

REPORT OF THE PRINCIPAL INSPECTION OF HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BRIGADE 2002



HM Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Making it work together



PRINCIPAL INSPECTION
REPORT
HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS
FIRE BRIGADE

October 2002

**A Report by
HM Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Principal Inspection of Highland and Islands Fire Brigade was conducted during September and October 2002. The HM Inspectorate team comprised Dennis Davis, Allan Whitton, Mark Jones and Charles Stewart. Robert Clark from Audit Scotland (the Brigade's External Auditor) also reviewed arrangements. Firemaster Brian Murray, with the support of the Brigade's senior managers, facilitated and was present during key stages of the inspection.

2. The inspection was the first of a new-style Principal Inspection conducted within the Brigade. Although it was not a joint inspection with Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive, this function in part being reviewed by Assistant Inspector Jones, the method used was comprehensive following a detailed assessment criteria.

3. Issues offering further opportunity for improvement are seen in:

- ◆ **Clearer and enhanced management structures linked to planning processes.**
- ◆ **Management information systems and operational risk assessments.**
- ◆ **Comprehensively concluding fire safety and emergency cover arrangements.**
- ◆ **Integrated communication systems and the procurement process.**
- ◆ **Training resource assessment and utilisation.**
- ◆ **Planning to integrate fire safety enforcement and awareness supported by IT.**

4. Overall, it is assessed that the service provided is, with the exception of fire cover in some areas, satisfactory and there is confidence that, in the general terms of the Fire Services Act 1947, the Brigade and Fire Authority are effectively discharging their duty.

5. This report highlights in bold text areas for further consideration to assist in the process of continuous improvement and those of good practice. The purpose of this approach is to enable the Firemaster and other Brigade managers the opportunity to review, together with members of the Fire Authority, the findings arising from the inspection. Having reviewed the findings it is suggested that action is taken in a programmed and targeted way to ensure advancement of the Brigade, either through the structured Service Plan or a specific action plan. This progress will be reviewed by HM Fire Service Inspectorate during Performance Monitoring Inspections which will occur during the next two years.

6. By adopting this approach HM Fire Service Inspectorate believes sufficient time, and where required resource, can be allocated to secure the longer-term progress required in some areas.

7. It should also be noted that highlighting matters for further consideration is not intended to suggest that only the need for improvement was identified during the inspection. On the contrary, since fire brigades are extensive and complex organisations, the focus for improvement commences from a position that satisfactory performance exists in all areas and that in some shows good practice.



8. Some of these good practice areas identified in Highland and Islands Fire Brigade are:

- ◆ Provision of a capability to fight fires offshore.
- ◆ External contribution through CACFOA and other groups in matters like performance review and good local joint working with the Police.
- ◆ Joint collaboration on specialist vehicle procurement.
- ◆ A well established health and safety policy.
- ◆ Tangible cultural shift towards community fire safety balanced by a clear enforcement policy.

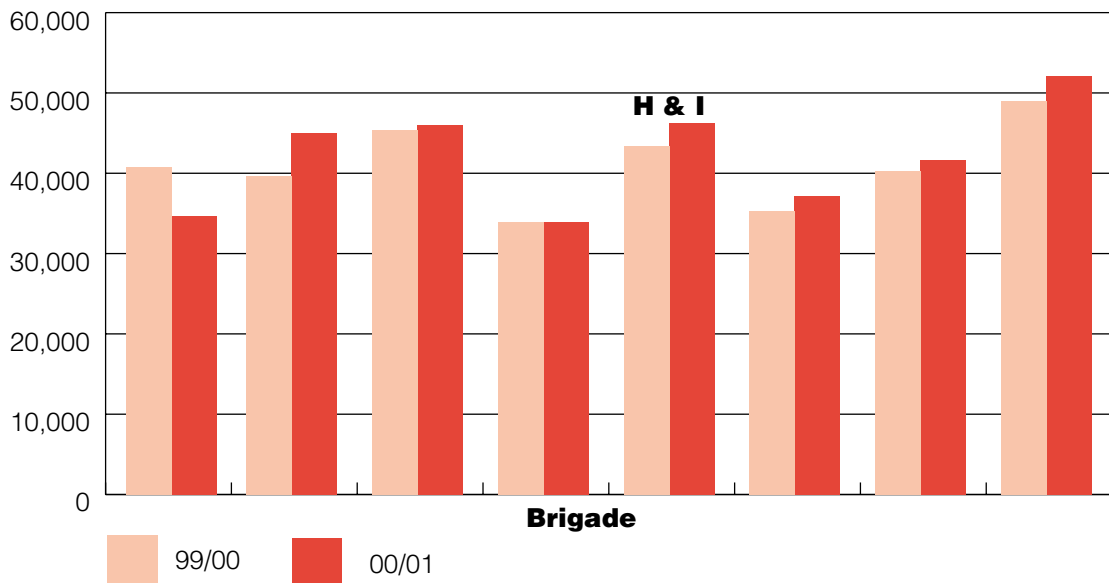


COMPARISON AND TRENDS BETWEEN ALL SCOTTISH BRIGADES

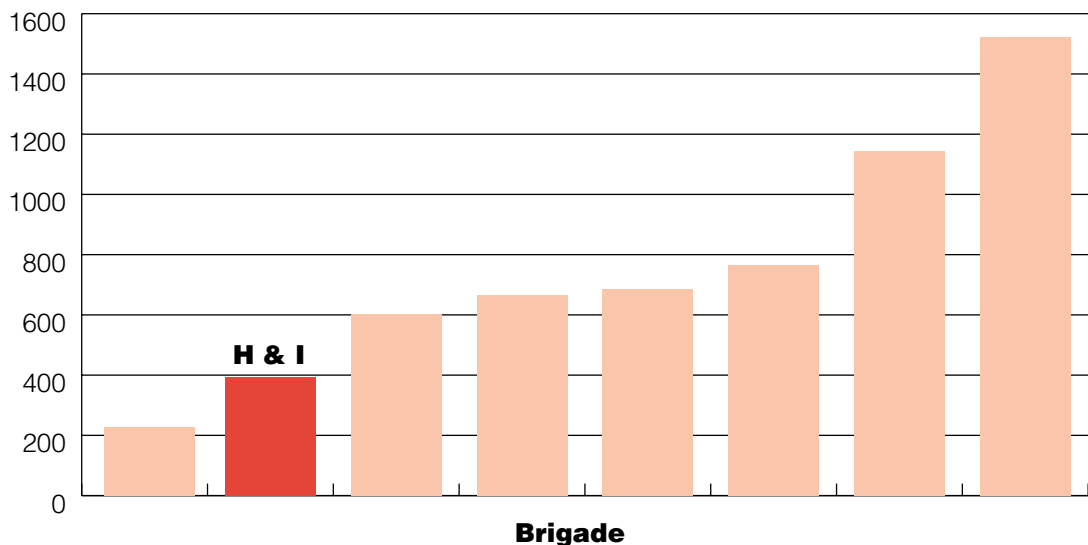
Sampling performance within Scotland

9. In common with most other Scottish brigades, Highland and Islands Fire Brigade's costs of provision per 1000 population have risen slightly over the previous years'. The Brigade serves many small communities dispersed over a large and geographically varied area. The relatively small total population is reflected in the number of calls per Control Operator – the second lowest in Scotland. In order to provide fire cover for such a large area the Brigade employ the greatest numbers of operational staff, mainly part-time retained and volunteer (auxiliary) firefighters, of any Scottish brigade. These factors combine to produce the lowest rate of incidents per firefighter in Scotland.

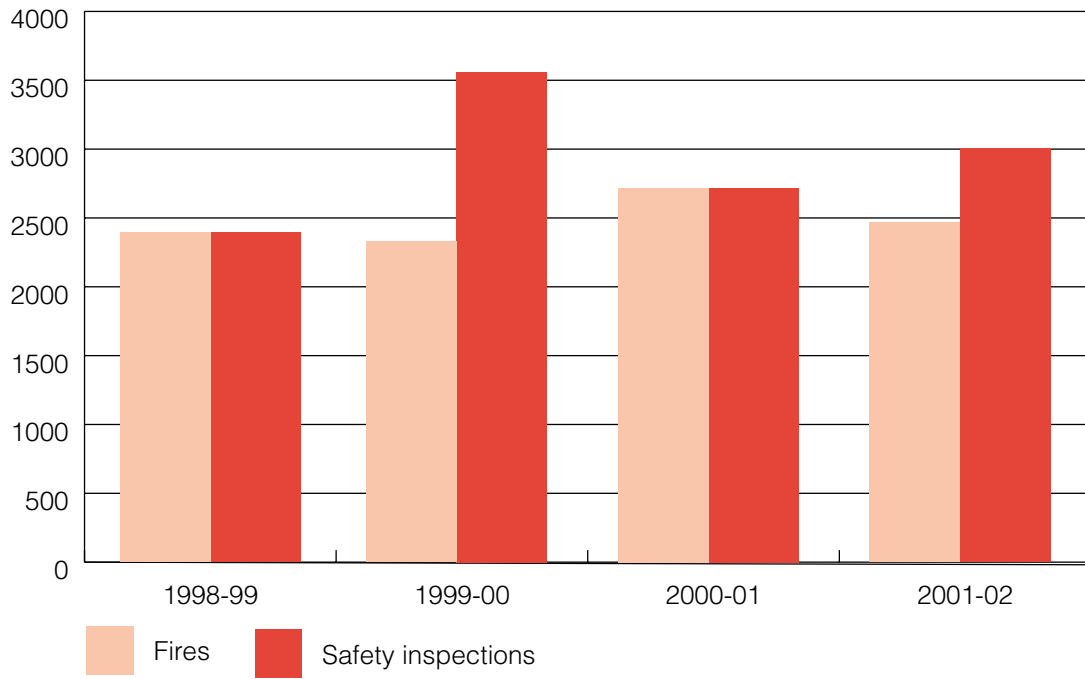
Cost per 1000 Population (£)



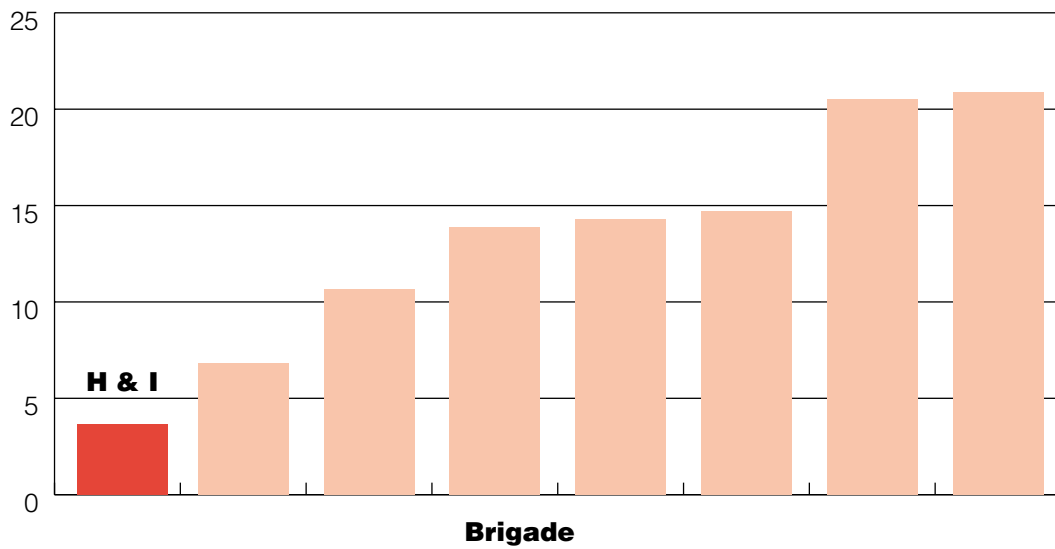
Number of Emergency Calls per Control Operator



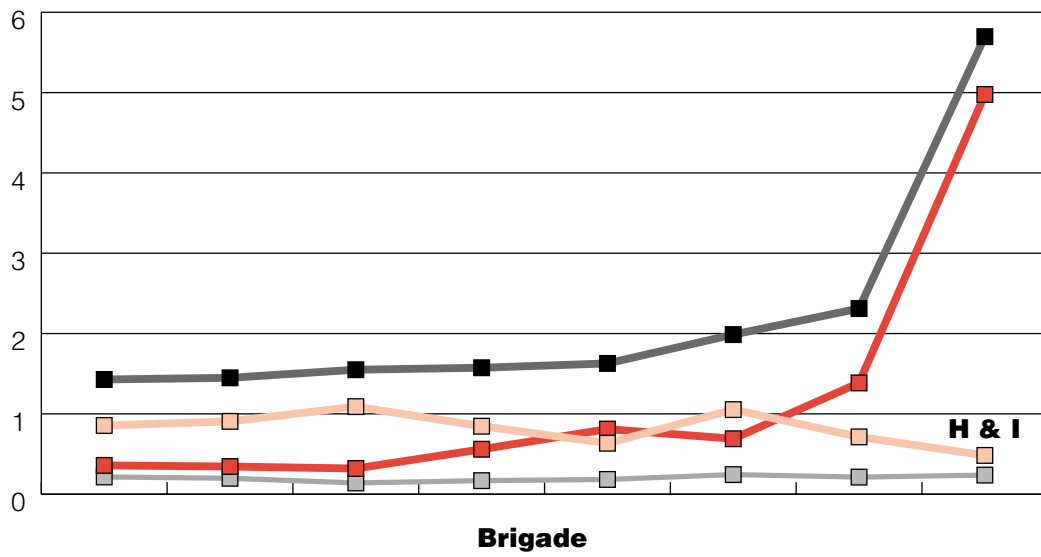
Number of Fires v Safety Inspections in Highland & Islands for last four years



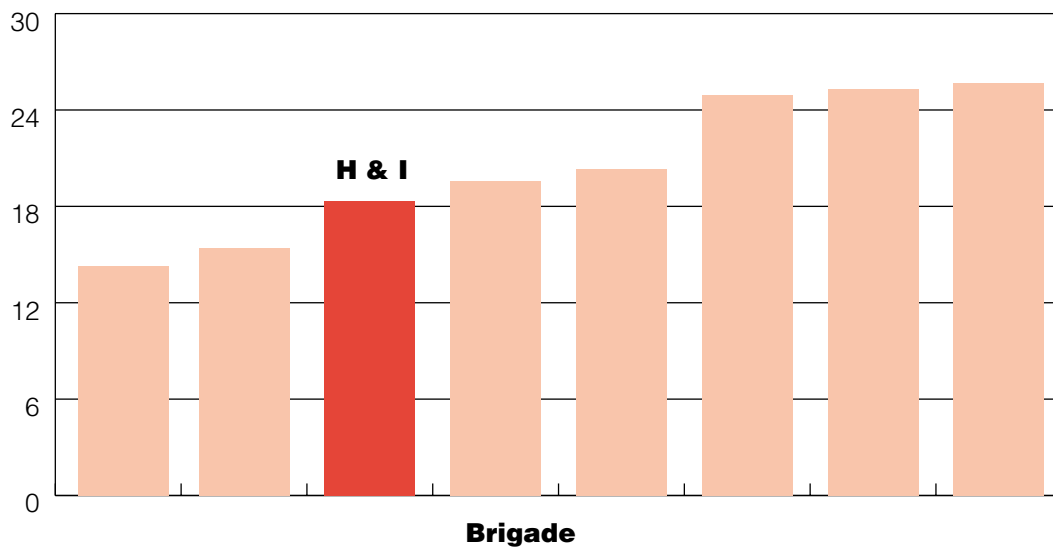
Number of Incidents per Firefighter



Actual Number of Staff per 1000 Population



Number of Incidents per 1000 population



STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategic Management is concerned with leadership direction and effective performance of desired outcomes.

Activities include management and planning of all resources and assets together with financial and performance monitoring. Consultation and information management are also important aspects with this activity.

Overview

10. Senior management within the Brigade has remained constant during the past year so helping provide a stable platform for further service consolidation and improvement. Emphasis has remained with the development of the extensive programme of upgrading of existing Volunteer Units and work on the Private Public Partnership has advanced. There are concerns about the overall impact of internal and external pressures on the small team of senior staff and a number of unresourced demands continue to exist. Key issues are:

- ◆ Resolve of organisational structure and management capacity.
- ◆ Conclusion of the first stage of the Public Private Partnership investigation.
- ◆ Review of staff resourcing in fire control, the use of flexible duty officers and the status of part-time staff.
- ◆ Introduction of comprehensive Management Information Systems.
- ◆ Conclusion of emergency fire cover arrangements.

Management Structure

11. The Fire Board has recently considered a proposal from the Firemaster that the existing management arrangements be enhanced to better meet the Brigade's evolving needs. Central to these requirements are a more sustainable strategic leadership and refined support mechanism together with divisional reorganisation. The proposal was accepted subject to adequate funding being obtained, the additional annual cost representing about £300,000.

12. The arrangements proposed received cursory review at the time of the inspection and do appear to reflect a more robust system of management with a stronger functional basis and a better supported divisional structure. In addition, the appointment of an Assistant Firemaster is judged most appropriate given the continuing pressures placed upon individual Brigade strategic managers. **Such a post will also help enhance operational response, an important factor in the developing context of meeting an extended role to compensate for increased public risk which brigades are now seeking to address.**

13. It is important, however, that in introducing any structure there is a general avoidance of individuals simply being appointed as deputies to other managers. Rather, the Inspectorate's preferred approach is that each individual should hold specific responsibilities within their own personal accountabilities. The mechanisms to support any new postholders, in the co-ordination and delivery of their responsibilities, are a further key feature. It is also highly likely to be necessary to introduce further cultural and developmental training if the restructuring is to offer real subsequent benefit. Adequate arrangements should be made to address these issues. **The Inspectorate is generally,**



therefore, supportive of what the Brigade is trying to achieve, particularly in regard to strategic and functional management, provided adequate accountability, support, training and business processes are also put in place.

Service Planning

14. Considerable information has been supplied by the Brigade to illustrate its current service planning approach. This approach has been developed over a period of some years and now shows integration between strategy, resource allocation and output monitoring. Consultation arrangements exist between internal and external stakeholders and there are frequent exchanges between the Fire Board, Brigade management and those engaged in service delivery. The process may therefore be described as more refined and better integrated than previously.

15. It was emphasised by Brigade managers that the planning intention and approach now recognises the essential feature of trying to keep outcomes to realistic achievement levels and there is evidence that this approach has been followed within departments. The detailed Service Plan therefore clearly shows actions with key managers and milestones, together with resource allocations in terms of management time. Service planning outcomes are subsequently reported as achievements following the conclusion of each year's activities, so enabling the Fire Board and senior management to track progress. Where actions cannot be completed within the timescale originally allocated, or other priorities demand substitution of activities, the Service Plan Achievement Report illustrates these changes. This integration of the planning process therefore does incorporate a far better defined area of resource, both human and financial, which is an important factor given that the Brigade currently expends around £1 million above GAE.

16. The organisation of the planning process is designed to meet SMART criteria and the Performance Management Team undertake an informal SWOT analysis prior to the inclusion of any item within the Service Plan. It is also to be noted that the service planning process has incorporated recommendations previously made by HM Inspectorate in terms of improvements to the overall planning process.

17. It was identified that local circumstances do drive the fire service agenda. A particular example is the current activity being undertaken as part of the Public Private Partnership (PPP). This PPP initiative is now fully engaging a range of individuals and particularly the Deputy Firemaster, who is spending a considerable amount of his working time progressing this initiative. The PPP initiative is to be reported upon to the Fire Board later this autumn, but it is apparent that considerable lessons and information has already been gathered, and ultimately a great deal more information will be available regarding the Brigade's assets. **This is therefore a positive outcome regardless of the decision that is made in terms of implementation, partial implementation, or no implementation, of any PPP approach.** The planning approach adopted for capital consent will also reflect this situation with either a PPP option or not, depending on the final decision.

18. Overall, the service planning process appears to be meeting the defined needs of the Brigade. Formal devolution to managers of aspects of the planning process is now occurring to departmental level. In addition the Brigade has introduced a five-year service review schedule, which horizon scans important issues and is now fully integrated within the three-year Service Plan. **One modest improvement would be the use of less generic titles within the service review schedule so as to enable them to be identified more easily as activities within the subsequent Service Plan.**



Managerial Commitment

19. **The Brigade does not have a comprehensive or dedicated continuous development process for personnel, although it is considering both the use of employee surveys and the EFQM Model.** Essentially the relationship between senior management is fairly informal, given the relative scale of the Brigade Management Team and routine feedback information is therefore expressed routinely and openly. It is apparent that the Firemaster has determined to create a more open inclusive style of working which should further facilitate a better exchange of information by helping increase managerial access at first hand to quality information.

20. **It is important that a process be adopted or developed that does allow evaluation of individual performance and recognition of contribution within a structured framework.** It was advised that the Deputy Firemaster currently disseminates information on a structured basis. This does enable individual managers to give consideration to both the benefits and resource implications of attending external learning activities. It was advised that senior management do consider the relative learning needs of individual managers to ensure that there is overall corporate capacity within the Brigade to meet managerial requirements.

21. The changes being made within the management structure are a clear indication the Brigade does understand the difficulties of management performance and the recent proposals will help achieve greater effectiveness.

22. The Brigade has sought to further expand its external liaison role, in a formal way within the community, through the Wellbeing Alliance. This Alliance, which is based around the Community Planning Alliance administered by Highland Council, includes a community safety steering group to which the Firemaster has now been appointed as Chairman. It is interesting to note that, although the Brigade was not mentioned in the strategic plan developed nearly three years ago and is not one of the stated key partners, its activities in community safety form part of the strategic plan. **It is to be hoped that in future, stronger recognition of the Brigade's role will find its way into the reported strategic planning process of the Wellbeing Alliance so that the Brigade contribution to the wider public need will thereby be recognised.**

23. It was also advised that officers are routinely briefed twice a year on significant Brigade matters. Many of these officers hold functional responsibilities and this is one of the meeting's benefits, offering all the opportunity to influence, as a key component in how the Brigade organises and demonstrates its commitment to good practice. The Brigade seeks to learn from other organisations and routinely contributes to the wider fire service agenda. **Placing this commitment in a more structured format would be helpful in showing that there is systematic development of key people and recognition exists of all staff and their contribution to the organisation.**

24. Considerable external involvement has also been undertaken in the general area of Best Value. The Brigade is active in all organisational aspects of the fire service related to this important initiative and has established itself as a key player in the overall performance management process. Typically, internal reviews are on a quarterly basis, with a series of local, statutory and Scottish performance indicators set as a series of defined benchmarks.



25. **The contribution of senior managers within the overall CACFOA (Scotland) Best Value working arrangements is positive and well recognised.** Defined processes therefore exist to ensure that Best Value review work, when undertaken, fully meets the criteria established by the Best Value recommended approach. Evidence was seen of a Best Value Review (BVR) undertaken by the Brigade into staffing arrangements within the Administrative Department, which illustrated this level of commitment.

Resource Management

26. As already mentioned, the Brigade has developed over recent years its capacity to meet new demands, such as review of fire cover and legislative change linked to issues common across the fire service in Scotland. As part of this review process the Brigade has determined that the management structure needs revision on a more functional basis to help it meet these demands. In addition, the majority of administrative staff are currently subject to single status review, which is being undertaken by the Highland Council. Already outlined and linked in part to these arrangements is the approach of a more inclusive management system and the inclusion of more extended partnership working arrangements through CACFOA (Scotland).

27. Whilst there has been no formal adoption of the EFQM Model, it is clear that the Brigade does adopt, together with the Board, a clear strategy which sets out to conduct Best Value Reviews in accordance with the generally accepted methods. These reviews are introduced into the five-year service review schedule previously mentioned. Scheduling in this way helps provide early alert of situations which are likely to require planning effort.

28. Already mentioned in this report are the demands placed upon the Deputy Firemaster arising from the Brigade's engagement in the PPP Initiative. **The service review schedule will need to recognise both a positive and negative outcome to this review as part of its planned future actions.**

29. The Performance Management Committee of senior managers reviews routinely progress against all defined milestones using the mechanism previously described for performance indicators. The resourcing of each part of the process is considered as each action is adopted within the formal Service Plan. There is synergy, therefore, between the horizon scanning process and the actual introduction of service objectives and their ultimate measurement. Identification of components for inclusion within the service review schedule is undertaken by the Performance Management Committee, which provides advice to the Brigade Management Team who may amend the strategy accordingly.

30. **Little work has been able to be undertaken in terms of cost cutting BVRs due to the resource capacity of the organisation, although there is commitment to this approach.** There are indications of a strategic consultation within the process of establishing resource issues and the Senior Management Team, together with the Fire Board, are actively engaged in the overall process. BVRs, when undertaken, do follow the currently accepted CACFOA Service Review Model, which has been adopted throughout Scotland. Staff, where necessary, are supported, to enable them to carry out reviews and the review reports themselves do contain most of the elements that are expected within a BVR.



31. Of significant importance within the Brigade is the resourcing of fire cover and this is a matter referred to later in this report. An illustration of the complications that arise from this programme is the need to fund additional training for Auxiliary Firefighters. Again this is an area in which the Brigade is trying to be realistic about its target setting, given that it will require considerable additional external funding if it is to be successful. Fire cover was last reviewed in the year 2000 and will require to be updated subsequently in five years' time, during which period it is likely a new method of risk assessment will be suitably defined.

32. The Brigade has undertaken an employee survey but did not carry through the public opinion survey as originally intended. The employee survey concluded in May 2002 provides an indication that there is support for training and development of individuals and a Performance Management Committee works with the internal Training Department to help identify individual and group training needs. The Brigade also operates a role related policy in which training is given specifically to those who require it for their operational or managerial role. The Brigade Training Officer is required to undertake a systematic review of all learning outcomes as part of the training audit process. In addition, as already mentioned, individual officers are briefed on Brigade objectives and performance expectations and progress is monitored against local departmental plans. The Brigade also supports external learning opportunities, including degree level education, where appropriate, for senior staff. The overall ethos that the Brigade aspires to is that of a learning organisation and the corporate statement in desired management style illustrates this commitment.

33. Operational resources are also subject to review, primarily through the Fire Cover Review process referred to later. Agreement has also been reached with neighbouring brigades where necessary, with the exception of Strathclyde, on mobilising mutual aid and support. On the Island of Unst the RAF are also involved in a formal agreement relating to fire cover. **Highland and Islands Brigade remains the only brigade in Scotland to maintain an offshore capability, operated from four locations – at Invergordon, Benbecula, Orkney and Shetland.**

34. The current attendance to property fires of two pumps is undertaken against a criterion of a minimum of three riders on any appliance. A risk assessment is conducted, where necessary, to permit this level of availability and use of minimum staffed crews. All major pumping appliances have been equipped with some road traffic accident equipment. The current ridership factor is 5.8 riders per rider position.

35. Routine performance management data are collated by Fire Control on all operational activities. **Control Room staffing remains a difficult area, with a minimum complement of two staff being on duty.** There are also concerns about the availability of heavy rescue equipment, given the large geographic area of the Brigade and, although use is made of helicopters for forest firefighting, this facility is not generally available due to cost and other practical considerations for routine operations. **This is an issue of some importance** and is illustrated by the fact that responses to hazardous material incidents are reliant upon resources from Inverness and, through non-formalised mutual aid arrangements, Strathclyde Fire Brigade.

36. In addition, officer command at incidents relies on the goodwill of officers to respond off-duty. This is a situation, which would not materially change, even with increased resources at the more isolated locations, such as islands. **It does occasionally give concern that the Brigade is so reliant upon a very flexible approach by its key managers.**



37. The Brigade has recently indicated to the Scottish Executive that it believes all its Auxiliary part-time firefighters should be upgraded to the status of Retained. It is accepted that this is a mechanism which would enable, in the Brigade's view, further resources to be obtained and then deployed to help mitigate some of the practical constraints and difficulties outlined. **It is, however, a matter that would require the widest discussion led by the Scottish Executive, given its impact on other brigades.**

38. Overall performance by part-time staff remains high, with the availability being indicated at 99.1%. This availability does, of course, reflect in part the low numbers of calls occasioned at some fire stations.

39. The Brigade relies on special appliances based at Inverness, which include a hydraulic platform and rescue tender. It has conducted a review of requirements throughout its area and does not propose any increases in aerial appliances, although it would wish to introduce a rescue tender in the south of the Brigade area at some time in the future. **It has not reviewed the actual location of road traffic accidents throughout its area, which should be a precursor to any further provision of a rescue tender.**

Consultation

40. The Brigade has a defined process for consulting key stakeholders, which was reviewed in 1998. The process has identified those key organisations and individuals, particularly within the community, that should be consulted and various mechanisms are introduced to enable this to be taken forward. In addition the Firemaster produces an Annual Public Performance Report. A range of usual methods are used to inform staff of ongoing issues. The Brigade website is currently being redesigned and routine performance data are widely distributed. As already mentioned, an employee survey has been conducted and an external survey will be commenced. Together with a number of other Scottish brigades, Highland and Islands does utilise the services of a consultant to assist in the development of its consultation process. The results of consultation are utilised in the development of the Service Plan and service review schedule.

41. There is no formalised media plan, but senior staff do release routine information to the media when required with politically sensitive statements also being routinely issued by the Firemaster or Convener. The wide range of information on outcomes reported through the service plan is also distributed to all members of the Fire Board and therefore generally accessible.

42. Opportunity was taken during the Inspection to meet with a senior official of the Fire Brigades Union. He confirmed that consultation did occur on strategic issues contained within the Service Plan and that, generally, the Union was aware of the developing policies of the Brigade.

43. He confirmed that internal consultation arrangements were generally businesslike and members of the Fire Brigades Union had been invited to join management on a number of occasions during discussions on service policy. Internally there did not appear to be serious difficulties in terms of the dissemination of information, although it was accepted that individual stations were not always clear as to the overall direction of some of the service policy. Attempts were, however, clearly made to try, at a local level, to improve the situation. In general industrial relations were stated to be satisfactory, although mediation proceedings using external arbitrators were underway at one station.



44. Industrial relationships were generally described as good and the working arrangements with senior management effective. Management was also seen to be generally supportive of trade union activity, encouraging staff development and team working. Management does have a formal process for consultation with this trade union at Brigade management and departmental level. Management on a needs basis also meets Unison and AEEU. Quarterly all three trades unions attend the Brigade Health and Safety Committee and there is therefore a regular exchange of views.

Information Management

45. Information management remains a key concern within the Brigade. A consultant was appointed to undertake a review of the use of information technology and a comprehensive information strategy has now been developed. Although considered by Brigade management to be an appropriate way of taking the Brigade forward, the strategy, which includes all the essential strands of integration between technologies and people, has unfortunately not been taken forward due to a lack of resources. This comprehensive strategy, reviewed during the inspection, does provide considerable scope for the development of the organisation and its ability to meet current and ongoing demands. It is particularly important given the large geographic nature of the Brigade and the limited human resources of senior staff. **It therefore represents a priority area for the Brigade to advance as soon as possible.**

Performance Monitoring

46. **Considerable mention has already been made of the extensive performance monitoring arrangements that exist within this brigade, which are recorded as good.** The Brigade, for example, was responsible for the establishing of the peer group review audit system undertaken to assess health and safety, using the ROSPA arrangements. Partly as a result of these reviews identification has been made of the need to better utilise internal facilities and arrangements are already underway to relocate, in this financial year, a number of administrative staff from the current Headquarters to the nearby Seafield Road, Inverness site.

47. The Brigade has also now networked its Oracle-based financial system which will enable a better use to be made of its financial information. It is also expanding the Brigade's intranet, using eleven ISDN lines so that all districts, together with Benbecula, will be able to access and utilise Brigade information. In addition it is seeking an Information Technology-based fire safety package to assist in its performance management in that area.

Fire Cover Review

48. The Brigade's Fire Cover Review has been the subject of extensive discussion between the Fire Board, Brigade, HM Fire Service Inspectorate and Scottish Executive over a number of years. Detailed proposals had been made and admirable progress has been maintained in the improvement of facilities and equipment throughout the Brigade's area.



49. The detailed nature of the proposals has been the subject of regular review by the Inspectorate and the following conclusions were made following the last full consideration of the issue in June 2001:

- ◆ **All communities require an appropriate level of protection.**
- ◆ **Assessment of risk, as outlined by the Brigade and their comprehensive study, is not fully supported.**
- ◆ **Successful risk reduction requires greater emphasis on community safety approaches.**
- ◆ **A balanced service delivery of prevention and intervention actions should be developed, with investment from the Scottish Executive.**
- ◆ **The proposed upgrading programme represents, in overall expenditure comparison terms, a costly option to lowering risk.**
- ◆ **There are implications for all Scottish fire authorities in supporting the programme, namely redistribution of borrowing consents and revenue support.**
- ◆ **Prior to the provision of further equipment, firefighter safety requirements require a discussion at national level with the Health and Safety Executive.**
- ◆ **Greater involvement in defining the role of the rural and retained firefighter, in both firefighting and rescue and in fire safety education and advice, should be fully supported by the Scottish Executive.**

50. During the current inspection a further review of progress was undertaken and visits were made to a range of facilities. These included Sleat, Minginish, Dunvegan, Melvich, Thurso, Portree, Broadford, Durness, Tongue, Bettyhill, John O' Groats, Wick, Lybster, Dunbeath, Helmsdale, Fort William, Ardgour, Strontian, Lochaline, Acharacle, Glenborrodale, Glenuig, Invergordon, Achiltbuie, Lochinver, Scourie, Achfary, Ullapool, Larig, Bonar Bridge, Beauly, Cannich, Drumnadrochit, Fort Augustus, Foyers, Carrbridge, Nethybridge, Boat of Garten, Aviemore, Kingussie, Newtonmore and Inverness. A fairly comprehensive picture was gained from these visits as to both the nature and quality of facilities, the respective levels of competency of staff when seen, the support network available and the managerial supervision systems in place to develop and monitor individual and team performance and response. Those individual members of staff seen were inevitably enthused and committed to their role as a firefighter and the performance witnessed in practical training indicated successful application of skills to the task being undertaken.

51. The central ethos applied by the Inspectorate throughout inspections and visits in assessing efficiency is that all firefighters, whatever their location and duty system, must be adequately trained and protected. Without this basic requirement being satisfied the service delivered to the public is unsatisfactory and the risk to the individual firefighter unacceptable. It is recognised that the Fire Board shares this underlying ethos and through its continuing efforts, with the support of the Scottish Executive, has sought to address inefficiencies.

52. It is also the Inspectorate's view that there is a requirement, when applying any risk assessment process to an area, of ensuring that both the likelihood and severity of fire are measured in terms of cost and benefit to the community. This approach has particular



relevance in the Brigade since communities are dispersed and fortunately the frequency of fire can be quite low or involve outdoor property, such as heaths or building fires contained within chimneys, presenting a low risk to life. This need has recently been reinforced by the progress report on the UK Fire Cover Review which stated that in addressing resource allocation strategies "in some circumstances resources are targeted at areas where there are only a few individuals at intolerable risk, which can be expensive on a *per capita* basis".

53. The Inspectorate accepts that all communities retain in their basic risk profile, often arising from non-fire events like road accidents, a threat to life. In remote locations this risk is affected by the increased travel time necessitated for response by the emergency services.

54. The generally accepted fire risk management philosophy in recognising these two points is that any action taken should firstly seek to reduce or remove risk whenever possible (prevention) and that, secondly, any emergency response (intervention) be appropriate, both in terms of those skilled and protected staff who will respond with suitable appliances and equipment, and the availability of those staff for immediate despatch.

55. Evaluation and assessment of the current operational capacity of the Brigade by the Inspectorate suggests that this important criterion is not, at some locations, being satisfied. This, despite the current endeavours of the Fire Board and the programme of improvement undertaken to date, which has been effective in a number of areas. **It is therefore the clear view of the Inspectorate that there needs to be an objective reconciliation of the existing programme to enable it to reach a defined conclusion.**

56. The current approach may in some regards be described as evolutionary. This evolutionary approach presents a number of difficulties, both in the short term for training and in the longer term, for sustaining the organisation created, given the overall limited corporate capacity of the Brigade. This corporate capacity is limited in areas like central training, continuous personal development, individual operational experience, station supervision and operational support management. It is also impacted upon by individual levels of commitment to undertake the additional personal development required or in offering manageable elements of personal commitment to enable the Brigade to ensure actual response. Added to these considerations are a range of other statutory and good practice requirements and advice designed to ensure the effectiveness of the system and the health, safety and welfare of individual firefighters. A direct consequence for the community is that without this corporate capacity the effectiveness of any emergency cover is unlikely to be satisfied.

57. **The Inspectorate considers that the current arrangements, especially from those locations operating non-mobile units placed in small garden sheds, are not efficient, represent an implied standard of protection to communities which is not realisable, and present an unacceptable risk to firefighters operating from those sites.** A view has therefore been taken on those locations which offer good strategic emergency fire cover options for the whole of the Brigade's operational area. In these locations it is important that all firefighters are, as has been previously emphasised, suitably trained and protected and immediately available to respond.

58. **By adopting this Inspectorate option it is concluded that it is not essential to mount intervention operations from all existing sites and that in isolated communities life safety from fire can be better assured using alternative arrangements.**



59. **It is the view of the Inspectorate that implementing these safety, equipment, competency and availability matters should not be delayed and comprehensive action should be taken to ensure that within two years training and protection has been afforded to all firefighters.** Thereafter it is essential that all firefighters are subjected and supported by a management process, of suitable capacity and assets, to ensure the required levels of efficiency are sustained.

60. **The Brigade should, in the light of the preceding and following comments, assess the current underprovision and prepare a short-term plan to rectify the identified deficiencies.**

61. Planning should use the existing pragmatic assumptions in terms of the facilities and vehicles required at each location. It is seen as undesirable and uneconomic to attempt a "one size fits all" solution, since current assumptions have attempted to match facilities to risk. Rather, buildings of various forms with vehicles of a kind appropriate to the equipment, staffing and terrain are acceptable, given the terrain, the risk and the likely use. Similarly prioritising further property improvements should reflect functional requirements like the need to maintain breathing apparatus, record training, house communications, provide drying and cleaning for fire kit and allow for personal dignity and hygiene. Large premises are not essential, but practical working arrangements to effectively meet service needs are. The plan should conclude by indicating how and at what cost these short-term improvements are likely to be achieved and be capable of delivery within a two-year timescale.

62. **The plan should then be subjected to further review and discussion with the Inspectorate, Health and Safety Executive and Scottish Executive so that confirmation of effective emergency provision, discharge of responsibilities and support for the funding required can be obtained.**

63. It is recognised that the PPP initiative now underway may be affected by this action but the issue is of such importance that it should not be delayed if the achievement of protection for the community and firefighter is to occur within two years.

64. **Thereafter planning is needed to meet the general sustainability issues identified. Community safety planning should also be undertaken. In all regards it is important that the Scottish Executive are engaged in this process, given the financial implications.**

65. This importance is underlined by the Scottish Executive's funding mechanism of GAE and the distribution to fire authorities, based in part upon establishment. Alterations to accommodate any improvements, that is wholtime or part-time personnel to meet sustainability requirements, will impact on the fire service as a whole in Scotland. **The Scottish Executive will need to consider this matter in conjunction with all Scottish brigades.**

66. **The Scottish Executive should also consider funding of trial projects within the community safety-planning programme as part of its general promotion of community fire safety.** This is an activity which the Fire Board cannot presently undertake, although this may alter following legislative changes now being considered. The protection of residential communities through installed preventative systems, using fixed detection and active systems, is worthy of greater exploration in isolated communities as an alternative to intervention. Sustaining such systems, once established, will be an important feature.



67. **It is also crucial that improvements are made at Invergordon and Fort William to support any sustainable training programme.** Each facility is in need of renovation to meet current and future needs. At Fort William, on a new site with equally good access to the town, training facilities could be introduced to the benefit of a wide catchment area. **The need to change the duty system at Fort William for fire cover purposes cannot be supported or justified at present** but there remain substantial arguments to increase the number of specialist wholetime staff located in Fort William to assist in supporting those part-time firefighters operating in the south of the Brigade's operational area. The Brigade should also consider other options for realistic training.

68. In determining the approach outlined of strategic locations the Inspectorate has had due regard to the existing operational activity levels and facilities already in place or underway. Some of the modern fire station facilities seen offer a substantial step forward to the Brigade and represent a creditable achievement. It is essential, however, that this effort is now underpinned by appropriate infrastructure, human and material, if the Brigade is to secure the professional service it now seeks.

69. The preferred emphasis now needs to turn towards supporting what is already or will shortly be on the ground. **This is vitally important given that with such a large number of operational stations the Brigade will have one of the most extensive operational networks in the UK serving one of the smaller populations with the highest number of part-time staff.**

70. Those strategic locations identified as developed, under development or suitable for future development are shown in Figure 1.

71. Two communities included, which may be worthy of review, are Scalpay and Scourie. In the first case the bridge to the mainland of Lewis has now provided access to the established resource at Tarbert. In Scourie's case established resources exist at Kinlochbervie and Lochinver.

72. Three other communities included in the disposition, which may represent suitable areas for the trial development of community safety practices, are Bressay, John O' Groats and Foyers. All these communities have access to services but are also remote, one being on an island, the others some distance by road from established resources. All also have small communities which may have difficulty in sustaining the commitment, referred to earlier, relating to guaranteed availability and personal development time. Community safety measures at these locations would enable evaluation of safety improvement, other than by intervention, to be thoroughly undertaken.



FIGURE 1 STRATEGIC EMERGENCY COVER LOCATIONS

Acharacle	Gairloch	Portree
Achiltbuie	Glenelg	Raasay
Applecross	Golspie	Rousay
Aultbea	Grantown on Spey	Sanday
Aviemore	Great Bernera	Sandwick
Baltasound	Helmsdale	Scalloway
Bayhead	Hillswick	Scalpay
Beauly	Invergordon	Scourie
Benbecula	Inverness	Shapinsay
Bettyhill	John O' Groats	Shawbost
Bixter	Kilchoan	Skerries
Bonar Bridge	Kingussie	South Lochs
Brae	Kinlochbervie	Staffin
Bressay	Kinlochewe	Strontian
Broadford	Kinlochleven	Stornoway
Cannich	Kirkwall	St Margaret's Hope
Castlebay	Kyle of Lochalsh	Stromness
Dingwall	Lairg	Stronsay
Dornoch	Lerwick	Sumburgh
Drumnadrochit	Leverburgh	Tain
Dunbeath	Lochaline	Tarbert
Dunvegan	Lochboisdale	Thurso
Durness	Lochcarron	Tongue
Eday	Lochinver	Torrison
Fair Isle	Lochmaddy	Uig
Fetlar	Longhope	Ullapool
Flotta	Mallaig	Valtos
Fort Augustus	Mid Yell	Walls
Fortrose	Nairn	Westray
Fort William	Ness	Whalsay
Foyers	North Ronaldsay	Wick
Foula	Papa Westray	

73. In expressing the views, and in particular identifying strategic locations, the Inspectorate accepts individual communities may disagree with the evaluation or wish to offer alternatives. The process of review has, however, been influenced by what action towards improvement has already been taken and the likely practical outcome on improving life safety. The operational response provided will have the highest density of fire stations *per capita* of any brigade [1:2,954] being around 10 times the UK average of 1:29,131 people. In Scotland the comparator average is 1:14,360. It is also important to reiterate, since there is an understandable desire for communities to have recognisable protection in the form of a fire station, that the evidence is that most fire deaths occur in the home and within a period of minutes from people realising a fire has occurred. A direct consequence of this is that improvements made through community safety in the home, to alert and allow escape or tackle small incipient fires, are more likely to save lives and property, especially in remote locations, than improved intervention.



The following two sections, referring to Finance Management and Capital Finance, were prepared, following review independent of HM Fire Service Inspectorate, by Audit Scotland, the appointed external auditor.

Financial Management

74. Highland and Islands Fire Board adopted standing orders and financial regulations on 28 November 1995. **The standing orders have been subject to review and the Board adopted revised standing orders on 27 January 2002. A similar review requires to be undertaken of the financial regulations to ensure they are still appropriate** to the Board and take account of changes in legislation resulting from the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994 and the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. After revision standing orders and financial regulations should be subject to regular review particularly where there are changes in legislation or accounting practices.

75. The Brigade has been developing new procurement procedures with the assistance of the Procurement Manager of the Highland Council. The Brigade Management Team will approve the new procedures in October 2002. Although we have not undertaken a comprehensive review of these procedures we noted that they set out the respective responsibilities of the Brigade Management Team and the budget holder; the requirement to undertake feasibility studies to address identified needs; specification and procurement guidance; tender and contract procedures.

76. The four constituent authorities, Highland Council, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council and Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, fund the Brigade's annual revenue budget. The budget for 2002/03 is approximately 9.8% above the Granted Aided Expenditure (GAE) assessment.

77. The Board has three-year budgeting and has prepared a 10-year projection of anticipated firefighters pension costs.

78. The Brigade has a comprehensive service planning, recording and reporting process, linked to its corporate strategy, which feeds into the budget planning cycle. The process has been developed by use of a local service planning framework which is directly linked to the corporate plan. Individual projects are monitored on a regular basis by the Brigade Management Team to ensure planned timescales are being achieved. Although requests for additional budgets/improvements come through this process and are ranked no growth items were included in the 2002/03 budget due to financial constraints.

79. Most heads of expenditure are devolved to budget holders with the exception of retained and auxiliary firefighters' costs, which can vary due to the number of incidents attended. The Brigade has a comprehensive budget monitoring system that includes monthly monitoring reports to budget holders and the Brigade Management Team.

80. We reviewed the minutes of the Brigade Management Team and noted reference to the need to keep expenditure within budget. **However, it was not evident from the minutes whether revenue monitoring reports were discussed at Team meetings.** In our view the Team's agenda should include revenue monitoring statements as an agenda item on at least a quarterly basis with more detailed reports, incorporating explanations for variances, on a six-monthly basis.



81. The Firemaster submits revenue monitoring reports to each meeting of the Board. The report to the Board on 29 November 2001 included a table outlining significant variances for Members' information. We commend this practice.

82. Annual statutory performance indicators are submitted to Audit Scotland and the Brigade also provides information to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) for inclusion in their annual publication of fire service statistics. The Brigade has been at the forefront of the development of local performance indicators. A group of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association (CACFOA) is also addressing the development of local performance indicators.

83. The Brigade's Third Officer chairs a quarterly meeting of the Brigade Management Team to review all aspects of Brigade performance.

Capital Finance

84. A capital programme has been prepared for years 2002/03 to 2004/05.

85. All capital projects are progressed on behalf of the Brigade by Highland Council's Property and Architectural Services. The Head of Finance and Administration and Divisional Officer (Senior Fire Safety Officer) have regular meetings with staff in Property and Architectural Services to discuss progress on capital projects. Thereafter the Firemaster and Deputy Firemaster are informed of the progress of projects and this can be included on the Brigade Management Team's agenda on an exception basis, i.e. if the project is not progressing as expected. The Director of Property and Architectural Services also submits detailed progress reports on capital projects to the quarterly meetings of the Board.

86. The Fire Brigade is developing an asset register/property database which, in addition to the property reference, will include details of the construction, layout and maintenance history of each fire station. This register will be completed in the current year and should assist the Brigade in the management of its property portfolio.



OPERATIONS

Fire service operations represent response and intervention at a very wide range of incidents requiring effective co-ordination, planning, research and development.

Overview

87. Progress continues in development of the planning process within the Operations Sections with continuous monitoring of tasks and use of performance indicators being a key feature. The ongoing upgrade of Auxiliary Fire Stations appears to be having a major impact on the ability of existing staff to meet their normal commitments. The current management review needs to clearly identify the support structure required to sustain the expanding service. A number of areas were identified where improvements were possible with the following being the main points for consideration:

- ◆ To carry out operational risk assessments linked to resources and support structure necessary to deliver the outcomes.
- ◆ Prioritisation of workloads.
- ◆ Review to be carried out of Fire Control.
- ◆ Provision of essential communication equipment.
- ◆ To review procurement arrangements.
- ◆ Policy and formalised arrangements for maintenance.

General Policy and Planning

88. The planning process is now well developed and appears to be clearly understood by all stakeholders. The Local/Departmental Plans reflect the Corporate Aims of the Brigade with specific objectives being identified along with personnel responsible and days allocated for completion. Progress monitoring of these tasks being carried out at the quarterly meetings of the Performance Review Group and is also a standing agenda item at Brigade Management Team meetings. The objectives set for the Operations Sections are laudable, **however, in meeting these objectives the effect on current and future workloads should be assessed to ensure that service delivery is not compromised. In addition, although a robust planning process is now in place the inputs to this process require to be reviewed. (See Organisation and Structure.)**

89. A key element of the planning process is the ability to measure performance and where necessary to provide benchmarks. It is pleasing to note the Brigade's commitment to this process by the positive use of Statutory and Key Performance Indicators, Local Performance Indicators developed by CACFOA as well as Brigade Internal Performance Indicators designed to measure specific functions or areas of Brigade activity. A company has also been contracted to carry out surveys of premises that have been involved in emergency incidents to determine their satisfaction or otherwise with the level of service provided and the performance of crews attending.



Organisation and Structure

90. It is acknowledged that a more sustainable strategic leadership is being considered for the Brigade, however, as highlighted under Management Structure, the mechanisms to support the postholders are also a key feature. Although progress has been made in relation to Operational Risk assessments by the production of a Fire/Incident Plan Template very few actual assessments have been carried out. There were also a number of other risk critical areas identified during the inspection that need to be addressed. Staff suggested that they could not deal with these issues due to existing workload commitments. The continual upgrade of Auxiliary Fire Stations has also had a major impact on the workload of existing staff therefore the sustainability of these plus future upgrades requires to be urgently addressed. The health, safety and welfare of personnel should be a fundamental requirement to the allocation of resources and prioritisation of workloads therefore **in the interests of firefighters safety management should:**

- ◆ Carry out an operational risk assessment throughout the Brigade area to determine what operational activities require to be delivered.
- ◆ Carry out an assessment of the resources and support structure necessary along with the financial implications for the effective delivery of all activities identified.
- ◆ Ensure that management functions are devolved to appropriate levels with workloads and responsibilities being clearly identified.
- ◆ Prioritise existing and future workloads with expected outcomes identified and within definitive timescales.

91. The Brigade has formed a working group to investigate interoperability, equipment compatibility and other joint working arrangements at cross-border incidents. In addition, a policy document and training note has been agreed by the Management Team regarding a revised Incident Command and Control System. It is understood training in the new system will commence in April 2003 with implementation scheduled for July 2003. **In the interests of firefighters' safety both these issues should be completed at the earliest opportunity.**

Communications and Control

92. There has been no further progress regarding the Best Value Review of Brigade Control. However, a very comprehensive document *Control Profile – Core Objectives* has been produced by the Fire Control Officer and an analysis of all call handling arrangements and review of staffing levels has been carried out. **It is again suggested the Brigade may wish to utilise the results of this initial work to inform a Best Value Review of Fire Control.**

93. From evidence provided it was established that in excess of 50 Fire Stations that are provided with Home Office Specification (GD 92) communications equipment are only provided with a primary communications bearer. **This is not considered to be a desirable arrangement and the Brigade should address the provision of a secondary independent bearer to these Fire Stations as a matter of urgency. In addition, the provision of such facilities should be considered as an inclusive requirement within the brief for the provision of any new or replacement Fire Station.**



94. The existing fireground radios provided on all fire appliances are not of the Intrinsically Safe (IS) type and therefore cannot be utilised at incidents involving flammable atmospheres. It is considered the provision of four IS radios carried on the Emergency Tender at Inverness is insufficient to ensure the safety of firefighters responding to incidents throughout the Highland and Islands area. It is accepted that it is incumbent upon an Officer in Charge to carry out a risk assessment when arriving at an incident to determine the risk and to deploy appropriate equipment. However, in many instances, particularly where breathing apparatus is deployed the only person that can determine the risk involved is the firefighter who has entered the premises. Additionally, when firefighters are wearing breathing apparatus and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) they may be unaware that flammable gases are present in the atmosphere. It is assumed that following risk assessment of the industrial and commercial premises throughout the Brigade area that a number will contain flammable gases, vapours or liquids. In addition many road accidents now involve highly flammable products and the heating and cooking facilities in many domestic premises are fuelled by gas. The Brigade may also have to deal with incidents underground where there is always the risk of the presence of flammable materials. There is likely to be a large percentage of premises throughout the Brigade area where it is known that flammable or explosive materials may be likely to be encountered and unfortunately there will also be others where these substances will be encountered unexpectedly. **The Brigade may therefore wish to reassess the adequacy of existing arrangements in line with the guidance contained in Dear Firemaster Letter 4/1992.**

Procurement

95. A comprehensive procurement policy document has been devised and will now be considered by the Management Team. However, the policy does not appear to contain clearly defined risk assessment methodologies. **Risk Assessment is an integral part of the procurement process, therefore it is essential that all procurement processes be subject to risk analysis that involves identification, estimation and evaluation, all of which should be fully documented. The policy should also provide details of how it will be monitored and reviewed.**

96. The Brigade currently has limited access to information regarding procurement performance. Effective mechanisms and accurate management information is essential to enable spend information to be analysed in a way that enables Senior Management to see what is being purchased, from whom and whether the most effective methods are being utilised. **The Brigade therefore needs to consider introducing a more formal arrangement for obtaining management information regarding the procurement process which will enable:**

- ◆ Initial and whole life costs to be considered.
- ◆ Policies for replacement based on empirical evidence.
- ◆ The true costs of procurement transactions to be determined.
- ◆ The measuring and targeting of year-on-year value for money improvements.
- ◆ Benchmarking with other authorities and brigades.
- ◆ Development of performance standards.



97. A welcome development has been the joint collaboration with other Brigades regarding the provision of Personal Protective Equipment. Liaison is also taking place with other brigades regarding portable pumps and breathing apparatus with a view to collaboration in procurement of these items.

Appliances and Operational Equipment

98. As highlighted in the previous inspection report, liaison has been taking place with other brigades regarding purchasing arrangements. The joint collaboration with Shetland Island Council, Shetland Island Enterprise, the National Trust for Scotland, The Civil Aviation Authority and the Brigade regarding the provision of a Fire Engine for Fair Isle being an exemplar of this type of arrangement. **The Brigade may therefore wish to extend this joint co-operation with other brigades to the purchase of vehicles.**

99. The Brigade continually evaluates and reviews operational equipment with the Appliances, Equipment and Uniform Committee co-ordinating the views and suggestions from stakeholders regarding improvements to, replacement of, and purchase of, operational equipment.

100. At the time of inspection a Personal Protective Equipment Review Team were carrying out research into the provision of PPE for use by personnel when undertaking structural firefighting and other operational activities. In addition, due to difficulties experienced with a current PPE supplier, the Team also addressed interim arrangements for PPE provision. It is understood that replacement of the current standard of PPE is to be scheduled over a five-year period and it was confirmed that during this period revised instruction, training and monitoring and maintenance arrangements will be introduced to cover the existing and interim provision PPE.

Maintenance Arrangements

101. Maintenance arrangements are predominately carried out by the Property Services Departments of the four constituent local authorities. The Property Services Departments utilise an approved list of contractors for general maintenance purposes. The Brigade also has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Highland Council who manages maintenance arrangements on behalf of the Fire Board. The SLA is currently being reviewed. The Highland Council also provides the professional services for refurbishments and new builds. With the exception of financial monitoring there did not appear to be any formal arrangement in place with Highland Council to ensure the quality of service and supplier performance was being achieved for property maintenance. **Consideration should therefore be given for a more formal arrangement for all maintenance arrangements, which should include the following objectives:**

- ◆ to ensure the Service is receiving what it is paying for;
- ◆ to maintain and improve the providers performance;
- ◆ to identify any performance problems at an early stage and remedy them; and
- ◆ to create and maintain an information database on providers' performance for the Service's use.



102. The Brigade currently does not have an integrated planned maintenance regime. These arrangements are being re-assessed and as part of the PPP initiative detailed structural surveys are being carried out of all premises. The results of this work will inform future planned maintenance needs.

103. The maintenance policy for transport is based upon a Forward Planning Document approved by the Fire Board in 1990. **The brigade may wish to consider whether the arrangements outlined in this document are still valid.**

104. As detailed in the previous report comment has continually been made since 1996 that the servicing and inspection frequency for operational vehicles is not in line with the guidance contained in the Vehicle Inspectorate *Heavy Goods Vehicle Inspection Manual* and the CACFOA *Recommended Best Practice for the Maintenance of Fire Service Vehicles*. Currently the inspection and servicing of operational vehicles by the Brigade happens twice per year. Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) is essential to maintaining the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the fleet. An integral part of successful PPM is the monitoring of defects in relation to the vehicle inspection and maintenance programme. The Guidance recommends that safety and fitness inspections should be carried out at a maximum of four-monthly intervals for **low mileage vehicles**. **It is therefore pleasing to note that a review is to be carried out of the current inspection and servicing arrangements.**

The Brigade may wish to extend this review to cover:

- ◆ current and future workloads;
- ◆ alternative servicing arrangements;
- ◆ staffing requirements;
- ◆ support facilities; and
- ◆ defect reporting.

105. In meeting the recommendations of Technical Bulletin 1/94 for the testing and maintenance of operational equipment, the majority of the maintenance is carried out by the Brigade Workshop. Any item of equipment that requires periodic maintenance and testing by the Workshop is provided with a unique serial/fleet number and is recorded on the Terian Fleet Management System. **However, accurate records require to be maintained regarding use, repairs and maintenance of all equipment from purchase to disposal. The Brigade should therefore ensure that all essential operational equipment is subject to this arrangement.**



HUMAN RESOURCES

The development of human resources is especially important in the fire service where high levels of competency and availability are a central part of an efficient organisation.

Overview

106. Whilst the Brigade's planning arrangement for training appears effective there is an urgent need to properly resource the risk-assessed staff development needs of the Brigade's personnel. In the personnel functions of the Brigade, the absence of strategic policies for diversity and fairness, and recruitment and selection, prevent a full audit being implemented. It is, however, pleasing to note that many worthwhile activities are ongoing in these areas. The Brigade's top-level arrangement for health and safety management would benefit from further efforts in terms of ensuring the competence of retained and auxiliary workers.

107. Notable suggestions in the report are:

- ◆ It would be productive to perform a training needs analysis that would allow a demand-driven approach to be taken to the resourcing of training and there remains an urgent need to properly resource the risk assessed training needs of the Brigade's personnel.
- ◆ Where policies or strategies exist the commitment to regularly review them should be apparent and the process by which the review will be conducted should be detailed including the process to be adopted and by whom the review will be conducted and a list of what inputs will be considered.
- ◆ The production of diversity and fairness plans based on the Brigade's policy and a recruitment and selection policy should be among the earliest considerations of the planned personnel function.
- ◆ The Brigade should ensure that they are satisfied that those people supervising training and testing sessions at retained and auxiliary stations are assessed as being competent to do so. Whilst accepting that limiting risk to volunteer and auxiliary crews is difficult the Brigade is encouraged to consider further controlling measures for these workers.

Training

108. The links between the Training Strategy and the Brigade's corporate plans are maintained and effective. Management objectives and priorities are incorporated into the training strategy via the Performance Management Committee.

109. The Training Department has developed a set of protocols which give guidance as to how routine activities are conducted and should serve well for the purposes of induction of new staff and continuity planning. It is intended to incorporate these protocols into the Brigade Order that governs training. The Brigade may wish to consider adopting this process for other areas of activity.

110. Performance standards are set and progress monitored by the Brigade's Performance Management Committee that measure and discuss achievements against the targets set within the training strategy.



111. Although it is not made clear within the strategy, evidence exists of a broad range of staff involvement in the development of training plans. The Strategy studied is very much focused on uniformed staff and evidence of its communication to all Brigade staff was not clear. The Strategy would benefit by being broadened to visibly include all brigade employees. **The degree to which staff understand the training approach taken has not been measured by the Brigade.**

112. The responsibilities of staff within the Training Department are clear and are derived from the Strategy. Operational district officers conduct many training activities and anecdotal evidence from crew members indicated that there may be occasions on which the commitment is not achieved. Whilst this evidence was derived from a small sample size, subsequent interviews with managers confirmed that there may be occasions on which training visits are not achieved. The Training Department may wish to devise support strategies that ensure that those units that rely upon district staff for training input are supported during the absence of the district staff.

113. The Training Strategy would benefit from the inclusion of some detail of the intended annual review process. This could include:

- ◆ **how and by whom the review will be conducted; and**
- ◆ **a list of what inputs will be considered.**

114. The Training Strategy is resource-based and aims to deliver the amount of training that can be achieved with the resources available. **It would be productive to perform a training needs analysis that would allow a demand-driven approach to be taken to the resourcing of training.**

115. The Training Department has had to address the new training needs of upgraded units over the recent years and a resultant increasing refresher workload. Whilst it is accepted that the Brigade has analysed the capacity of district staff to undertake training duties, and where needed, added extra staff, **there remains an urgent need to properly resource the risk assessed training needs of the Brigade's personnel.** Failure to do so will eventually result in an inability to address the needs of the organisation.

116. In terms of the delivery of training, some specialist training has had to be curtailed in order to facilitate the increasing breathing apparatus workload presented by units that have been upgraded. Whilst the commitment to maintain BA standards is clear, the other training was presumably required and is now not taking place. Maintenance of breathing apparatus skills is of great importance to the Brigade and **it is worthy of note that the intended annual refresher programme is normally achieved.**

117. The five-year strategy used by the Brigade should visibly consider increasing resources required to meet increasing need and **would benefit from a Best Value Review of future training provision.** This will assist the Brigade in its commitment to "provide and develop a skilled, motivated and representative workforce".

118. The Department has also had to use managerial staff for the delivery of training to cover for the absence of training delivery staff. **Whilst the staff willingness is commendable, the other roles for which these staff members are employed must inevitably suffer. The Brigade should consider alternative strategies for the purposes of ensuring continuity in the delivery of training.**



119. The Brigade has incorporated a training needs mechanism into individual training records. In many areas, operational district officers generally meet these needs. It is clear that district officers play a significant role in the provision of training and yet **there is no evidence that their ability to deliver training or assess subordinate competence plays a part in their selection or appointment.**

120. The Training Department internally consults with staff using a series of departmental meetings, client consultation is facilitated by regular meetings of retained and wholetime officers at which training regularly features as a discussion topic.

121. The incident debrief process used by the Brigade appears effective and could be expanded to incorporate training exercises. In any case, the Training Department should regularly receive summaries of debriefs which will assist them with the identification of corporate training needs.

122. The driver training arrangements of the Brigade are undergoing increasing demand and may benefit from a Best Value Review of future provision. This is one of the areas in which a move to a demand-driven approach may be productive. The Brigade's officers currently receive no specialist driving training for proceeding to incidents.

Diversity and Fairness

123. The Brigade has an established fairness at work committee, which advises the Firemaster in respect of fairness and diversity. A fairness at work policy exists which has been communicated to all workplaces. The fairness at work policy should commit to regular review and should detail the processes that will be utilised for the review.

124. There is no formal plan in existence for equality and little evidence was available to the audit that would suggest a planned approach at the corporate level. This appears to be the result of previous reliance upon the Highland Council for provision of personnel services and should be satisfactorily addressed by the intended formation of a personnel function within the Brigade.

125. The fairness at work committee is drawn from all internal stakeholders, including the Fire Board, and should provide a good basis for policy development.

126. **Although no evidence exists that staff understanding of the Brigade's policy has been assessed, the levels of knowledge of fairness and equality issues within the workforce sampled was good.**

127. Some job descriptions contain responsibilities for fairness at work, but the link between these responsibilities and the policy is not clearly defined. Amendment of all job descriptions that have responsibilities for fairness and diversity should be a natural succession to policy amendment in this area.

Recruitment and Selection

128. The Brigade's arrangements for recruitment are focused very much on the wholetime and retained uniformed sectors. **No overarching policy or strategy was evident** but there is clear evidence of many procedures and protocols that govern the selection processes.

129. The staff involved in the Brigade's selection processes are not yet all trained for the purpose but the Brigade has a stated intention to ensure that this is achieved.



130. The Brigade is committed to achieving a more representative workforce and positive action campaigns have been conducted. In an attempt to attract applications from a broad cross-section of the community, the Brigade uses a broad range of advertising media when informing of vacancies.

131. Candidates who are unsuccessful in promotion applications may receive feedback upon request. This could be usefully included in the advert for positions.

Health and Safety

132. **The Brigade's policy has recently been reviewed and provides a good basis for health and safety planning.** The policy carries only the Firemaster's signature; it is important that the employers – the Fire Board – are seen to have ownership of the health and safety policy. **The Brigade may wish to take steps to enhance the ownership of the policy by the Fire Board.**

133. An extract of policy statement is visible in all workplaces within the Brigade. This poster gives the corporate commitment to the health, safety and welfare of workers. The Brigade has not assessed how well workers understand the policies in relation to health and safety. The use of an abbreviated policy extract for the purposes of personal issue to all workers would enhance awareness of the policy and may provide the vehicle for feedback on understanding.

134. The audit arrangements in use are effective and there is clear evidence of policy review following significant events and other external inputs. The structural arrangements for health and safety are effective and their incorporation into the departmental planning processes is a valuable step.

135. The staffing arrangements within the Health and Safety Department are adequate but **the workload implications of not filling temporary vacancies should be an important consideration.**

136. It is noted that there are occasions on which auxiliary crews are self-supervised during training sessions and whilst testing equipment. **The Brigade should ensure that they are satisfied that those supervising on these occasions are assessed as being competent to do so.**

137. The Brigade has a well-defined risk assessment mechanism for operational activities. A variety of suitable risk-reduction mechanisms are utilised. It is accepted that limiting risk to volunteer and auxiliary crews is difficult and **the Brigade may wish to implement further controlling measures for these workers.** A full service review of PPE was recently concluded and compatibility of existing and new PPE was an integral part of the review. It is intended that the risk assessments made during the future selection of PPE will take cognisance of the compatibility of new PPE with that already existing.

138. The competence of the Brigade Health and Safety post holders is high and is maintained effectively. The Brigade's commitment to improving health and safety knowledge at all levels within the rank structure is clear.



139. The size of the Brigade's area presents challenges when dealing with the investigation of accidents and other safety events. The system in use is developing but relies upon district staff to perform preliminary investigations with further more in-depth investigations being conducted by departmental staff if required. **It is important to ensure that all staff involved in investigation of these events are competent to do so.**

140. The provision of occupational health is currently under review and the links between health and safety and occupational health are maintained by the presence of the senior staff officer (who manages occupational health) on the Brigade's Health and Safety Committee. These links could be strengthened by the inclusion of occupational health targets under the performance management system in line with the guidance given in "Revitalising Health and Safety".



FIRE SAFETY

Prevention of fires requires a fully integrated programme of positive actions based upon realistic targets. Changes to enforcement regimes and the introduction of wide community safety objectives provide the foundations. Fire investigations and call reduction require similar positive action.

Overview

141. The fire safety function of the Brigade is beginning to change following the introduction of new key staff and the conclusion of an extensive data review. Good information was forwarded to the Inspectorate, which indicated a clear enforcement process was in place with an active community fire safety work programme. Practical actions in community fire safety and the joint working with the Police provide optimism that fire safety is progressing.

142. Fire Safety issues identified as significant were:

- ◆ A functional task or business plan is needed to incorporate the two main strategic links of promoting fire safety in the community, through statutory duties and agency requirements and the advance of fire safety education and awareness.
- ◆ Validation shows a clear enforcement and inspection policy in operation, together with a recently introduced audit and performance management framework.
- ◆ Improvements have been made in the delivery of fire safety legislation through better use of data, improved internal communications and protocols and better planning arrangements.
- ◆ The management and delivery of legislative fire safety in particular would benefit from the provision of a customised fire safety management software package and the consideration of the electronic storage of all files and relevant correspondence.
- ◆ Community Fire Safety (CFS) was seen to be an active strategic priority of the Brigade, there being a tangible CFS cultural shift in evidence at District level.
- ◆ Improved internal data sharing has been extended to joint transfer of appropriate information with the Northern Constabulary. This is commended and seen as good practice.

Management of Fire Safety

143. Within the past year both the head of Fire Safety and the deputy have been respectively replaced and promoted. It is evident at this early stage that the Brigade will benefit from the appointment of a well-motivated and focused team of committed and knowledgeable officers. This can be gauged from the increased enthusiasm and attitude displayed by the District Officers, who constitute the inspecting and community safety staff, in conjunction with Fire Safety Officers based at Headquarters.



144. The task of validating the current Brigade systems of work was considerably enhanced by the written evidence supplied by the use of the functional self-assessment tool provided by the Inspectorate. It is acknowledged that within the Brigade Service Plan there is a formal policy and commitment to the delivery of fire safety matters and the Department contributes to the Brigade aims through the delivery of a strategy designed to provide a system of fire safety education and enforcement throughout the Highland and Islands area.

145. The Fire Safety Department does not yet have a formal fire safety plan to support the corporate policy of the Brigade. It is evident, however, that most of the constituent elements to provide such a plan exist in extant and dispersed Brigade documentation. **It is recommended that a functional task or business plan be produced to incorporate the two main strategic links to the Brigade of promoting fire safety in the community through statutory duties and agency requirements and the advance of fire safety education and awareness.** This should also result in a re-worked presentation of the Brigade functional self-assessment of fire safety from the initial policy and strategies to the performance monitoring and quality control measures adopted and including a summary of the business risk assessment approach.

146. The Brigade provided written evidence to show that the legislative obligations of the Fire Board, devolved through the Firemaster, are being delivered through initial and re-inspection programmes that are risk-based, thereby concentrating its resources where most required. **System validation shows that the legislative strategy of the Brigade has a clear enforcement and inspection policy in operation and has recently introduced an audit and performance management framework.** This has resulted in an improved qualitative output of fire safety work. It should be noted that although there is a slight reduction in the output of work the long-term advantage of increased quality will ultimately benefit the Brigade and is appreciated by the Inspectorate.

147. An interesting series of initiatives has been advanced recently by fire safety managers on behalf of the Brigade Management Team to:

- ◆ Review fire safety workloads.
- ◆ Collect data on fire certificate files.
- ◆ Prioritise re-inspection programmes.
- ◆ Re-issue departmental notes.
- ◆ Re-introduce the Quality Service Questionnaire (QSQ).

148. These initiatives have been driven by the requirement to initiate performance management systems and partly through the lack of information forthcoming from the Brigade database which was inoperative at the time of this Principal Inspection. It is noted that there is good evidence to support this process which resulted in remedial action being taken by supervisory staff.



149. The most important aspects of these initiatives and others recently introduced to improve the delivery of fire safety legislation have been:

- ◆ **The quantitative and qualitative information drawn from an extended data trawl of fire safety premises files.**
- ◆ **Improved communication links and intelligence transfer between operational, fire safety and mobilising and control functions to support community risk management objectives.**
- ◆ **Amendments to existing Brigade procedures dealing with serving improvement notices, workplace regulations, exemption and prohibition notices.**
- ◆ **District routine planning and performance management.**

150. The latter issue deserves to be singled out for special mention as it firmly grasps the ethos of recording fire safety planning process and performance management as an essential tool of the inspecting officer and manager alike. The initial planning process is designed to take account of the volume and time available for inspections as informed by the Brigade priority programmes and the risk perceived from the premises "data trawl".

151. Having previously commented on the unavailability of the existing Brigade computerised data base **it is recommended that the management and delivery of legislative fire safety in particular would benefit from the provision of a customised fire safety management software package and the consideration of the electronic storage of all files and relevant correspondence.**

Community Fire Safety

Planning and Strategy

152. The Brigade has published, but not fully implemented, a clear and concise CFS plan and strategy approved by the Fire Board. The plan is designed to reduce the number of fires, fatalities, injuries and also raise public awareness of the dangers from fire. The key aims are to be addressed through the implementation of the CFS programme and strategies allied to national initiatives and Best Value practices over a five-year period.

153. Highland and Islands Fire Brigade has been historically reactive to CFS issues when compared to other Scottish brigades' output statistics. It can, therefore, currently be said that although CFS is being moved forward on a broad front, both geography and the existing demographic elements of the Brigade area continue to present a severe challenge to the effective delivery of community fire safety in its fullest sense.

154. In recognising the foregoing it is pleasing to note that **CFS is an active strategic priority of the Brigade and that there is a tangible CFS cultural shift in evidence at District level.** This can be evidenced from the way in which the Wellbeing Alliance Partnership is being replicated at local level both within and external to the Brigade.

Information

155. By means of incident profiling the Brigade has effective arrangements to use operational data at its disposal to inform District Officers of localised trends. This data-handling system was designed in-house at the Brigade Command and Control Centre and provides a full suite of data to District Officers on a rolling three-month programme. This allows an exchange of meaningful local information to be delivered through partnership working wherever it is deemed to be most effective.



Implementation

156. The implementation of CFS education initiatives stems from a small team at Brigade Headquarters who assess the impact of new legislation and other obligations, develop and monitor policies and tactics to support the delivery of CFS. The day-to-day delivery of CFS rests mainly with the 10 multi-referenced District Officers and forms one of their primary roles. Very often they are the main point of contact with the public, developing and maintaining the vital links with local partnership organisations.

157. The current principal projects running in the Brigade are:

- ◆ Fire Safety education in schools – the “Risk Watch” project.
- ◆ Home fire hazard intervention.
- ◆ Hazard awareness advertising.
- ◆ Support for National and Local domestic sprinkler campaigns.
- ◆ Incident profiling.

Partnerships

158. The Brigade are supporting “Risk Watch” as a strategic programme as it is a broad-based safety package delivered in schools by regular teaching staff to pupils aged from 5-14 years assisted by subject specialists. This method is seen as an ideal vehicle for Highland and Islands Fire Brigade who have dispersed communities, size of classes and year peer groups. To this end “Risk Watch” is being piloted in five schools situated in Skye, Dingwall, Inverness and Nairn. Presently discussions are ongoing with the Scottish Executive, who are supportive of the long-term objectives of “Risk Watch” with a view to incorporating the system into the national education system for Scotland.

159. Other major and established partnerships continue to educate and inform the wider community of many and varied dangers to the public health such as the Safe Highlander scheme and the well supported Wellbeing Alliance Community Safety Partnership for which the Brigade is commended for their involvement. During the inspection it was ascertained that the Western Isles have recently engaged in a domestic smoke detector project with financial backing of some £20,000.

Domestic Sprinklers

160. Through the Firemaster’s involvement the Brigade has supported the effort to introduce a national domestic sprinkler Bill for Scotland and has opened discussions with Highland Council, the area’s largest housing landlord. Initial installation targets are fire damaged properties in Markinch, Inverness and AIness that have a profile of fire history data. This methodology has also resulted in one Sutherland property being identified as suitable for such an installation. The Brigade is currently engaged in providing risk assessment tools to community care workers to conduct self-assessments. The Brigade will then assist the Council in determining priorities.



Fire Investigation

161. An advanced draft joint fire investigation protocol is being discussed between Northern Constabulary and the Brigade and follows the good practice demonstrated at the CACFOA Scottish Fire Investigation Forum.

162. The Brigade recognises both its obligations to the judicial process and the importance of fire investigation data to its own community safety strategy. District Officers have received nationally accredited Fire Investigation training and a small team of Headquarters Officers have had further specialist skills added to their national accreditation.

163. Information sharing is seen as an essential element of joint working practices which include mobilising, prevention and investigation. A good example of prevention activity benefiting from sharing is that of police officers who, in the course of their duty observe potential fire hazards to occupants of a building, passing the information on to the Brigade for assessment and possible action using Section 93 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

164. Along with other improved communication links and intelligence sharing between operational, fire safety and control staff, **the extension of joint information transfer with the Police is commended and seen as good practice**. It is also pleasing to note that early discussion and data transfer has taken place following the joint thematic inspection report *Fire: Raising the Standard* issued earlier this year on behalf of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland and HM Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland.

Reduction of Unwanted Fire Calls

165. Within the last month the Fire Safety Department has issued a new procedural note, CR1, detailing the Brigade's call reduction strategy. The Command and Control Centre collates all statistical information on automatic fire alarm calls and provides a monthly summary to the Fire Safety staff who analyse the data and take appropriate action.

166. As the current volume of false alarm calls accounts for approximately 30% of the Brigade total emergency response it is imperative that this essential strategy is followed through by all parties concerned to drive down wasteful unwanted fire calls.

167. A system of local performance indicators exists as does an audit trail of all occasions that the Brigade receives a call to individual premises. Where no improvement is made despite the efforts of all parties there is a six-monthly review period at which time such cases are referred to the Senior Fire Safety Officer for further discussion and action.



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