

The Fire Brigades Union



A service to be proud of – a service worth defending

FBU submission to the
government's Comprehensive Spending
Review 2010
September 2010

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Introduction

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary

The fire and rescue service faces an extremely serious challenge. The coalition government claims that cuts of between 25% and 40% are necessary in public services. For months the public have been fed an endless stream of argument that there is no alternative – these cuts simply have to be made.

Prior to the general election there was much talk of the need to 'protect the front line'. David Cameron visited a fire station as part of his election campaign. You cannot get much more 'frontline' than the fire and rescue service. Yet now all those pledges and fine words are forgotten – so far the fire and rescue service has been offered no protection whatsoever.

The main document contained here is the submission of the Fire Brigades Union to the discussion on the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). In it we make the case that the fire and rescue service is an outstanding public service with high levels of public support. It is also an extremely efficient service. The FBU does not accept that there is room for cuts in our service. Talk of cuts in the order of 25% is complete lunacy – a modern, efficient and professional service simply could not be delivered on such a basis.

Sadly, there are many in positions of authority within local fire services who have simply accepted the argument about cuts and resigned themselves to the idea that nothing can be done. The FBU cannot afford such an approach. These issues are too important for us to surrender without a fight.

So we have set out here the arguments against the cuts agenda. The case is supported by a recent YouGov public opinion survey and by figures which the union has collated on rescues by firefighters. These are both also presented here.

These facts show the real contribution made by firefighters to society. It is a contribution which deserves to be recognised – not by patronising words of praise but by action. We call on others within the service to support our campaign. Chief fire officers and fire service politicians should be making the case for investment in our service rather than rushing to plan and implement cuts.

Despite all the propaganda we have suffered over the past year and more about the inevitable need for huge cuts we should remember that the UK remains a very wealthy country. The resources do exist for investment in our public services. The decision to attack those services is a political one and it is one which (as we show here) the public already reject in relation to fire and rescue and will reject more widely as the reality of the cuts hits home.

The FBU, as the voice of firefighters, will fight tooth and nail against the cuts agenda. Our concern is for our profession, for the safety of the public and for the safety of firefighters. We pledge to defend them by every possible means.



Matt Wrack
General secretary



Executive summary

- Public satisfaction with the fire and rescue service is very high – 93% in a recent YouGov survey. Even the Audit Commission has recognised that the service is exceptionally well regarded by the public.
- The public does not support cuts to the fire and rescue service. An overwhelming 85% are opposed to cuts in fire service budgets and 95% want the same number or more firefighters. The government does not have a mandate for cuts to the service.
- Over seven thousand people were rescued from fires in the UK between April 2009 and March 2010. For the UK as a whole this represents nearly 600 rescues a month, or 19 every day of the year on average.
- In England alone during the same period over five thousand people were rescued from fires, over one thousand in Scotland, nearly five hundred in Northern Ireland and almost three hundred in Wales.
- More rescues were carried out last year than a decade ago, the last time the government published figures. There are now fewer fires, fewer fire deaths and more fire rescues.
- The fire and rescue service has an incredible rescue record in other areas such as floods, terrorist attacks, major incidents like Buncefield and Stockline, train crashes like Selby – and countless other interventions. It is a record to be proud of.
- The fire and rescue service has met and exceeded government efficiency targets. It is a lean, refined service. There is no bloat – no fat to cull. Firefighters have increased their productivity in the last decade – we now do much more with fewer personnel.
- Since 1997 the UK fire and rescue service has experienced the loss of 3,381 wholetime firefighters. In the last five years 1,848 wholetime firefighter posts have been lost. There are now 1,030 fewer frontline (wholetime, retained and control) firefighters compared with 1997. Over the last five years, 2,261 frontline firefighter posts have been lost.
- Firefighters face many challenges in the near future. Climate change will affect the service with more grassland fires, more floods, drought and more storms. The service needs trained professionals to meet these challenges.
- The Association of British Insurers (ABI) states that the cost of fires has been increasing: the average cost of fire claims more than doubled between 2002 and 2008. In the first six months of 2009 insurers paid out £639m – £3.6 million a day – for fire damage. This is the highest half-yearly figure ever, and follows on from last year's record high levels.
- Firefighters have a vision of a high-quality public service, resilient to every challenge we face nationally and locally. We want to reduce response times and help more people who call our control rooms. That means more firefighters, better trained and equipped.

FBU submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) represents 44,000 committed professionals in fire and rescue services across the UK. We are the most significant and representative stakeholder in the sector and we bring an important perspective to policy.

The achievements of the fire and rescue service

The fire and rescue service in the UK has much to be proud of. The service is a real success story when it has the personnel and the resources to do the job. Over the last decade the fire and rescue service has added further pages to its celebrated history.

It was no surprise that the government and polling surveys have consistently found that "Public satisfaction with their local fire and rescue service is rated consistently higher than other public service".¹ These findings are reinforced by an authoritative survey for the Fire Brigades Union carried out by the respected YouGov polling organisation (see Appendix A.1).

Fires

Firefighters continue to carry out very high levels of rescue from fires. Recent data obtained by the FBU from individual fire and rescues indicates that over seven thousand people (7,098) were rescued from fires in the UK between April 2009 and March 2010. In England alone during the same period over five thousand (5,196) people were rescued from fires. For the UK as a whole this represents nearly 600 rescues a month, or 19 every day of the year on average.² These figures are the first results of a new electronic incident reporting system. CLG has not published figures on rescues over the last decade. The last set of published figures for the UK, in Fire Statistics UK 1999, recorded just over five thousand rescues (5,099) for the UK, and nearly four thousand (3,816) in England.³

The increased number of rescues is all the more remarkable when set against the fall in the number of fires and fire deaths over that period. Over the last thirty years, the number fire rose from 139,300 in 1981 to a peak of 228,300 in 2001, before falling to 144,500 in 2007. Casualties at all fires fell from over one thousand (1,096) in 1979 to 443 in 2007. Although these improvements reflect many social, economic and technical factors, they also indicate the successful fire prevention work carried out by firefighters.⁴

Flood and water rescue

Firefighters do much more than carry out rescues from fires. One area that has been particularly prominent in recent years is rescues during flooding. The summer 2007 floods, damaged 48,000 homes and 7,000 businesses, and were linked to at least 13 deaths.⁵ During this emergency the fire and rescue service rescued over three thousand people. A *Times* newspaper/Populus poll (31 July 2007) rated the fire service as the best public service responding to this emergency, praising firefighters not only for saving lives but also helping to protect critical national infrastructure.⁶ Other floods since then have reinforced the vital role of firefighters. In Cumbria in 2009, fire crews again distinguished themselves in unprecedented conditions. The FBU would add that our members did so without much of the vital resources and equipment promised after the Pitt Review.

Other rescues

The last decade has also seen a huge number of high-profile emergencies where firefighters have used our professionalism and expertise to help people. No one will forget the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005, when 52 people were killed by bus and tube bombers. Firefighters helped rescue 700 injured people and led hundreds of victims to safety on that terrible day.⁷

¹ Audit Commission, *Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment*, February 2009

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/InspectionOutput/fireandrescue12feb09REP.pdf>

² Freedom of Information request by the Labour Research Department, May-June 2010

³ Home Office, *Fire Statistics UK 1999*, Table 13

⁴ CLG, *Fire Statistics UK 2007*, Tables 25 and 26

⁵ Michael Pitt, *Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods*, 25 June 2008

http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/thepittreview/final_report.html

⁶ FBU, *Lessons of the 2007 floods*, June 2008

⁷ London Assembly, *Report of the 7 July Review Committee*, June 2006

Spending concerns

The Buncefield oil storage terminal explosion rocked Hertfordshire in December 2005 caused widespread damage and left 43 people injured. The first firefighters on the scene, faced with the largest European peace time fire, immediately searched the area for casualties and set about bringing the blaze under control – a task that took several weeks to complete. More than one thousand firefighters attended the blaze from 33 fire and rescue services across the country, working together as one team in extremely arduous and hazardous conditions to put the fire out and limit the effects on the environment.⁸

The Stockline factory collapse rescue in Glasgow in May 2004 was one of the largest industrial incidents in the last decade. Nine people were killed and 60 injured. Some 14 appliances including a heavy rescue vehicle attended the scene to bring the incident under control and assist the injured. Similarly, the Selby train incident in February 2001 saw 10 killed and 40 people injured. There are also countless other examples of road vehicle rescues, river rescues, mudslides and all manner of other emergency where firefighters have responded magnificently to save life and limit damage.⁹

An efficient service

The fire and rescue service is recognised as an efficient service, exceeding the goals set for it by politicians. The government PSA targets for fire services in England came into effect on 1 April 2005. The targets were to:

- reduce the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home by 20 per cent, averaged over the 11 year period to 31 March 2010, equivalent to 280 fire-related deaths per year, compared with the average recorded in the five year period to 31 March 1999 of 350 fire-related deaths; and,
- achieve a 10 per cent reduction in deliberate fires by 31 March 2010 to 94,000 from the 2001/02 baseline of 104,500.

According to the Audit Commission, “all services are performing well against the PSA target for arson. Performance in reducing deliberate fires appeared to be levelling off but this trend did not continue in 2007/08. The fire service is also on course to meet or exceed the PSA target for reducing deaths from accidental fires in the home”.¹⁰

The fire and rescue service has succeeded during a period in which it has undergone extensive “modernisation”. The fire and rescue service did not experience a “golden age” under the New Labour government. It is a lean, efficient service – not a bloated, wasteful service.

Unlike many other public services, there has not been a huge increase in investment in the fire and rescue service over the last decade. Overall spending on the fire and rescue service grew from £1.6bn in 1997-98 to £2.8bn in 2009-10.¹¹ This represented a 72% increase over the 13 years of New Labour governments, or an average of 5.6% per annum. Although over 80% of fire service expenditure is on employees’ salaries, this increase in spending did not translate into more firefighters or higher pay for firefighters. On the contrary, much of this money has been spent on new equipment, very large salary increases at the level of principal management, and on human resources personnel at fire headquarters. As table 1 (opposite) indicates, there are fewer frontline firefighters now than a decade ago.

⁸ Buncefield investigation <http://www.buncefieldinvestigation.gov.uk/index.htm>

⁹ FBU, *Tragedy, Loss, Hope, Help*, 2008

¹⁰ Audit Commission, *Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment*, February 2009

¹¹ CIPFA, *Fire and rescue service statistics 2009*, and *Fire and rescue service statistics 1998*

Table 1: Numbers of UK firefighters (total, full-time equivalent)

	Wholetime	RDS	Control	Other	Total UK	W+R+C
31/03/1997	39,169	15,370	1,783	6,272	62,594	56,322
31/03/1998	38,983	15,243	1,762	6,433	62,421	55,988
31/03/1999	39,042	15,315	1,733	6,676	62,766	56,090
31/03/2000	38,616	15,355	1,644	6,988	62,603	55,615
31/03/2001	38,643	15,372	1,762	7,124	62,901	55,777
31/03/2002	38,680	14,853	1,768	7,229	62,530	55,301
31/03/2003	38,845	15,435	1,807	7,207	63,294	56,087
31/03/2004	38,744	15,928	1,823	7,664	64,159	56,495
31/03/2005	38,128	16,047	1,897	8,200	64,272	56,072
31/03/2006	37,636	18,055	1,862	9,262	66,875	57,553
31/03/2007	37,667	18,380	1,836	9,445	67,328	57,883
31/03/2008	37,682	17,596	1,899	10,224	67,400	57,177
31/03/2009	36,895	17,015	1,962	10,063	65,935	55,872
31/03/2010	35,788	17,534	1,970	9,887	65,179	55,292

Source: CIPFA Fire and rescue service statistics 1998, 2003-2009

Although the total number of fire service personnel rose between 1997 and 2010, this did not mean more frontline firefighters. Since 1997 the UK fire and rescue service has experienced the loss of 3,381 wholetime firefighters (8.6% decrease). In the last five years 1,848 wholetime firefighter posts have been lost (4.9% decrease). There are now 1,030 fewer frontline (wholetime, retained and control) firefighters (1.8% decrease) compared with 1997. Over the last five years, 2,261 frontline firefighter posts have been lost (3.9% decrease).

There are many essential personnel, such as community fire safety and fire training, included in the "other" personnel. Some are former or current uniformed personnel.

Others will carry out human resources or similar functions at headquarters. What stands out from the figures is the increase in the numbers of other roles. Since 1997 an additional 3,616 personnel have been recruited for these roles (57.6% increase). Although this has slowed in recent years, it represents a contrast with falling numbers of frontline firefighters.

Table 2: Numbers of firefighters in England (total, full-time equivalent)

	Wholetime	RDS	Control	Other	Total UK	W+R+C
31/03/1997	32,019	10,829	1,371	5,056	49,275	44,219
31/03/2006	30,491	11,976	1,473	7,624	51,564	43,940
31/03/2010	29,893	12,172	1,575	8,316	51,956	43,640

Source: CIPFA Fire and rescue service statistics 1998, 2003-2009

A similar picture emerges from the figures for England alone (see table 2 on previous page). Again the total number of fire service personnel increased, while frontline firefighter numbers fell. There are now 2,126 fewer wholetime firefighters (6.6% decrease) compared with 1997. Overall there are 579 fewer frontline firefighters (1.3% decrease). At the same time, the 3,260 additional other personnel have been recruited (64.5% increase).

Challenges ahead

The fire and rescue service has to be ready for an emergency, national or local, 24/7 and 365. Whether it is a fire or a flood, terrorist attack or explosion, the public rightly expects that professionals will be available to deal with the situation. We cannot predict the future; but we do know that there are many challenges on the horizon that can be foreseen and planned for now.

The Treasury stated with respect to the comprehensive spending review that the government will “look beyond near-term pressures to support reforms that better position the UK for meeting long-term demographic, economic, environmental and social challenges”.¹² The Fire Brigades Union believes that the fire and rescue service faces a range of challenges which require an ongoing commitment of resources and personnel. Some of these are outlined below.

Climate change: fire, drought, flood, storm

Climate change is a critical issue for the fire and rescue service in the UK. It is the greatest environmental challenge facing humanity at present. Climate change will increase the risk of grassland and forest fires. It will increase the risk of floods, including from surface water, rivers and from the sea. Climate change will affect the supply and availability of water and may give rise to more extreme weather events.

These hazards will have implications for the working conditions of firefighters. Climate change will require significant changes to appliances, to the equipment

available to firefighters, to training, greater awareness of firefighters’ health implications, to pumping capability and water use and increased emergency fire control capacity.

In 2006 CLG recommended that the fire and rescue service “begin to plan for climate change and to have an awareness of climate change when decisions are being made”. It recognised that “for Fire and Rescue Services in the UK there is potential for increased workloads all year round”.¹³ The FBU believes that the UK fire service is not yet prepared for the enormous implications of climate change. The service needs the staff, resources and equipment to tackle grassland fires, floods, drought and storms. There is no logic to job cuts and shutting fire stations when these risks are likely to increase in the years ahead. Firefighting is a green job and firefighters can play a vital role in helping society adapt to climate change.

Grassland and wildfires

The CLG climate change report accepted that there is “a clear and demonstrable link between hot dry summers and the number of fires”, particularly wild and forest fires. It based the correlation on data on higher average temperatures and increased secondary fires between 1973 and 2003. The annual CLG Fire Statistics report contains figures for outdoor fires and their location. The report warns that the number of grassland and heathland fires is “very dependent on weather conditions”. The two recent highpoints in grassland fires coincide with the hot summers of 1995 and 2003.¹⁴

The CLG climate report estimated an extra workload of up to 50% more incidents of grassland fires would, “stretch the resources of the Fire and Rescue Services”. It acknowledged that: “Fire crews will be tired from attending more incidents, sickness and injury levels may rise due to fatigue, and equipment will be under more strain due to increased usage.” The report estimated that the increase in workload will have “the largest impact on rural Fire and Rescue Services” and “on firefighters working on the retained duty system”.

¹² HM Treasury, *The Spending Review framework*, June 2010

¹³ CLG, *Effects of Climate Change on Fire and Rescue Services in the UK*, 2006

¹⁴ CLG, *Fire Statistics UK*, 2007 Table 5.1 p.50

Drought

Fire and rescue services will also have to contend with drought. The latest government climate projections (UKCP09) estimate that summer rainfall may decrease by between 20% and 30% by 2080.¹⁵ The 2006 CLG report argued that water shortages would affect brigades' training and demonstrative capabilities. Water companies are expected to reduce the pressure in their mains supplies to minimise leakage, so firefighters may have to relay water across longer distances from alternative water sources and could expect changes in training, tactics, procedures, and equipment.

Floods

Floods represent a big challenge for the fire and rescue service. The CLG report argued that the role of the fire and rescue services during flooding is divided into three main areas: emergency response and rescue; damage mitigation; when the floodwaters are subsiding, making flooded areas safe before residents are permitted to return to them.

According to the UKCP09 data, by the 2080s, the South West of England could get 31% more rain, with London (27%), East of England, North West England and Wales (all 26%), East Midlands (25%) as well as Scotland North and the West Midlands (24%) also experiencing substantial increases. The Pitt Review into the 2007 floods across the UK also made the connection with climate change. The Review commissioned work to update the Foresight: Future Flooding Study. Pitt concluded that: "The key message from the update is that the effects of climate change may be more extreme than had previously been estimated." In particular Pitt argued that the potential increases in rainfall volume and intensity, and temperature, are greater; and there is a greater risk of extreme sea level rise. The risk of flooding, including urban flood, will increase.¹⁶

CLG does not collect data on fire service call outs for flooding. The CLG report, said that if flooding becomes more frequent, "Fire and Rescue Services may have to consider adapting their capabilities to allow for a greater flood rescue response capability". It listed possible changes to: appliances, equipment, training, health implications, additional pumping capability and greater call centre capacity.

Storms

Firefighters often make rescues during storms and are exposed to increased risks. On 16 October 1987, two firefighters were killed when a tree crushed the cab of their fire appliance in Dorset. The 2006 CLG report cited the 1987 storms as an example of what to expect in future. Firefighters would be expected to rescue people during similar events, as well as to remove fallen trees and other obstacles, which requires specialist equipment and training. The FBU recognises that predictions about extreme weather, particularly wind and storms, are uncertain and not yet very concrete. However the union believes it is essential for the fire and rescue service to have the capacity to tackle such events, which means firefighters available to respond and the right equipment to do the job safely.

Costs of fire damage

Although the numbers of fires and fire deaths has been falling, the cost of fire damage has increased in recent years. For families who lose their homes, the effects of fire can be financially and emotionally devastating.

Fires can also result in significant business losses. Even a minor fire at a crucial stage of production can mean large losses for individual firms. Business interruption or even closure can have a significant effect on local communities through loss of jobs and services. Fire services play a key role in limiting the impact of fire on the economy by providing fire safety advice to the business community and enforcing fire safety legislation. Last year the Audit Commission said there had been a significant increase in the insured commercial loss from fire from £521m in 2000 to £753m in 2007.¹⁷

The insurance industry has also seen a much larger real terms rise in insured losses. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) stated in December last year that, "the number of fires has been falling, but the cost of these has been increasing: the average cost of fire claims more than doubled between 2002 and 2008". In the first six months of 2009 insurers paid out £639m – £3.6 million a day – for fire damage. This is the highest half-yearly figure ever, and follows on from last year's record high levels.

¹⁵ DEFRA, *Adapting to climate change: UK Climate Projections*, 2009

¹⁶ Pitt, *An update of the Foresight Future Flooding 2004 qualitative risk analysis*, 2008

¹⁷ Audit Commission, *Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment*, February 2009

The ABI's analysis of fire trends showed:

- Fire damage claims in the first half of 2009 cost £639m – £3.6 million each day. This follows on from the £1.3bn fire losses in 2008, a 16% rise on 2007 and the most expensive year ever.
- Between 2002 and 2008 the cost of the average fire claim for both commercial and domestic fires doubled, to £21,000 and £8,000 respectively.
- Arson, which tends to increase during a recession, accounts for half of all commercial fires. Socially deprived areas and schools are especially vulnerable: arson rates are 30 times higher in poorer areas. Twenty schools a week suffer an arson attack, disrupting the education of 90,000 schoolchildren and causing damage costing £65m.
- More open plan buildings, which allow more rapid spread of fire, and the increase in out of town developments, where fires can go for longer unnoticed, are among factors contributing to the doubling of fire costs since 2002.

The wider economic cost of fires is immense. In 2006, CLG estimated that the total cost was £7.03bn, equivalent to approximately 0.78% of the gross value added of the economy. Some £2.77bn of the costs were incurred in anticipation of fire. The cost of the fire and rescue service responding to fires was estimated at £1.74bn, with the remaining £2.52bn attributable to the consequences of fire, consisting of property damage, lost business, the economic cost of injuries and fatalities, and the criminal justice service costs associated with prosecuting deliberate fire starters. The Fire Brigades Union believes these figures underestimate the true cost of fire – and in any case were for 2004 and so are now dated. Nevertheless, as a cost-benefit analysis, they clearly indicate the value of the fire and rescue service to the economy.

Firefighter safety

The tragic deaths of two firefighters in Southampton in April 2010, together with other deaths in recent years, have further highlighted an alarming trend in firefighter safety. The trend in firefighter deaths was downwards until the turn of the century. However there has been an alarming upturn in recent years. Since 2003, at least

29 firefighters have died while on duty, significantly more than in the previous period. Eight firefighters died on duty in 2007 alone, the worst year since 1985. The deaths of four firefighters in Warwickshire in 2007 were the worst incident of multiple firefighter fatalities in the UK since 1972. FBU research has found that firefighter deaths at fires rose sharply in the five years (2003-2007), with at least 13 firefighters killed at fires. This was the worst five-year period in more than 30 years.

The FBU is concerned that the "modernisation" process begun by the last government, downgrading emergency intervention and the training associated with it, has had a detrimental effect on firefighter safety. With fewer firefighters and further cuts, the union fears for the safety and well-being of our members. We do not want to see another firefighter death that could have been prevented if the right resources and personnel had been in place.

Quality of public service

It should be a scandal that response times across the UK are getting worse. Official figures show that appliances are taking longer to get to fires now than a decade ago. The union does not accept that this is just because of traffic congestion, as response times at night are also slower. In 2009, CLG published a report called Fire and Rescue Service response times. Table 1.1 from that report showed how average response times in England had increased between 1996 and 2006, with response to dwelling fires worsened by 18%. The report predicted the effect of increased response times. FSEC predicted that increased response times may contribute to about:

- 13 additional fatalities in dwelling and other building fires each year;
- Possibly 65 additional deaths in road traffic collisions (RTCs); and
- An £85m increase in other buildings fire damage.²⁰

Further evidence gathered from the official statistics has shown that response times continued to worsen in 2007 and 2008. Figures released on 22 March 2010, in response to a question by John McDonnell MP, show that slower response times to dwelling fires in many parts of the country. For England alone, if these figures

¹⁹ CLG, *Economic Cost of Fire: Estimates for 2004* <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/144524.pdf>

²⁰ CLG, *Fire and Rescue Service response times: Fire Research Series (Greenstreet Berman Ltd), 2009*

are added to those in the CLG report, response times for dwelling fires increased by 22% between 1996 and 2008. They have also worsened in Scotland and in Northern Ireland.

Firefighters will not accept the argument that response times are irrelevant. Built into a firefighters' DNA is the desire to intervene swiftly – to make that difference to whether someone lives or dies, whether they are temporarily overcome with smoke or maimed for life, or whether someone loses their home and their prize possessions.

There are people who might be dead today, but are alive because of the intervention of firefighters. There are people who might have far more serious injuries, but for the rapid response of firefighters. It is to preserve life – to save those who would otherwise perish – that firefighters adhere so strongly to the motto "every second counts". The Fire Brigades Union wants to reverse this trend in response times and improve the quality of the service provided. But the fire and rescue service requires the funding and resources to make these improvements.

Equality

National research shows that people on low incomes and living alone are more likely to experience a fire in their home and to suffer death or injuries as a result. People on the lowest incomes and living alone are more likely to experience a fire and to die or suffer injuries as a result. Factors such as smoking, poor health, disability and poor housing raise the risk. The government estimates that 30% of those who die in fires are people with limited mobility.²¹

This means that cutting the fire and rescue service will have a disproportionate impact on the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the community. The service is committed to equality, but it will not deliver for all sections of the public unless it has the necessary resources.

Conclusion

The new government has been very clear since the election that it intends to make huge cuts to public expenditure. We are told the public sector is "bloated". Of course there is waste. Too much public money has gone to private consultants who have come into our public services and advised how to "improve" them – often with disastrous results. Too much money has gone to boost the salaries of those at the very top – while the rest of us are told to tighten our belts. And too much money has gone on ill thought out projects – such as control regionalisation.

But we reject the argument that the public sector is bloated or a waste. The public sector provides services people – especially working class people – need. In the fire and rescue service, there has been no golden age of huge investment. We have fewer firefighters than we had ten years ago. The cuts we have already seen have been targeted precisely at the so-called "frontline". There has been no protection of "frontline" services in fire and rescue.

The truth is that we cannot afford cuts on the scale the government talks about – indeed we can't afford cuts at all. Cuts will mean further attacks on pay, pensions, jobs and conditions. Cuts will undermine the safety of firefighters and the public. Those are the stark facts.

The Fire Brigades Union states clearly to government that there is no room for cuts in our service and that cuts on the scale proposed by the government are simply not possible while maintaining any semblance of a modern and professional fire and rescue service. We appeal to Chief Fire Officers and to members of fire and rescue authorities to join us in rejecting the cuts agenda for our service. The Fire Brigades Union – on behalf of the vast majority of those delivering our service at the frontline – pledges to resist this agenda and to fight to protect our service and the communities we serve.

²¹ CLG, *Learning Lessons from Real Fires: Analysis of Fatal Fire Investigation Reports* 2006, 2007 p.8

Comprehensive spending review framework

The Treasury has asked specific questions for this spending review.²² Based on the foregoing analysis, these are the FBU's short answers.

Is the activity essential to meet government priorities?

Yes – the fire and rescue service saves lives, protects property and adds value.

Does the government need to fund this activity?

Yes, fire and rescue is recognised by economists as a public good, which the market will not provide.

Does the activity provide substantial economic value?

The economic costs of fire far exceed the costs of providing the service.

Can the activity be targeted to those most in need?

The service is both universal and targeted at those in need.

How can the activity be provided at lower cost?

No, not without irreparably damaging the service. National efficiency savings targets have been exceeded. There is no bloat. Cuts today would be to the marrow.

How can the activity be provided more effectively?

The FBU wants national standards and guidance to level up best practice.

Can the activity be provided by a non-state provider or by citizens, wholly or in partnership?

No, firefighting is a skilled profession, dangerous for volunteers. For example, two-thirds of firefighter fatalities in the USA are volunteers.²³

Can non-state providers be paid to carry out the activity according to the results they achieve?

No, given the unique nature of the service and national resilience provided by fire and rescue.

Can local bodies as opposed to central government provide the activity?

Local bodies already do provide the activity.

²² HM Treasury, *The Spending Review framework*, June 2010

²³ USFA, *Annuals reports* <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/fatalities/statistics/report.shtm>

Appendix 1: Public opinion on the fire and rescue service

More than nine out of ten (93%) people across the UK believe the fire and rescue service is providing a good service, with only 1% describing it as "fairly bad". Two out of three (68%) thought the service was very good – a glowing tribute to the work firefighters do on a daily basis. Four out of five (82%) members of the public were satisfied with their local fire and rescue service, while only 2% were dissatisfied.

The public are very clearly opposed to cutting the number of firefighters and to funding cuts for the service. Some 95% said they favoured maintaining the current level of staffing across the UK, with a third (32%) demanding more firefighters. Some 85% said they opposed plans to cut funding to the fire and rescue service as a whole, with the same percentage opposed to local cuts in funding. Just over one in ten

of the population said they wanted cuts – a tiny minority by any standards. Nine out of ten (90%) people believe that the fire and rescue service is good value for your money.

People see the value of a nationally integrated service. Two-thirds (67%) of the population oppose plans to create regional control centres, accepting the FBU's arguments that this would lose local knowledge and increase response times.

An overwhelming majority of people (95%) believe that rapid response to an emergency call is a priority for them as householders and for local businesses. The same percentage believe that attendance times should be a high priority for fire and rescue services – exploding the myth emanating in some quarters that response times don't matter.

Q. To what extent do you think the fire and rescue service is providing a good or a bad service?

Very good	Fairly good	Fairly bad	Very bad	Don't know
68	25	1	0	6

Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local fire and rescue service?

Very good	Fairly good	Fairly bad	Very bad	Don't know
60	22	1	1	16

Q. To what extent do you support or oppose plans to cut funding in the fire and rescue services?

Strongly oppose	Tend to oppose	Tend to support	Strongly support	Don't know
52	33	9	2	5

Q. To what extent do you support or oppose plans to reduce funding in each of the fire and rescue services?

Strongly oppose	Tend to oppose	Tend to support	Strongly support	Don't know
54	31	10	2	3

Q. Do you think there should now be more, fewer or the same number of frontline firefighters?

More	Same	Fewer
32	63	5

Q. Do you agree or disagree that a rapid response to fires should be a high priority for local people and local businesses?

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
70	25	1	0	3

Q. Do you agree or disagree that the fire and rescue service is good value for your money?

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
53	37	3	1	6

Q. Do you agree or disagree that a rapid response to fires should be a high priority for the fire and rescue service?

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
72	23	2	0	2

Q. Do you oppose or support plans to close three-quarters of local fire control rooms and replace them with nine regional control centres?

Strongly oppose	Tend to oppose	Tend to support	Strongly support	Don't know
35	32	17	3	14

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1020 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken 16-27 August 2010. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

Appendix 2: Rescues from fires

Table A1: Rescues from fires, April 2009-March 2010

Rescues	Unharmed	Injured	Total rescues
UK	2,520	4,578	7,098
England	2,129	3,067	5,196
FBU region	Unharmed	Injured	Total rescues
1 Scotland	229	908	1,137
2 Northern Ireland	0	481	481
3 North East	104	269	373
4 Yorkshire	169	197	366
5 North West	472	1,023	1,495
6 East Midlands	154	106	260
7 West Midlands	206	181	387
8 Wales	162	122	284
9 Eastern	146	475	621
10 London	450	229	679
11 South East	101	82	183
12 Southern	197	135	332
13 South West	130	370	500

Source: Freedom of Information request by the Labour Research Department, May-June 2010

Table A2: Rescues from fires by fire and rescue service, April 2009-March 2010

Fire and rescue service	Rescued unharmed	Rescued injured	Total rescued
Central	12	1	13
Dumfries and Galloway	7	24	31
Fife	8	15	23
Grampian	22	52	74
Highlands and Islands	10	65	75
Lothian and Borders	139	317	456
Strathclyde	0	406	406
Tayside	31	28	59
Northern Ireland	0	481	481
Cleveland	30	4	34
Durham	11	9	20
Northumberland	12	3	15
Tyne and Wear	51	253	304
Humberside	34	32	66
North Yorkshire	6	17	23
South Yorkshire	72	130	202
West Yorkshire	57	18	75
Cheshire	63	5	68
Cumbria	182	14	196
Greater Manchester	118	845	963
Lancashire	39	96	135
Merseyside	70	63	133
Derbyshire	39	22	61
Leicestershire	34	27	61
Lincolnshire	3	11	14
Northamptonshire	25	4	29
Nottinghamshire	53	42	95
Hereford and Worcester	10	12	22
Shropshire	93	6	99
Staffordshire	34	20	54
Warwickshire	15	19	34
West Midlands	54	124	178
Mid and West Wales	29	22	51
North Wales	14	24	38
South Wales	119	76	195
Bedfordshire	37	14	51
Cambridgeshire	17	41	58
Essex	47	180	227
Hertfordshire	0	204	204
Norfolk	26	30	56
Suffolk	19	6	25
London	450	229	679
East Sussex	52	37	89
Kent	20	35	55
Surrey	18	10	28
West Sussex	11	0	11
Berkshire	57	7	64
Buckinghamshire	42	59	101
Dorset	28	10	38
Hampshire	58	52	110
Isle of Wight	6	2	8
Oxfordshire	6	5	11
Avon	34	15	49
Cornwall	21	24	45
Devon and Somerset	59	190	249
Gloucestershire	12	35	47
Wiltshire	4	106	110

Source: Freedom of Information request by the Labour Research Department, May-June 2010



Fire Brigades Union

Bradley House
68 Coombe Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT2 7AE

Tel: 020 8541 1765

Fax: 020 8546 5187

www.fbu.org.uk