



Community fire safety innovation fund:
process issues

Fire Research Series 24/2008



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The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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1. Introduction

The fire and rescue service (FRS) has long been acknowledged as an effective public service and in recent years has been looking beyond its traditional fire suppression role to making a wider contribution to the safety of the community. FRSs are involved in Home Fire Risk Checks (HFRCs) and smoke alarm (or other fire safety equipment) installation campaigns for the vulnerable and the wider community and other innovative initiatives designed to make the community safer from fire.

Earlier research suggested that those most likely to suffer a fire are those living in socially deprived areas and in low-income families. In response to this, and to encourage further activity in the area of Community Fire Safety (CFS), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, now Communities and Local Government) established the Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund.

Funds were allocated initially in 2003/4 to the 11 fire and rescue authority (FRA) areas with the worst death rates per 100,000 population (more than a 25 per cent above the national average or close to that level) (tranche 1).

In 2004/5 funding was extended to an additional seven areas with above average death rates (tranche 2) and a further eight areas in 2005/6 (tranche 3), resulting in a total of 26 FRAs being allocated funding.

The funding given to the tranche 1 was allocated over three years, tranche 2 over two years and the tranche 3 for one year only. The size and amount of funding allocated to each FRS across England varied. The variation in the level of funding can be seen when examining the following two areas – for example, London were allocated £380,000 per annum, conversely the Isle of Wight were given £9,000 per annum.

The aims of the Innovation Fund were to:

- contribute to the reduction of fires and fire-related casualties
- reduce the level of inequality in the incidence of fires and fire-related casualties; *and*
- identify local CFS approaches that could be rolled out nationally.

An evaluation of the first two years of the Innovation Fund was commissioned by the ODPM in 2005. The **objectives** of the evaluation were:

1. To carry out an evaluation concentrating on implementation and delivery issues.
2. To assess the impact of the Innovation Fund on the number and type of fire incidents and to measure the *additional* impact of the funded projects on incidents.

3. To determine the impact of the Innovation Fund on the level of inequality in the incidence of fire and fire-related casualties.
4. To determine the costs and benefits of different approaches and to compare different approaches adopted.

This summary focuses on the process evaluation, which aimed to address objective 1 – implementation and delivery issues. The statistical analysis did not detect any significant effect on the number of fires and/or fire-related casualties and is therefore covered only briefly below. As no effect was detected whilst carrying out the statistical analysis, the cost benefit analysis could not be carried out.

2. Research methods

The **process evaluation** involved the collection of information from three sources:

- workshops with members of FRSs from all three tranches
- interviews with twelve FRSs in the first two tranches
- case studies of five FRSs in the first two tranches.

A summary of the 12 FRSs included in the interviews, with some information about their characteristics, is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Names and Characteristics of FRSs included in the Evaluation				
Fire and Rescue Service	Tranche	Urban/Rural nature	Funds Allocated	Audit Commission Rating
West Midlands	1	Urban	L	Good
West Yorkshire	1	Urban	L	Good
Lancashire	1	Urban/Rural	L	Fair
South Yorkshire	1	Urban/Rural	M	Weak
Cheshire	1	Urban/Rural	M	Good
Humberside	1	Urban/Rural	M	Fair
Northumberland	1	Rural	S	Fair
London	2	Urban	L	Good
Royal Berkshire	2	Urban/Rural	M	Good
Suffolk	2	Rural	S	Fair
Durham & Darlington	2	Urban/Rural	S	Fair
Cornwall	2	Rural	S	Fair

L = Large (£274,818 to £759,616)

M = Medium (£84,572 to £245,898)

S = Small (£52,832 to £70,738)

The **statistical analysis** utilised several datasets:

- FDR1 data (data collected by FRSs following an incident) on all fires, fatal casualties and non-fatal casualties obtained from the ODPM.
- Population data for each local authority from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) website. This was used to calculate casualty rates.
- Data on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 from the ODPM website. This was used as a measure of deprivation.

The 12 FRSs included in the process evaluation formed the 'intervention group'. A comparison group was chosen based primarily on the FRS with the three year average fire casualty rate closest to that for each intervention area prior to the Innovation Funding. A few other methods for choosing comparison areas were used and the analysis re-run to ensure accuracy. The three main outcome measures were fire casualty rates, accidental fire casualty rates and accidental fire rates.

3. Results

FRSs varied in their approaches to the use of Innovation Funding. **Table 2** shows that around half of the FRSs in the sample chose to concentrate on a limited number of initiatives, while others spread resources over a variety of initiatives, relying on funding from other budgets or partners.

Table 2: Number of Interventions Funded by 12 FRSs			
Fire and Rescue Service	Tranche	Funds Allocated	No. of Programmes Funded
West Midlands	1	L	29
West Yorkshire	1	L	11
Lancashire	1	L	13
South Yorkshire	1	M	3
Cheshire	1	M	2
Humberside	1	M	2
Northumberland	1	S	10
London	2	L	7
Royal Berkshire	2	M	5
Suffolk	2	S	11
Durham & Darlington	2	S	2
Cornwall	2	S	5
TOTAL			100

L = Large (€274,818 to €759,616)

M = Medium (€84,572 to €245,898)

S = Small (€52,832 to €70,738)

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the type of interventions across each of the 12 FRSs. The majority of funding was spent on interventions or programmes aimed at children and young people as well as programmes targeted at youth and at-risk youth. Some examples of these included Young Firefighters or firesetter intervention strategies. Many FRSs had used the funding to support work around Home Fire Risk Checks, and some FRSs had entered partnerships with other agencies to provide a more comprehensive home safety assessment that covered areas such as security, energy use and trip hazards.

Table 3: Intervention type		
Intervention theme	Intervention type	Number
Capacity building, infrastructure and organisational change	Additional staff/Community Advocates	8
	New ways to generate Home Fire Risk Check referrals	5
	Community meeting spaces	4
	Partnership working	4
	Community outreach/ Outreach vehicles	4
	Free phone number	3
	Data/mapping	3
	Funding for local initiatives	1
Total no. of interventions relating to capacity building, etc		32
Education, training and publicity	Education	17
	Youth programmes including intense course or counselling	17
	Advertisements/publicity	9
Total no. of interventions relating to education, training and publicity		43
Environmental modification, Removal of fuel	Comprehensive home safety assessment	10
	Home Fire Risk Checks	6
	Product replacement	4
	Sprinklers	2
	Rubbish removal to reduce arson	2
	Deaf alarms	1
Total no. of interventions relating to environmental modifications, etc		25

4. Community consultation

Community consultation was important in setting up schemes. It aided development by identifying the local community's needs and highlighted which programmes to include. Programmes such as HayleSafe in Cornwall and the Outreach Fire Station in Cheshire involved considerable community and partner consultation before they were developed and launched, to gain an understanding of the community's needs. The consultation led to a migrant workers pack which offered key fire safety information in various languages and liaison with campsite owners. The programme in Cornwall continued the consultation, evaluation and review process throughout the life of the project, making it sensitive to changing community needs.

5. Importance of partnership working

Most FRAs made considerable efforts to cultivate partnerships, with 79% of interventions involving some form of partnership work. In many cases, these partners were an important source of referrals for HFRCs, or were trained to carry out the referrals themselves. In other cases they provided resources such as sponsorship for equipment, vehicles or other necessary items.

The case studies and the workshops highlighted the importance of partnership working at both organisational and operational levels. Partnerships at the organisational level meant involvement from senior levels of organisations, which could greatly facilitate strategic planning and dedication of resources to community safety. Partnerships at the operational level greatly enhanced the success and reach of programmes that may otherwise have limited scope.

Cheshire FRS provided an example of partnership working at both the organisational and operational level. The Communities of Cheshire Partnership, which oversaw the Local Area Agreements, was limited to 24 seats, making it necessary for Cheshire FRS to prove its worth in helping potential partners meet their targets and the targets of the Local Area Agreements. Cheshire FRS obtained a seat on the Partnership, despite having no monetary resources, because of its previous history of engaging the community. At the operational level, it was recognised that fire statistics allowed the identification of potential target areas, but partners could enhance their use by providing information and data for more specific targeting and acting as a conduit for access to particular populations and communities for HFRCs. These partnerships were facilitated and enhanced by good contacts and personal relationships at the local level between fire personnel and staff at other agencies.

6. Methods of reaching deprived or 'hard to reach' groups

FRSs developed various strategies for gaining access to hard to reach groups, including the use of community advocates, volunteers and partnering with organisations that had regular contact with these groups (eg faith groups, Age Concern).

Most initiatives had particular target audiences. Typically, these were groups perceived to be at high risk of fire. As outlined above targeting was mainly at children and young people, adolescents and young firesetters, but there was also a reasonable amount of targeting at the elderly and homebound and a small amount at black and minority ethnic groups. Half of the interventions were targeted authority-wide and half had a specific geographic target area.

Several FRSs, such as the West Midlands FRS and the West Yorkshire FRS introduced programmes of community advocates. In the West Midlands, the community advocate team had a mix of English and Asian men and women. They primarily assisted in generating referrals for Home Fire Risk checks (through presentations, liaising with community leaders and groups and by knocking on doors), but also conducted the checks for those considered at high-risk. Each borough of West Midlands FRS was allocated a certain amount of community advocate time based on 'hot spot' areas for accidental and arson-related fires.

The use of volunteers was a strategy adopted by the Royal Berkshire FRS to build capacity for Home Fire Risk Checks, particularly in rural areas such as West Berkshire. The strategy included finding volunteers who were familiar with the community and members of the community that may be at risk. These "champions" could then carry out the risk checks themselves or accompany the fire fighters and introduce them to the resident and/or translate if necessary.

7. Local evaluations of the Innovation Fund

While FRSs recognised the importance of evaluating programmes, evaluation data tended to be scarce, and if it did exist, was piecemeal. In some exceptional cases, a great deal of effort was made to evaluate initiatives and even FRSs with relatively few resources managed to find ways to evaluate programmes. For example, Cornwall FRS had built links with Cornwall Business School and involved students in carrying out evaluations of the HayleSafe Programme. These evaluations incorporated sending out questionnaires to local households and carrying out interviews with residents.

8. Attitudes towards the Innovation Fund

The feedback on the Innovation Fund from FRSs was both positive and negative. Participants felt the Innovation Fund's flexibility was its main advantage, providing FRSs with the freedom to spend the money on projects which would not otherwise have got underway. Complaints about the Innovation Fund included the lack of direction given by the department (then ODPM, now Communities and Local Government) on targeting and its relationship to deprivation, as well as the late notice of funding arrangements before initiatives were expected to be up and running. However, this needs to be viewed within the context of Local Government Finance policies and procedures. As the money was a non-ringfenced grant, the department were not permitted to specify how the money should be spent, although they did provide suggestions. Neither were they allowed to give advance warning that the grants were to be made available to FRSs.

9. Impact of the innovation fund on fires and fire related casualties

The researchers carried out detailed analysis to determine the impact of the Innovation Fund on the rate of fires, non-fatal casualties and fatalities. The three main outcomes measured were fire casualty rates, accidental fire casualty rates and accidental fire rates.

The researchers compared the rates of the outcomes between the intervention and comparison areas pre and post funding, adjusting for differences in deprivation. No significant differences were found in the rate of change (although reductions were observed) or the rate of change over time between intervention and comparison areas. Below are two graphical illustrations of some of the results from this analysis.

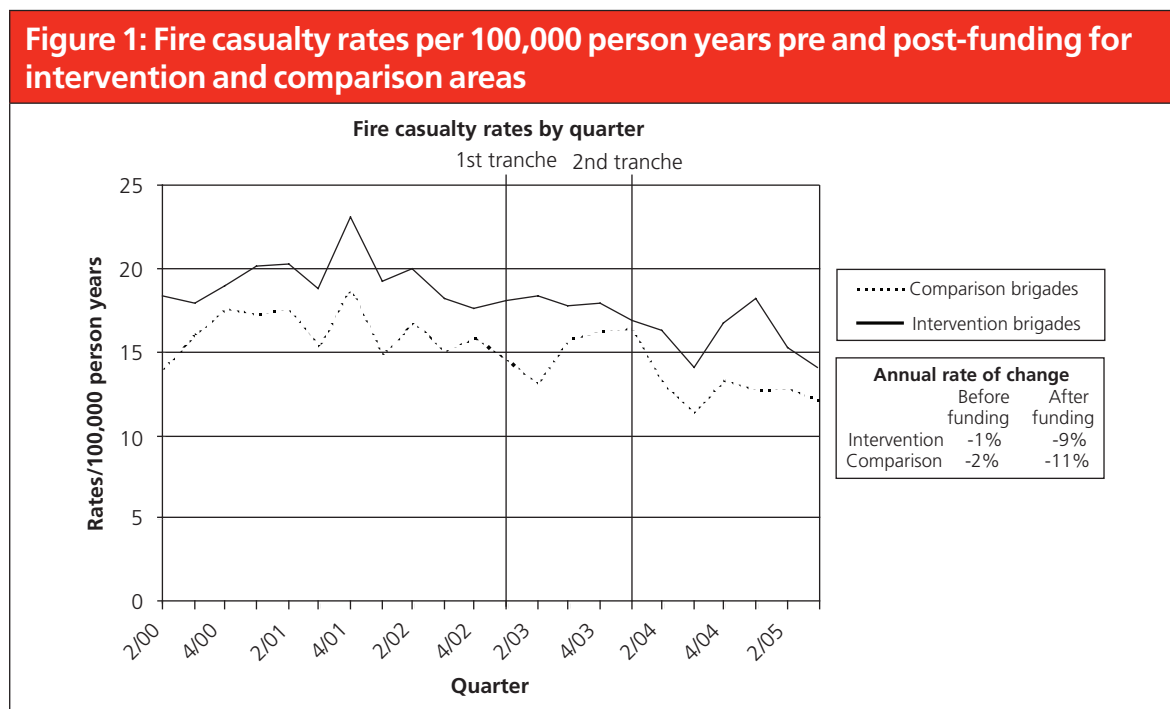
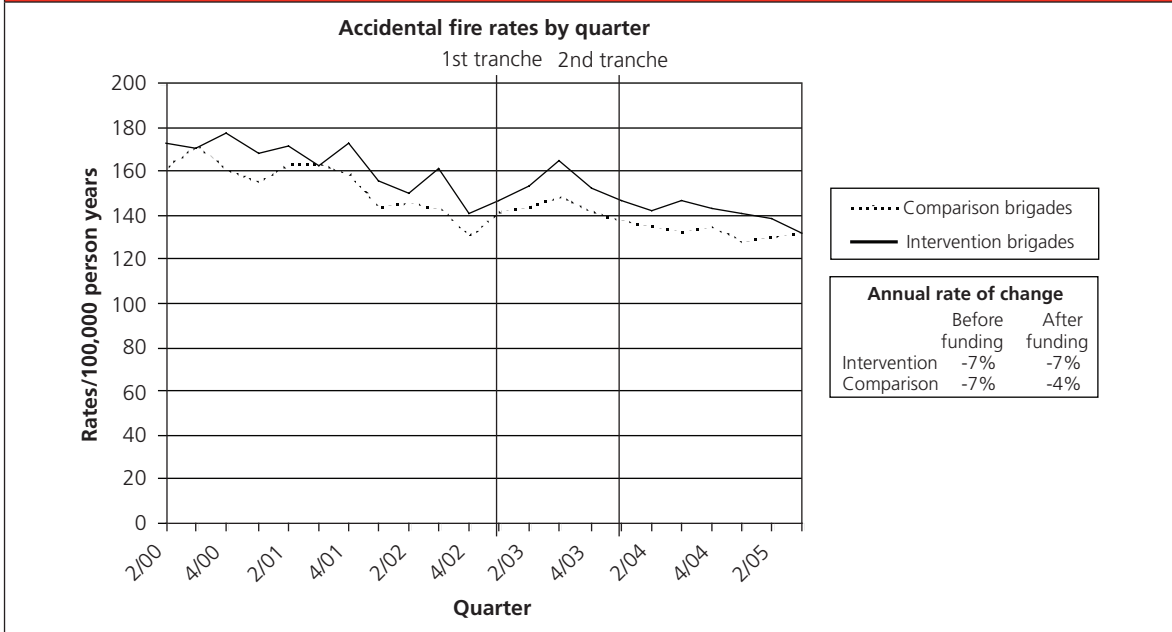


Figure 2: Accidental fire rates per 100,000 person years pre and post-funding for intervention and comparison areas



Rates for the outcomes were also compared by deprivation quartiles for intervention and comparison areas pre and post funding. (Deprivation quartile 1 being the least deprived areas and quartile 4 being the most deprived areas). Similar relationships between deprivation and rates for all outcomes pre and post funding were found in both the intervention and comparison areas.

10. Lessons learnt

- The process evaluation showed that the flexibility of the Innovation Fund resulted in considerable variations in how it was implemented in different FRSs. This varied from targeting specific localities or target groups, based on an analysis of local data and local consultation, to delivering a range of projects to the wider community or using the funding to supplement existing programmes.
- The workshops, telephone interviews and case studies served to highlight the considerable enthusiasm for community fire safety work and the range of innovative projects and partnerships developed by FRSs.
- At the workshops participants reported the benefits of having resources that could be brought to the table and used to 'oil the wheels' of collaborative working to reduce inequalities.
- FRSs developed a variety of strategies for gaining access to hard to reach groups, including the use of community advocates, the use of outreach vehicles, volunteers, champions and partnerships with organisations that had contact with these groups.
- The importance of partnership working at both organisational and operational levels was demonstrated in numerous examples, in particular for securing access to vulnerable/at risk groups.
- Evidence of local involvement with evaluation was, however, more limited.

The analysis of the impact of the Innovation Fund showed that there were reductions in the previous five to six years in the rates of fires and fire related casualties in both the Intervention and Comparison areas. However, it was difficult to isolate and tease out the effect (statistically) that the Innovation Fund had made over and above that taking place elsewhere. There were several possible reasons for this:

- There were other factors not accounted for in this project which could impact on rates of fire generally – media awareness campaigns, many other CFS initiatives being set up prior to the Innovation Fund, etc.
- The Innovation Fund came into existence at a time when the shift in the FRS from a reactive to a preventive service was beginning to take effect.
- Other (larger) funding streams were also available to FRSs to tackle CFS issues, including the Home Fire Risk Check initiative and the Arson Control Forum's New Projects Initiative.
- The evaluation was also carried out before the Innovation Fund had been completed and before an effect may indeed be detectable – a few years data post funding would have been preferable and some of the projects had only been in place for just over a year at the time of the research project.

11. Recommendations proposed by the researchers

- Develop a national strategy which outlines approaches to accessing 'hard to reach' groups to ensure that funding programmes are all inclusive.
- Develop guidance on consultation, monitoring and evaluation processes to enable FRSs to assess their own programmes independently and to allow for national comparisons.
- Workshops/seminars should be organised on a regional basis using the framework of the Chief Fire Officers' Association's Community Fire Safety Task Group to facilitate better dissemination of promising and proven practices for community fire safety.

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