection of the public. When communicating with stakeholder groups, there should be an emphasis on community fire safety coupled with reassurance that operational response to incidents will be maintained. It is fundamental to convince all audiences that response to emergencies will be retained but organised in a different and more flexible way appropriate for modern circumstances. Other positive messages could be taken to the business communities, such as the fire service's role in damage control and maintaining business continuity.

At the same time, it is important to convey the message that various forms of preventative work will save lives. There should be a strong emphasis on statutory and community fire safety, as well as on working with the construction industries to improve building design and procedures. In particular, it will be important to show that extra resources and effort will be put into reducing the risk of fire, and how this will reduce deaths, injuries and damage. You should do so without implying that what the fire service had previously been doing was wrong.

The time that the FSEC review will take is a material feature of the process and you ought to make the timetable clear at the start if the credibility of the FSEC review is not to be undermined.

4.2 Using Plain English

The level and detail of explanation to staff, stakeholders and public and the extent to which it is necessary for them to understand it, needs careful consideration. You should understand that levels of literacy vary greatly within the population and your communications should take account of this. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) has studied levels of literacy in Britain and details of the ONS report are at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1314&More=Y>

One way of helping people to understand what you are trying to tell them is to adopt the principles of the Plain English Campaign. You can find details on their website at <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>. They define plain English as "something that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. Plain English takes into account design and layout as well as language." Their website contains some free guides to writing plain English and information of training courses and other services that they offer.

4.3 The Content of Early Communications Materials.

Your early materials will contain information on the background to the FSEC review.

A number of brigades piloted the risk assessment 'toolkits' and the technique for response planning described in the introduction during the Pathfinder trials. One barrier encountered

by those involved in Pathfinder was the difficulty of communicating a complex and evolving programme in an understandable way. Since fire-cover is an emotive issue, people will be initially suspicious of any changes. Pathfinder brigades also found it difficult to explain the complexities of the process, particularly the concept of strategic cover and the way in which risk is calculated, in a simple manner.

We are confident that the difficulties suggested in the previous paragraph can be overcome. In particular, we have noted that increasing familiarity with Pathfinder led to greater acceptance of the process and this is likely to continue as the FSEC review is implemented. Greater understanding of how and why the FSEC review is being done will reduce initial suspicions and misunderstandings.

The outcome of the Pathfinder trials has been reported in a document "The Fire Cover Review: Report of the Task Group to the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils, October 2002". The following section summarises the findings of that report. You can use it as a source for your own materials, but should consult the original document also. Later in this report, in Appendix A, we show some examples of how to prepare material that communicates this information in a simple way.

4.4 The Background to the FSEC Review

The FSEC Review was developed in response to the Audit Commission's report 'In the Line of Fire' 1995. That recommended that new standards of cover should be developed taking into account the risk to life, the impact of fire safety initiatives and the need for a more flexible response. It also recommended that fire cover should be more closely related to risk and that the emphasis should shift from firefighting to fire prevention. It argued that fire prevention work would reduce the need for firefighting. Within this framework, the categorisation of risk is based on empirical evidence and response standards are reassessed.

The aim of the review was to maintain or enhance the protection of the public without compromising the safety of firefighters and to address the risk to life more directly, all in a cost-effective way. The new approach combines three strands: risk assessment and response requirements, a resource allocation strategy and the allocation of resources. The costs and benefits of the result of the analysis are calculated.

4.4.1 Risk Analysis

First comes a detailed assessment of the risks to life, property, the environment and the nation's heritage. This is based on historical records wherever possible and takes into account the impact of fire safety measures. It also incorporates a definition of the response requirements derived from an identification of the tasks that need to be undertaken when dealing with an incident and the requirement for personnel and equipment.

Risks are assessed for the smallest areas for which Census data are available. These are known as enumeration districts (EDs). For each ED, the risk is assessed by reference to the following types of incident:

- **Dwellings**
Fires in typical houses
- **Other Buildings**
fires in larger buildings such as offices, shops and hospitals

- **Special Services**

non-fire incidents such as road traffic accidents and chemical spillages, and

- **Major Incidents**

major incidents such as rail or aircraft crashes

For each type of incident, relevant combinations of the following types of risk are assessed:

- **Individual risk to life**

the risk to individuals from fire or other incidents

- **Societal risk to life**

the risk of multiple casualties resulting from a single incident

- **Firefighter risk**

the risk to firefighters while carrying out their operational duties

- **Property loss**

this can take a number of forms:

- **Replacement cost**

the direct losses due to the fire

- **Environmental damage**

the risk of damage to the environment caused by fire

- **Heritage loss**

the risk of damage to the national heritage caused by fire

- **Business interruption**

the risk of loss to business caused by fire, and

- **Social loss**

the risk of loss to the local community

Modern buildings with in-built fire safety systems are safer than older buildings without them and this fact is taken into account when assessing risk. The level of each risk will vary by the time of day and this is taken account of by assessing risk in each four-hour interval. This enables brigades to target cover to those places and times where and when it is most needed.

4.4.2 Resource Requirements

A planning scenario is defined for each type of incident such that it represents a reasonable basis for planning routine emergency cover. Each scenario contains a timed task-by-task analysis of what has to be done by the brigade at that type of incident. This leads to the identification of the resources that are required to complete those tasks. Matching this

requirement to the inventories of vehicles determines how the resources are delivered to the incident. It is not necessary for all the resources to be delivered to the incident at the same time (i.e. a phased arrival). In the case of a phased arrival, it has to be shown what tasks can be completed with the resources available and which have to wait for the arrival of other resources.

4.4.3 Resource Allocation

The strategy for allocating resources is based around the Health and Safety Executive's Tolerability of Risk framework. It defines three regions of risk:

- intolerable risk which, in the industrial situation, must be reduced regardless of cost;
- tolerable risk, which should be reduced if possible without incurring disproportionate cost; and
- negligible risk, which does not need to be reduced further but which should be monitored to ensure that it remains negligible.

In the public sector, intolerable risks can only be reduced where they are directly controlled from the centre. A Local Authority does not have the option of closing all housing in a large rural area, because the fire statistics show them to be above the criterion for intolerable risk. They can only rely on persuasion by means of fire safety campaigns to reduce the risk, together with an enhanced response where it can be afforded.

The rules for allocating resources are as follows:

- resources are placed to reduce risk to levels which are As Low As Reasonably Practicable (ALARP), taking into account the costs and benefits, but
- where there are regions of intolerable risk, the benefits to be achieved in those areas can be enhanced proportionately.

4.4.4 Cost Benefit Analysis

The cost of emergency cover includes:

- crew costs, taking into account crew types (e.g. whole-time or retained and ridership and shift factors);
- vehicle costs, taking into account vehicle types, equipment, capital and running costs; and
- station costs, taking into account size, facilities, capital and running costs.

Quantitative benefits include the lives likely to be saved and the value of damage prevented to property, heritage, environment, business and society. In intolerable risk areas, the number of lives saved can be artificially enhanced, to increase the probability that additional resources will be justifiable in these areas. Other benefits are qualitative in nature and include public perception and operational practicality.

4.4.5 The Benefits of FSEC

Although the existing standards of fire cover are easy to understand they are inflexible and too prescriptive. The FSEC approach is more complicated but gives much greater flexibility to fire authorities when they are planning how best to protect the lives of members of the public and firefighters and minimise damage.

Actual risks will be assessed based on evidence and taking into account fire safety measures, unlike the present system where risk is based largely on property type. Furthermore, it will be possible to incorporate many different risks within the system.

At present, the response to an incident in an area is determined solely by the risk category of that area. Under FSEC it will be possible to send different responses to different incidents in the same area depending on the type of incident it is.

FSEC will assist fire safety initiatives by enabling analysis of where such initiatives will be most effective.

Statutory fire safety will be similarly helped as inspections can be targeted on higher risk locations.

The FSEC process, being evidence based, is easily audited, which will bring benefits to brigades, inspectors, local authorities, representative bodies and courts of law.

4.4.6 Summary

In summary, although the FSEC methodology is more complex than the existing standards, it provides:

- an evidence-based method for assessing and responding to actual risk;
- a logical and flexible method for response planning, which assesses the actual resources required at a given incident, taking into account firefighter safety; and
- an auditable process where the consequences of operational decisions can be quantified.

4.5 Some Examples of Materials

Section 4.4 covers the sort of information that you should include in your communications materials. However, it needs to be tailored to different audiences. In Appendix A we give some examples of how you might do that.

Obviously, there are many different ways to communicate with the public and you will probably use a combination of them. We describe different channels of communication in Chapter 5. However, irrespective of the communications channels that you use the messages you convey must be the same. People should not hear different things at a public meeting to that which they read in leaflets or hear from a firefighter engaged in community fire safety work. Naturally, the level of detail you can cover will depend on the channel of communication that you are using. At a public meeting you may have an hour to develop your case, whereas the amount of information contained in a leaflet will be much more limited and you will need to direct readers to a more comprehensive source such as a website or helpline.

The type of information set out in the second example in the Appendix shows what topics you will need to cover in any communication. It is the bare bones of a presentation but most of the content of a leaflet. It shows what you should brief staff to say to people that they meet in the course of their work.

4.6 Using the Web

One way of communicating with people is through a website. It cannot be the only or even the main means of communication, as many people do not have internet access. However, it will be useful to develop a website that informs the public about the review but also about the communications and consultations opportunities available to them.

Web sites are likely to play a major role as channels of communication, given their growing acceptability and accessibility, even if some people access them only via local libraries etc. The government is committed to enabling electronic communication between citizens and all government departments, government agencies and local government to take place electronically, within the next few years. The Office of the e-Envoy (OeE), located in the Cabinet Office, is leading the drive to get the UK online. On its website www.e-envoy.gov.uk it states its purpose is to ensure that the country, its citizens and its businesses derive maximum benefit from the knowledge economy. To support this aim, the Office has three core objectives:

- to develop the UK as a world leader for electronic business;
- to make all government services available electronically by 2005 with key services achieving high levels of use; and
- to ensure that everyone who wants it has access to the internet by 2005.

A website can be very small, consisting of a home page and a short menu of:

- why change is needed and how it will affect local residents and businesses;
- how to learn more/forthcoming events;
- how to give your views; and
- general advice on fire prevention.

At the appropriate time, it would be helpful to establish a central website containing material such as text, photographs and illustrations, which could be downloaded by individual brigades wishing to create their own website. The central website would also include instructions on how to develop a small web site. Do not forget that you are trying to engage in a dialogue, i.e. consulting the public rather than merely informing them. Consequently, there should be the opportunity for people to email comments on any new proposals for fire service cover. All material could also be included in CD-ROM format for ease of use.

The website should inform the public about the review but also about the communications and consultations opportunities available to them.

It will be necessary to identify the resources needed to develop and maintain the website early in the process. It needs to be welcoming, modern-looking, interesting and always up to date. If you do not keep it updated, it will convey the wrong message that the FSEC is not an ongoing process and is of little importance to the brigade. So you should earmark resources for continuing maintenance of the site. You will also need resources to make certain that the website is publicised and marketed.

Do not forget the importance of keeping staff fully informed. Your website is one way of doing this and you should make it available on your brigade's intranet, if it has one.

5 Communicating and Consulting

5.1 Introduction

Your brigade will begin a dialogue at the earliest stage with some audiences, the Fire Authority and the unions for example. This will happen while you are developing your plan. This chapter is about turning the plan into action. It describes:

- **Internal Communications: Talking to The Staff**
How to keep staff fully informed and take account of their views
- **Communicating with Other Stakeholders**
Addressing organisations in the political, business, voluntary and other sectors
- **Communicating With the Wider Public: Media Campaigns**
Getting your message across to local residents
- **A Dialogue with the Public**
Effective public consultation
- **Evaluation**
Reviewing what you have done in order to improve it

You should communicate at an early stage with some audiences. They are as follows:

- inform the unions;
- inform the staff; and
- inform other local stakeholders, in order;
 - LA officers;
 - local politicians/MPs/MEPs;
 - other emergency services/neighbouring brigades/partner organisations; and
 - other public bodies e.g. GO, RDA.

The unions will have already been informed that the brigade is undertaking an FSEC review (see Chapter 3). Endorsement of the process by unions will strongly help to bring staff on board and in turn the various wider stakeholder audiences.

Other audiences will not need proactive communications so early in the process. Of course, you should respond honestly and openly to any questions that may arise from these groups, whenever those questions arise. For this reason, you should have a plan in place early in the process to enable you to deal with enquiries. However, the time for sending information to them will come later in the process when there is more to report than simply that a study is underway. These audiences include:

- the business community;
- other local organisations e.g. heritage, environment;
- local voluntary organisations; and
- the public.

'Connecting with Communities' has many examples of good practice in the public sector. You may find that your own local authority has adopted some of these guidelines and a good starting point would be their website.

5.2 Internal Communications: Talking To The Staff

Good internal communication will be a critical success factor in the FSEC review. We have already explained that the internal audiences will include managers, staff and unions and the first report on this work described their views. You need to set your objectives in the light of this, bearing in mind that different brigades will be starting from different positions. Your objectives though are likely to be similar to those set for communicating with other stakeholders.

You may have to overcome some initial suspicions even among management. Pathfinder managers in our research were generally supportive of the FSEC review process. However, some described how their initial reaction had been one of distrust as to the motives of the process and questioning the necessity and purpose of it. As their knowledge and understanding had increased, most claimed to have found the process *"a revelation"* to them. *"The initial reaction was, and I think this is the initial reaction that I was trying to get over, one of initial Fire Fighters saying there ain't nothing wrong with what we've got. But when you look at it and you look at it in depth, there is a lot wrong with what we've currently got"*. The more they learnt, the more they supported changes in emphasis on risk assessment.

It is vital to get the acceptance of staff before starting to talk to other audiences such as the public and other stakeholders. Without the support of staff, it will be very difficult to achieve the support of the public and other stakeholders. The public, in particular, has an enormous trust in fire fighters. Therefore, if the fire fighters can sell the process to these audiences on the basis that it would improve the service, then they would believe it. Conversely, if staff say that management is imposing changes, and these changes are detrimental to the service, then there would be public opposition to change. The FBU and other unions are an important audience as they have a very great influence on staff attitudes. Unions will have been informed that the brigade is implementing the FSEC process at the very start.

In our research, we found that the quality and effectiveness of internal communications varied from brigade to brigade. In many, managers felt that the growing pressures that they were experiencing were increasingly distancing them from front-line staff. The personal touch was disappearing because they had less time to visit the stations, and this was creating a void between staff and management. Managers believe front-line staff 'misunderstand' the roles of managers, and the responsibilities and pressures they have. These perceptions were mirrored in the attitudes of staff and their union representatives who also reported difficulties with communication and mistrust of the motives of managers.

It was noticeable in many of the other stakeholder focus groups that internal communications were viewed as a problem within the fire service. HMFSI has noted instances of poor communications in some brigades but has also found many examples of good internal communications. Some brigades had overcome previous communications problems and are now communicating very effectively with staff. Look for ways to disseminate good practice in this area. Within each brigade, there will be some people who have good interpersonal and communications skills. You could consider an event such as a seminar for the FSEC team at which these people could share their experience and skills.

Union representatives felt that improved communication would be a vital part in explaining the process to staff and gaining their support. When we did the research, representatives were distrustful of management and they linked this to problems in communication. Passing information down the hierarchy is ineffective and likely to lead to a lack of consistent messages. You should use more direct forms of internal communication.

The managers that we interviewed also believed that the staff would be suspicious of the process, and see it as threatening a reduction in jobs and closure of fire stations. Discussions with staff and union representatives partly confirmed this. Those brigades that had embarked on early discussions with staff found that it helped to ensure co-operation, and this might be a model that others could adopt.

Pathfinder managers considered that the active involvement of staff in the FSEC review was important and that this involvement will help with communicating it within the brigade. They felt that staff should be made aware that the information they collect is being used to improve fire protection. As one said, *"I think what the profession is concerned about are the things that aren't expressed right at the beginning, so say what is it for, what is the purpose of risk based standards of fire cover, what are the objectives we expect to see achieved for it, what are the outcomes"*.

The staff that we interviewed in our research also generally supported the changes in emphasis on risk assessment and particularly its greater emphasis on life risk, but the operation and potential impact of the process was unclear to them. One told us, *"I think the most important thing in a firefighter's job is saving life, and up until now our priority is into property so it's time the emphasis changed, focus on what we are there to do."*

You will want to make the internal audiences aware of the review, provide factual and readily understood information about it, reduce misunderstanding, allay people's legitimate concerns and create a favourable climate of opinion. You will need to set out actions, a timetable, resource requirements and responsibilities for achieving these objectives. It will take time but in the process you will also be improving the internal communications within your brigade. The purpose of the toolbox is not to improve the communication skills of fire brigades but that could be a spin-off benefit.

You should be prepared to revise and update your plan as the process proceeds. Circumstances may change causing you to re-examine your objectives. It is important that managers keep staff fully informed throughout the process (not just at the start) to avoid the proliferation of potentially damaging rumours and speculation.

Fire service staff would like to be provided with as much relevant information as possible, although there is a need to avoid an 'information overload' making it difficult to identify what is relevant. Although there are many communication channels that exist, it is very important that the communication with staff should be a two-way process, enabling them to raise issues of concern and put their views direct to senior management. Fundamentally, staff would like the reappearance of the 'human touch' into the communication - they want information from an individual, not a piece of paper, a video or an email.

You should consider a range of tools for internal communication. There are already established means of communication within the fire service that could be used to promote FSEC, and these should be used in support of face to face discussions, as could media such as a video about the changes. Most brigades have these communications tools in place to a greater or lesser extent already. They include team briefings, staff and managers' workshops, newsletters, posters, emails, videos etc. Above all, the essence of good internal communication is listening. It is not enough just to keep staff informed. Many staff are concerned about the impact the review will have on their jobs and enabling them to voice these concerns will be a vital part of the internal communications process. You may like to use volume one of this report to show that we have qualitative research evidence of staff and managers' attitudes and that in essence these are not greatly different to those of other stakeholders.

However, our findings do highlight the need to do more than just pass the message about FSEC down the usual channels of communication. Union representatives that we interviewed felt that there were too many tiers of management for information to filter through before it reached the workforce. *"I think if you have too many people trying to put the message across you end up with a lack of consistency. You know its a question of the person at the top tells the person directly beneath him what he wants said and they pass it on to a group of people who go to fire stations, I think often you will not get a consistent message across, which is one advantage of videos I guess at least everybody is getting the same message".*

Although face to face meetings will be important they will be time consuming and you should consider the resources required.

From our discussions with Pathfinder teams, it would seem that a series of presentations could be more helpful than a single two-hour session. Many found that two hours were 'barely enough' to cover the issues and answer questions. It might be more practical to set up a brief face-to-face introduction consisting of a broad overview and to take general questions. Managers could return at a later date to present local proposals in detail. Although staff want 'the human touch', a video could still prove helpful as general background (though this is not an easy/cost-effective medium to adapt to local circumstances).

Even if individual firefighters are not keen on using the internet (and we found that many are not), a web-style presentation complete with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) could be made available on a machine in the premises for staff to view at their leisure. This could include both an email facility and hard copy comments forms to allow people to put their questions/concerns to management.

The communication will require good interpersonal skills and the ability to make people enthusiastic about the review and what it implies for enhancing the service to the community. Some may be reluctant to accept the changes that the review may bring but the more that can be convinced of the benefits the more this will help the communication and consultation with the public and other stakeholders.

The changes that Community Fire Safety and FSEC review will bring to the nature of the firefighters' job will have repercussions for recruitment to the fire service and staff training. The internal communications strategy should show that the brigade is addressing these issues. This adds emphasis to what we said in Chapter 3, namely that staff and unions need to be reassured that the FSEC review will not be simply a cost cutting exercise. The communications strategy should take note of their perceptions and respond to them, but should do so honestly.

In general, support staff had very limited awareness of Pathfinder and felt that it did not have anything to do with them since it is concerned with fire cover and any effect on their

work practices will be small. This is no reason to overlook them when planning an internal communications programme in support of the FSEC review.

5.3 Communicating with Other Stakeholders

At the start of this chapter, we explained that you do not have to inform all stakeholders of the FSEC review at the same time.

Many stakeholders have a much greater technical understanding of the issues than do members of the general public but few have knowledge of how funds and resources are allocated within the fire service. Stakeholders that we interviewed generally felt that the method of risk assessment has to be updated to bring it into line with current conditions. This represents a good starting point for discussion.

Stakeholders who had been involved with the fire service for many years could see how the service had changed over time. They thought the public's expectations of the fire service, and what it could provide, has constantly grown over the years. Many saw the priorities of the fire service already shifting from fighting fires to preventing them. For them, change and development is normal.

Different stakeholders had different concerns. Local Authorities felt that changes in the risk assessment would have a major impact on the council and there were many issues for which they would have to prepare. The council has responsibility for the well-being of the community. It was believed that the more senior members of the council would certainly raise funding concerns. These concerns will have to be addressed.

For organisational stakeholders, change and development is normal and the communications and consultation strategy should reflect this perception of theirs. Many stakeholders will be suspicious at first of the FSEC process, but their suspicions will be different. Some will have to be convinced that any changes will be in order to create a modern service rather than leading to cutbacks. Their experience of new schemes is that they are generally introduced to reduce costs, rather than increase national spending, and therefore there will be scepticism to overcome. These concerns also will have to be addressed. To overcome different suspicions, it will be important that messages should target particular audiences.

Whatever technique is used to promote the FSEC review, some stakeholders would respond well to a customer service model with publicity focusing on the positive aspects, i.e. how will the service be better for being modernised.

While most organisational stakeholders that we interviewed saw leaflets as secondary to other methods, it is impractical to hold briefings for individual businesses, apart from the largest ones. It is also unrealistic to expect most businesses to attend meetings at the local fire station. Presentations could take place via local Chambers of Commerce or the local authority, but websites and CD-ROMs could also be used to communicate the approach, including FAQs and the opportunity to email comments and questions. The employer pack could also contain leaflets for staff noticeboards informing employees of the likely effects of planned changes.

Where possible, send literature by email as well as by post, so enabling businesses to log straight onto the relevant website.

An issue with consulting businesses was that they would always raise the question of money - what is the additional cost to the business? The FSEC review does have implications for businesses, not least their insurance costs, and the fire service will have to communicate extensively with the business community. The risk assessment procedure within businesses could be a way of communicating the FSEC review to the local industries and other local stakeholders. Some stakeholders thought that the risk assessments within

organisations, and associated codes and practices, were much tougher these days. Other positive messages could be taken to the business communities, such as the fire service's continuing role in damage control and maintaining business continuity.

Securing the support of important figures in the community, such as local MPs and local politicians should be a precursor to more widespread public consultation. Local politicians should understand the basic principles of the FSEC review and the potential impact that it will have on their communities. You should brief local government officers before members so that they are able to respond to any questions the latter direct to them.

However, despite the importance of securing local political support, the main communications with the public should come directly from the fire service, the management, chief officers and the brigade staff, and not from the local politicians. Working with the media can also present a challenge and we discuss this in the next section

5.4 Communicating With the Wider Public: Media Campaigns

The research indicated that an acceptable form of announcement for most people would be via a simple leaflet. Door-to-door drops and are often a very wasteful method of communicating with local residents, as so many are discarded as soon as they arrive. Inserts in local newspapers tend to be cheaper and more effective, but again the majority of recipients will discard them. An alternative is to place posters and leaflets in local libraries and leisure centres, council offices, post offices, hospitals, doctors' surgeries, and DIY stores, so that people who are interested will pick them up.

The information that people would want to know from a leaflet would be:

- specific details relating to their new local fire brigade.
- where the nearest fire station would be based;
- what the new response time would be; and
- are there any other cost cutting exercises?

It will not be long before the local print and broadcast media take an interest in what you are doing. You will need to be prepared for this and should try to be proactive rather than reactive. In the research, stakeholders indicated that the media could be difficult to work with both nationally and locally. Because fire cover is such an emotive subject, there is a danger of journalists emphasising the negative. An alternative (though more expensive) is to pay for advertising in local newspapers and (where practical) on local radio. These would supply details of a web site or how to obtain a brochure

When the time comes to give publicity to the outcome of the review you should plan your media campaign to create opportunities for good publicity and try to pre-empt negative stories. Avoid adopting a bunker mentality if there are bad news stories and try to understand why they have come about.

A common scenario is for an organisation to issue a press release about what it regards as a positive development only to be surprised at the negative publicity that it generates. It then claims that the media are hostile and never report fairly. Frequently though the media's response is that they are not deliberately negative but that the original story had little in it to interest their readers or audience. A general statement about a proposal does not carry the human-interest element that their readers want. So a reporter will try to find an individual who is going to be impacted by the changes and report from their point of view. The organisation originating the press release then feels that it has been ambushed. The lesson from this is to try to identify a positive human-interest element from the start.

While it is important to be honest about the changes, rather than attempting to put a 'spin' on the story, any communications/promotional material should emphasise the change to a more flexible system, rather than criticising the old system. This means that any leaflets/advertisements etc. should be upbeat rather than apologetic.

Media campaigns should be seen as part of a wider communications and consultation process. They do not replace the other activities that need to be done, as they are only a one-way channel of communication. They can be useful though to influence public opinion in favour of the brigade's point of view on difficult decisions it needs to make.

The website 'Connecting with Communities' points out that a properly planned media campaign will include:

- key messages;
- key audiences;
- key media;
- milestones;
- communications tools;
- resources;
- targets;
- timescale and deadlines; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

Dealing with the media is a two way process – you do not simply send them information and expect them to use it. You may find that there are many questions that arise from the media, and from members of the public. You should draw up and constantly add to a checklist of model Questions and Answers, according to the experience of your individual brigades. This will encourage uniform response to specific media comment/criticism. You may find it helpful to exchange your checklist with those drawn up in neighbouring brigades.

5.5 A Dialogue with the Public

Many difficulties will affect the communications and consultation process. We have already described how some aspects of fire service culture present barriers to change. Another difficulty, different in its implications but still requiring ingenuity to deal with, is the public's lack of detailed understanding of the fire service combined with an unquestioning faith in the service. We are confident that these difficulties can be overcome.

In general, members of the public have little or no direct experience of the fire service and little knowledge or understanding of the demands on firefighters' time. People trust the fire service to save them in an emergency, and feel safe just knowing that it exists.

People will be strongly interested in community fire safety. It gives them reassurance that they would know what to do to help themselves in the case of a fire; it reduces the risk of fires starting and minimises their impact if they did start. Its role in reducing risk therefore needs to be described as part of the communications strategy.

Hardly anyone knows how the service assesses risk but will accept that the nature and extent of risk has changed over time. If you explain the current practice you will find that

people are ambivalent towards it. Whilst some will feel it is pointless to remove the present system because it has proved to be successful, more are likely to agree that the fire service needs to bring its system of risk assessment up to date. If the process used now to assess risk is given too much emphasis in communications material it might induce some concern if people perceive that residential areas are not nearer the top of the risk assessment in the present system. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored as they will understand and appreciate the changes more if communications start by stating the current position. Information should be coupled with reassurance.

People in our research could see the logic in the approach that will be adopted in the FSEC review and were cautiously in favour of it. The caution was because it was such a complicated process that they could not comment on the technical aspects. The fact that the FSEC review is being done by the fire service itself makes it far more acceptable than would be the case if it were being done by some outside agency. People trust the fire service to decide on future service requirements without reducing services, cutting corners and attempting to reduce public expenditure. For similar reasons, communication will be more acceptable if it comes direct from the fire service, the management, chief officers and the brigade staff, rather than a local politician or MP.

If the brigade makes it clear that they are doing the review themselves and explains that changes are not because of past inadequacies but to bring cover in line with today's needs, then there is a good chance of gaining the public's acceptance. However, the service should commit itself to responding to emergencies without compromising what was there before.

It will be important for the FSEC team to decide whether they are 'informing' the public of the outcome or 'consulting' them on possible changes. The emphasis should be on consultation. Stakeholders will want to voice their opinion before anything is finalised. Many of the stakeholders that we interviewed felt that there should be local meetings to consult people about any possible changes that might take place. These would avoid accusations of secrecy, but experience in many brigades has shown that such meetings are seldom well attended. However, community fire safety has allowed the fire service to communicate successfully with people on a local level, and they could use this relationship to aid the FSEC review.

Because the public trusts the fire service more than anyone else, most felt that they would want to hear about changes from people within the service. Face-to-face contact could be very important in some areas when explaining any changes to the public – if the brigade supported the changes, the public would not see the changes as cutbacks. This might provide another justification for a consultation meeting. In areas where consultation is less necessary, members of the public thought that a simple leaflet, advertising a contact number for additional information, would be the most useful way to inform people of changes.

It is important for effective consultation and communications that any review does not lead to an overall reduction in service. A reallocation of services to higher risk areas will be more acceptable and it will be easier to secure general support for it. Many felt that if any of their local fire resources were relocated to alternative fire stations their safety would be compromised. However well the scheme is explained to the public, there will still be opposition from those who feel the level of cover provided in their area is being reduced.

Both the public and other stakeholders thought that public confidence would have to be rebuilt in areas that had reduced cover. A practical demonstration that the fire service would still arrive on time might be necessary.

5.6 Dialogue Means Consultation

You will also have to tell all the stakeholder groups how they can make representations. Any information you obtain from them will have to be acknowledged, analysed and fed back to the rest of the FSEC review team. You should also feed back the result to the consultees. In this way they will see that they have been listened to. If they feel that they have not, then they will become disenchanted with the process and cease to be engaged in it. Without their engagement, you may find that opposition to proposals is much stronger than it would have been. People will not feel that the brigade has properly considered their views. Consequently, it will be more difficult to make them understand the reasoning behind any proposals that emerge.

Initially you will receive comments on the process, as there will be no outcome to discuss. Your role in consultation in this phase will be fairly passive and reactive. When outcomes are available there will need to be active consultation, which will also involve the wider public.

Brigade-wide consultation will be better than local consultation. At the time of writing, there is a proposal from the ODPM to remove the requirement for local consultation under Section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. Nevertheless, there may be a tendency to consult only those who feel that their cover is being reduced as they will be most vociferous. This would give a distorted picture of public views. It will give a truer picture if all shades of opinion are canvassed and a balance found.

There are many different techniques of consultation ranging from traditional ones such as public meetings and invitations in the press for people to submit their views to newer forms of deliberative technique in which people are asked to assimilate information, think about the issues and provide a considered response. Most have their place, depending on what your objective is. Some are more dubious; e.g. it is difficult to see how "street theatre", a consultation technique sometimes advocated, could contribute to the FSEC review. You will need guidance on what to do, but fortunately there is much excellent guidance available. Sources identified earlier, such as "Viewfinder" from the Cabinet Office contain lists of techniques with descriptions and indicative costs. It is on their website at <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/servlet/DocViewer/docnoredirect=279/Viewfinder%201%2022.10.022.pdf>

5.7 Public Meetings

Because everyone saw the fire service as a trustworthy organisation, many people felt they were more likely to trust alterations to the present fire service if it was done on a local level, with individual brigades making their own decisions. Door-to-door leafleting in conjunction with well-advertised local meetings were considered one of the overall best methods of communication. However it was specified that the meeting would have to be advertised as 'concerning the future of their local fire station' for people to want to attend. Above all, it would be the support of the fire service itself, for example the managers and staff, that would carry conviction.

Public meetings can indeed be a good way of engaging in dialogue with local communities, but there have often been problems of small attendances. If you decide to hold meetings you will need to find a suitable venue and it is always worth visiting it in advance to ensure its suitability. It would be best for the Communications Co-ordinator to take the lead at the meeting but should have members of the FSEC team there to answer any technical points that may arise. Senior management should be there as should frontline staff, possibly those who already have experience in advising people as part of their community fire safety work. It would also be beneficial to have union representation.

Ensure that the meeting is well publicised some time in advance and again nearer the time of the meeting. However, meetings are seldom well attended unless there is an issue that

people perceive as a problem for them. If local meetings are seldom well attended, as several brigades have found in the past, consider combining them with a more upbeat event, such as Open Days, charity car washing days, children's fairs etc. at fire stations. Such events are quite popular with local residents, especially in fine weather. A room/area could be set aside where the public could hear about the proposed changes, ask questions and leave comments.

This could be combined with general sessions educating both adults and children about fire prevention and what to do in the event of a fire, combined with booklets and small promotional gifts such as pens, rulers, sticks of rock and balloons giving the web site address.

Alternatively, many shopping centres allow small-scale exhibitions/promotions to take place at the weekend. Shoppers would be encouraged to pick up leaflets, promotional gifts and possibly a CD.

5.8 One To One Meetings With The Public

There are opportunities to communicate directly with members of the public one-to-one and deal with any points they might wish to raise. This is during community fire safety and statutory fire safety activities. The staff who do this work will have developed good communication skills as a result and are also more likely to be receptive to the concept of the FSEC review. As one manager said to us during our research *"I'd say there are still a large number of firefighters that see fire safety as something that interferes with their job, they still see their prime role as fire fighting"*. Obviously, they are not the ones to choose.

It is worth taking time to train them in the concepts and practice of the FSEC review. They will need support in the transition from their traditional position to that of a more preventative role. You should take account of their concerns. We found that staff did have some concerns about working with the community alongside their existing work:

- They felt that community fire safety should be done outside of what is for most people the working day since during the day few people are at home. *"I mean from a personal point of view, we spend a lot of time during community fire safety, knocking on doors of empty houses during the day, and the early evening has been the only time to catch people"*. Staff also were concerned that cold calling may irritate people and therefore prearranged visits would be needed;
- Staff have some personal safety concerns since in the past there have been attacks on fire-fighters in certain areas and consequently fire-fighters are reluctant to go into these areas for community safety work;
- Staff would require the backing of unions and insurance to undertake work in the community and wanted their conditions of service made clear.

5.9 Evaluation

It is not sufficient simply to carry out the communications and consultation exercise as part of the FSEC review, without reflecting on the process and attempting to evaluate it. From time to time, you will need to evaluate your strategy and what you are doing so that you can be sure that it is helping you to achieve your communications objectives. Set out the progress you have made with each of the stakeholder groups that you have identified and determine whether you are on course or whether you need to alter your approach, increase the effort or take some other action.

Your communications and consultation plan is a working document. If circumstances change you need to change your plan. To keep it up to date you should monitor it regularly, at least once a quarter and modify it as necessary.

A report by the Local Government Association, "Communications In Local Government: A Survey Of Local Authorities. Research Briefing Nine, July 2001", gives an interesting assessment of the communications service in local authorities. It explains that the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA) has developed benchmarks for communications to use in the Local Government Improvement Programme peer reviews. Taken from the report, they are as follows. While they are not directly relevant to the FSEC review communications programme, you might find it helpful to consider them when evaluating your own performance.

5.9.1 IdeA Communications Benchmarks

Level 1

Meets statutory requirements for disseminating information. Complies with Audit Commission performance criteria for communicating with the public by phone and letter and dealing with complaints. Produces a comprehensive range of clearly written and up to date information on specific service areas, activities and functions which are translated into other languages where appropriate and available in Braille and on tape on request.

Level 2

Communication seen as ensuring the public is better informed and is able to gain an understanding of the council's policies and priorities. Proactive dissemination of information in response to perceived needs. Information about councillors and council performance is readily available. A wide range of media used for communication including ICT. Has arrangements for communication with partners and stakeholders on major areas of policy or significant change e.g. budgets, new legislation. Has produced guidance for staff and members on how to communicate and involve the public. Has designated specific responsibilities to members and officers for communicating on particular issues. Has access to specialist communications expertise and has a strategy for engaging with local press and radio. Has made some attempts to address inequalities in mechanisms used.

Level 3

Communication is a strategic issue. Timeliness, targeting and access are all considered and positive steps taken to engage local people, with special efforts to communicate with 'hard to reach' groups e.g. young people, ethnic minorities. Communication is two-way, enabling the authority to listen and learn. The opportunities presented by ICT have been thought through and are contained within the strategy. All communication is evaluated against the objectives set. The leadership of the authority and senior officers set the communications style and members are seen as good communicators. Training in communications and presentation skills is readily available and participation by members and officers is actively encouraged.

6 Conclusion

The task of communication and consultation in the FSEC review process will be difficult but should not be daunting. The difficulties arise because there will be many different audiences with different levels of understanding and different areas of concern. The FSEC review methodology is complex and the process will take a long time. It is natural that staff, public and other stakeholders will be wary until they can see the outcome of the process.

On the other hand, our research has shown that these difficulties can be overcome with a well designed, well implemented and well resourced communication and consultation plan. The support for the FSEC review process that we found amongst those who had gained an understanding of it through Pathfinder indicates that there are many positive messages to communicate. Stakeholders, including members of the public and staff, will be more inclined to support the process if they understand how risks to life and property and other risks are being explicitly addressed.

It is possible to convey the message that lives can be saved through various forms of preventative work. If people can be convinced that extra resources and effort will be put into reducing the risk of fire, then they can be made to realise that this will reduce deaths, injuries and damage.

The fire service has the support of those it serves. It is right to be proud of what it does and that it is admired and valued by the public. Communicating the positive message of the FSEC review will ensure that it continues to receive the trust of the communities it serves.

Appendix A

In Chapter 4 we summarised the report on the outcome of the Pathfinder trials, "The Fire Cover Review: Report of the Task Group to the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils, October 2002". We drew your attention to this report so that you can use it as a source for your own materials. In this Appendix, we show some examples of how to prepare material that communicates this information in a simple way.

Below we give a possible outline of a document that you could use in different ways early in the process of informing people about the review. The first example is directed towards staff. You can edit it for your own circumstances and for different audiences. We have shown some ways in which you might modify it for the public and for local politicians.

An Example of Leaflet Content for Staff

Here is a suggestion for a leaflet giving background information about the process and why and how the brigade is undertaking the FSEC review. The suggested audience is Fire Service Staff at fire stations. You could adopt a similar approach for staff not in the front line, but tailor it more to their circumstances. For example, some may have operational duties e.g. control room staff, others may have more administrative duties e.g. finance, HR, Best Value etc. Explain how and why the FSEC is relevant to them in their jobs.

What is the FSEC review and why do we need it?

The current system of assessing risk dates from the Fire Services Act 1947. It is simple and has worked well for many years.

But it is no longer appropriate in today's conditions. Why?

The current system concentrates on protecting the public from the hazard of a fire that has already occurred. It does not explicitly deal with risk to life, nor does it deal explicitly with special services. There is no way of dealing with the risk to firefighters.

Modern buildings such as offices are designed to reduce risk. Statutory fire safety measures do this too. So do Community Fire safety measures. It is better to save lives by preventing fires from starting than simply respond when they do.

Most deaths in fires now take place in people's homes, so it is important to find ways of making the public more aware of fire safety precautions and how to get out in the event of a fire.

We will never eliminate fires and other risks. There will always be a need to respond to emergencies quickly and effectively. But we can save lives and protect property in different ways.

It is time to update the process of assessing risk.

When we have identified the pattern of risks then we can plan how best to deal with them.

This may mean some changes but cuts are not expected – just the way cover is allocated to different areas, tasks and risks. Any change is a long way off because the process will take time. Some areas will receive increased cover; some may have more than they need at the moment in relation to their risk and resources can be redirected to where the need is greatest.

Unions are being kept informed and consulted. They support the new process for assessing risk and the emergency cover needed to meet those risks. No change will happen without full negotiation.

How is the review to be carried out?

Fire Brigade staff will undertake most of the initial work, inspecting buildings and assessing the risks. That is the start of the process.

Staff then feed this information back to the team working on the process in each brigade.

These teams will combine this information with data from other sources, such as:

- Types of hazard
- Types of vehicle available
- Vehicle location
- Travel time to incident
- Vehicle running costs and salary costs
- Cost in lives and cost of damage
- National statistics on calls, false alarms and vehicle road speeds at different times of day
- Updated Census information

The team (*name them and where they are based and how to contact them*) will use their years of experience as firefighters along with some specially designed mapping software to bring this vast quantity of information together to determine resource requirements.

The team will also keep staff and unions informed as the work proceeds. The work is expected to take *x* years. There will be opportunities to give your views throughout the process.

Interested parties such as local councillors, health authorities, the police, community groups, residents' associations, the media and the public will be informed and consulted at appropriate times.

The team will develop their proposals. The Chief will review them and they will be discussed with the unions and the Fire Authority. There will be more consultation. When everything is agreed the approval of the Secretary of State will be sought.

The process doesn't end there because circumstances change. Risks don't stay the same for ever. New buildings and developments will have to be provided for.

FSEC affects everybody and everybody will be involved. It moves the Fire Service forward from the process developed just after the Second World War to something that is relevant to the 21st century.

We are proud of our service and we are admired and valued by the public. Through FSEC we shall continue to receive the trust of the communities we serve.

An Example Of Leaflet Content For The Public/Media

Similar background information, as it may be sent to the press or distributed to the public in the form of a leaflet could be:

Modernising the Fire Service to Save More Lives

Page 1 What is the FSEC review and why do we need it?

Last year, x people died in fires in the UK.

The Government's review of Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) is designed to save more lives by improving the way the Fire Brigade assesses fire risk and responds to incidents. At the moment, fire fighters have to use a system that dates from just after the Second World War. The Fire Services Act 1947 allocates categories of risk according to the predominant types of building located within each area and allocates responses accordingly.

- 'A' risk areas contain large, well-occupied buildings such as offices, factories and shops.
- 'B' risk areas contain lower concentrations of the same kinds of buildings, along with some multi-storey residential properties.
- 'C' risk areas tend to be residential.
- 'D' risk applies to other, largely rural areas.

The system is simple and has worked well for over fifty years, but it is no longer appropriate in today's conditions. Why?

The current system concentrates on protecting the public from the hazard of a fire that has already occurred. Because it is based on buildings rather than people, it does not explicitly deal with risk to life, nor does it deal explicitly with special services, such as rescuing trapped people or dealing with chemical spillages. There is no way of dealing with the risk to firefighters.

Most of us would agree that it is better to save lives by preventing fires from starting than simply asking the Fire Brigade to respond when they do. Modern buildings such as offices are subject to a range of statutory fire safety measures designed to reduce risk.

Most deaths in fires now take place in people's homes, so it is important to concentrate everyone's efforts on being more aware of fire safety precautions and how to ensure we can get out quickly in the event of a fire.

We will never eliminate fires and other risks. There will always be a need for fire fighters to respond to emergencies quickly and effectively. But we can all save lives and protect property in different ways.

Before the process of responding to fires can be updated, Fire Brigades have to identify the pattern of risks and then plan how best to deal with them.

The new process is supported by fire brigade management, staff and unions and no change will happen without full negotiation with staff and without full consultation with the public.

Page 2 How is the review to be carried out?

Staff at your local Fire Brigade will undertake most of the initial work, inspecting buildings and assessing the risks. They will not have the resources to visit every building, but we estimate they will be able to inspect about one in ten.

Teams working on the process in each brigade headquarters will combine this information with data from other sources, such as

- Incident data for the last three years
- Fires by building type
- Types of vehicle available
- Vehicle location
- Travel time to incident
- Vehicle running costs and salary costs
- Cost in lives and cost of damage
- National statistics on calls, false alarms and vehicle road speeds at different times of day

The team (*name them and where they are based and how to contact them*) will use their years of experience as firefighters along with some specially designed mapping software to bring this vast quantity of information together to determine what resources are needed and where.

The team will also keep staff, unions, the public, local businesses and other interested parties informed as the work proceeds. There will be opportunities to give your views throughout the process. When everything is agreed the approval of the Secretary of State will be sought.

The process doesn't end there because circumstances change. Risks don't stay the same for ever. New buildings and developments will have to be provided for.

FSEC affects everybody and everybody will be involved. It moves the Fire Service forward from the process developed for a very different era to something that is relevant to the 21st century.

The Fire Brigade is justly proud of the service it offers. Through FSEC it is confident of continuing to receive the trust of the communities served by its fire fighters.

Page 3 Isn't This Just Another Way of Closing Fire Stations?

This review may mean some changes but cuts are not expected – just the way cover is allocated to different areas, tasks and risks. Some areas will receive increased cover; some may have more than they need at the moment in relation to their risk and resources can be redirected to where the need is greatest. Any change is at least a couple of years away because the review will take time.

[possibly show a map]

Page 4 What Can I do to Help?

Text about fire safety and details of how to get further information.

How Can I put my Views?

Open Days will be held at the *[NAME]* Fire Station on *[DATE]* And *[DATE]*

We will be conducting group discussions with members of the public and local businessmen selected at random, but you can also write to *[NAME]* or log onto our website at *[URL]*

An Example Of Material For Local Politicians

For local politicians, the information you need to give them is similar to that which members of the public require. However, local politicians do have some special concerns that you need to address. You should make sure that you keep the officers of the local authorities fully briefed on the FSEC process, as it is likely that Members will turn to officers for advice in the first instance.

Audience: Local Politicians.

Some content similar to topics in communications to staff but serving as an introduction to local politicians to inform them that the process is taking place. They need to know that it will be a lengthy exercise and that this is just preliminary information. They are busy people and have many documents that need their attention so you should keep your note brief. Those politicians who are most closely involved in decisions over fire cover will obviously have much more material supplied to them during the process; the others need a general overview.

As well as saying that cuts are not expected you should say that neither is it expected that the cost of providing fire cover will rise substantially.

Stress it involves a technical exercise taking a serious look at the risks in the area and how best to meet them. Emphasise that it covers the area as a whole, not just a part of it – it is designed to serve the whole community. Businesses and other special interest groups will have their needs taken into account.

Say that local politicians will be kept informed and be able to contribute to the process. Give them signposts – tell them what the stages are and when they can next expect to hear from you.

Although it involves a technical exercise, there is more to it than that. There will be considerable consultation with all stakeholders and the public. This will be fed back to the decision-makers on the Fire Authority.