

# Business continuity management

The fire and rescue service

Local government report, September 2010



**The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.**

**Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.**

**As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.**

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction and background</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction	3
Background	4
<b>Findings</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Questions that elected members in fire and rescue authorities could ask</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Glossary of terms</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Explanation of our survey</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Findings for each fire and rescue service</b>	<b>28</b>

## Summary

- 1** This report examines how well fire and rescue services are able to deal with periods of disruption to their normal business.
- 2** Fire and rescue services plan well for short-term loss of staff, but longer disruptions may pose a greater risk to public safety.
- 3** Fire and rescue services are becoming more resilient. Since the inclusion of contingency planning for emergencies in the National Framework in 2005, significant progress is being made in improving national resilience. This is important because the government makes it clear that services cannot rely on military support in the event of disruption.
- 4** All fire and rescue services have satisfactory business continuity plans in place. And some services are good at business continuity management and can ensure their services can continue when disrupted. Those services having more experience with disruption are learning a lot and are better prepared for next time.
- 5** But services cannot cope with every situation indefinitely. If disruptions are sudden, involve high numbers of staff, last a long time and are widespread, there is a higher chance the risk to public safety will increase.
- 6** Some fire and rescue services could further improve business continuity. Not all fire and rescue services:
  - engage enough with local people to agree what is an appropriate level of service;
  - fully consider the effects of a disruption to services on people living in vulnerable circumstances;
  - test their plans to see if there is enough capacity and skills;
  - do enough to make partners and staff aware of business continuity plans;
  - make specialist equipment or specialist staff available during periods of disruption;
  - do enough to improve the resilience of control rooms to deal with emergencies; and
  - learn from other fire and rescue services and from other organisations outside the service.

# Introduction and background

## Introduction

**7** Organisations have to be able to deal with periods of disruption to their normal business. Good business continuity management builds organisational resilience by identifying risks and planning for them. It is important for emergency services to be able to deal with disruptions so they can continue to help keep the public safe.

**8** The Audit Commission was asked by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to undertake a survey to build on our previous assessment work, and provide a more detailed report on how fire and rescue authorities in England meet the requirements for business continuity management. The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework sets out these requirements. CLG formally commissioned us to do this work in March 2010. This survey began in April and builds on our assessment work published in December 2009 and our audit work. We followed up our findings by some further targeted work from May to July to verify the information we had about fire and rescue services.

**9** The government makes it clear that fire and rescue services cannot rely on help from the military if there is a disruption. Military staff are heavily committed overseas and the old 'green goddess' fire engines have been sold. The 2008 National Framework highlights the transfer of responsibility for dealing with disruptions to fire and rescue services. The Framework states that fire and rescue services must:

- have in place a plan to provide such level of emergency cover as it regards appropriate during any period of emergency, liaising as necessary with other relevant organisations, but without reliance on the support of the Armed Forces;
- ensure the availability of all necessary vehicles, equipment, training and support; and
- have in place arrangements for heightening public awareness and vigilance in respect of safety issues during periods of emergency cover.

**10** There are good business reasons for these requirements. The fire and rescue service is a key part of the UK's national security and safety infrastructure. It does not just deal with fires. It rescues people from cars, trains, rivers and many other dangerous situations. The fire and rescue service also contributes towards dealing with disasters such as flooding and terrorist incidents. For example, during the widespread flooding in 2009, the fire and rescue service carried out over 2,000 rescues.

**11** This report presents our findings on how resilient fire and rescue services are as a result of business continuity management. When we use the term ‘resilience’ we mean the ability of a fire and rescue service to deal with disruptions to its services, and still be able to provide an appropriate level of service. In general terms, the public will be safer if the fire and rescue service stays resilient.

**12** During our work, we have noted a significant focus on business continuity within fire and rescue services. And plans have developed significantly during this time, leading to better resilience against disruption to its services.

**13** In this report we do not explore the likelihood of disruptions to fire and rescue services.

## Background

**14** The Audit Commission’s role is changing. It has had responsibility for the assessment and audit of the 46 fire and rescue services in England. This includes looking at how well each fire and rescue service is meeting the expectations set out in the Fire and Rescue Service’s National Framework. The government expects that each service should plan to manage disruptions to its services without the support of the military.

**15** Disruptions are caused by things like:

- extreme weather – such as widespread flooding – that could prevent firefighters getting to work when they are most needed;
- industrial action – particularly strike action – leading to significantly reduced numbers of firefighters and other staff being available;
- an event such as a flu pandemic that could mean high levels of staff absence affecting the ability to provide a normal service; and
- other reasons – including failures in information communication technology (ICT), power cuts and fires.

**16** All 46 fire and rescue services in England need to be able to work in a wide range of situations and are obliged under different legislation to make sure they are able to do so. The fire and rescue service has duties under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to make suitable plans to maintain services during periods of disruption. This includes being able to deal with staff not being available for various reasons. Therefore good business continuity management is needed to ensure that vital services are maintained at an appropriate cost to taxpayers. Fire and rescue services are obliged to test and exercise their plans under the contingency planning regulations.

**17** Our report takes a view of business continuity in the round, with consideration of the different local risks faced by each service. The Audit Commission has been working closely with expert peers and has consulted with fire service organisations on how well services plan to deal with disruptions during any period of emergency. These organisations include the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers Association, the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Cabinet Office, and the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor. We prepopulated the survey with information where this was already available. The Commission also included in the survey four questions at the request of CLG and the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor.

## Findings

### **Fire and rescue services are becoming more resilient and are using a number of approaches to stay that way**

**18** Fire and rescue services have a strong track record of dealing with large-scale emergencies. Services are becoming more resilient because they have better equipment and staff are better trained. Services are more aware of their legal responsibilities and they are learning from real-life events such as flooding. Our assessment work over the last five years tracks these improvements.

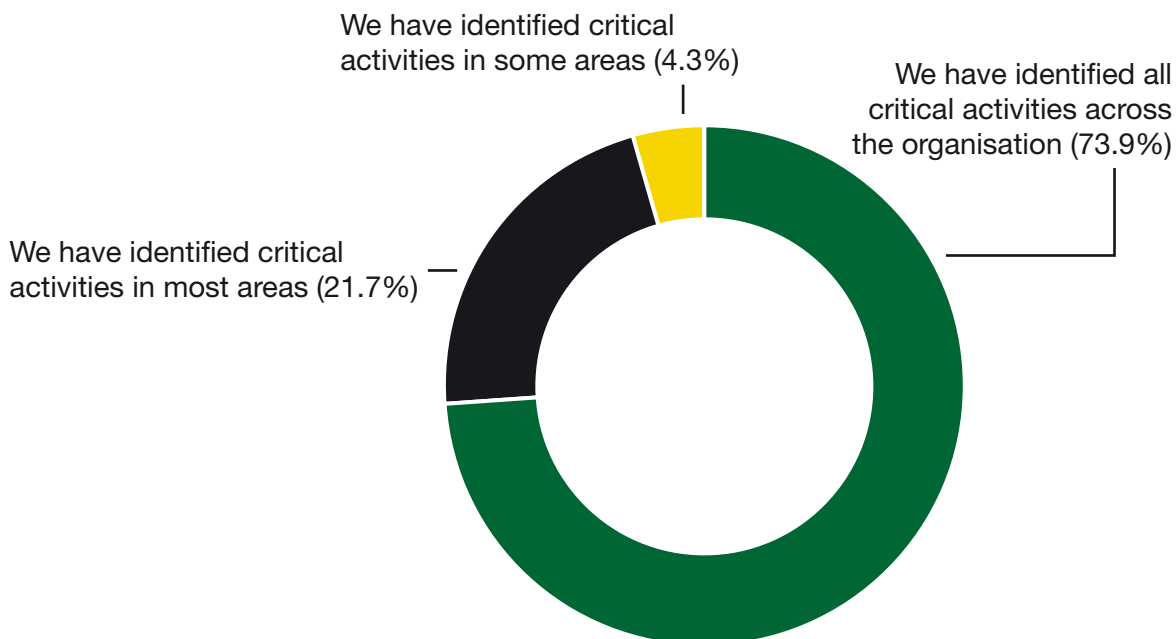
**19** Services can deal with short-term disruptions and are getting better at planning for them. Some fire and rescue services, including Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Hertfordshire and Suffolk have successfully managed local industrial disputes. In these instances, disruption did not spread and there was no evidence of significant impact on public safety.

**20** All fire and rescue services plan to deal with disruptions. Services have a good understanding of what parts of their organisation would be affected and they have identified minimum levels of service. In addition, services know when to enact business continuity plans. All services have a procedure identifying when to enact plans.

Figure 1 shows to what extent services have identified critical activities. Our survey found that 74 per cent of services have identified all critical activities in their organisation. Services need to understand the most important parts of their organisation and then make sure they identify an acceptable level of service for them.



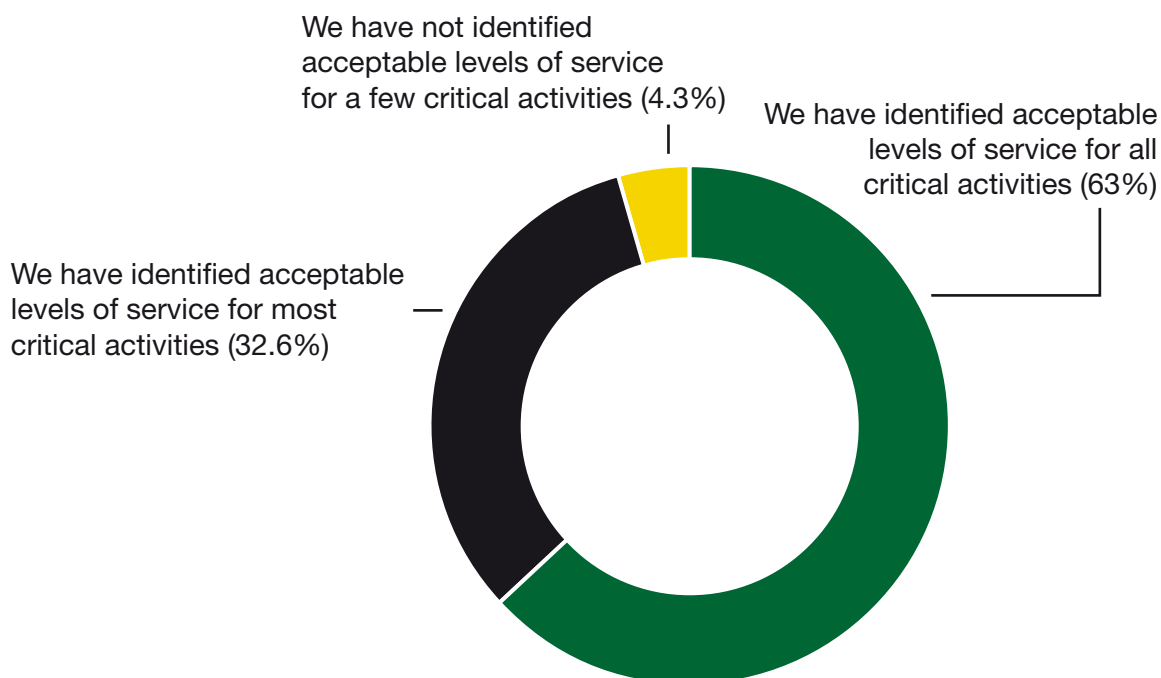
Figure 1: **To what extent have you identified critical activities?**



Source: Audit Commission

Figure 2 shows that 63 per cent of services have done this for all activities.

Figure 2: **To what extent have you identified an acceptable level of service?**



Source: Audit Commission

**21** Some good business continuity plans exist. Services that are better at strategic planning and have the most experience of significant staff absence are generally better at business continuity management. Their plans show how staff and equipment should be redeployed as their availability decreases, and what minimum capacity and skills are needed to maintain basic services.

**22** Fire and rescue services have several different approaches to deal with disruption. Broadly, these seek to make the best use of existing staff or contract in staff from outside the fire and rescue service. Specific approaches include:

- paying staff to make themselves available and not to take strike action – known as ‘resilience contracts’;
- arrangements with private contractors that can provide a suitable number of external staff to provide an emergency response;
- reliance on retained duty system (RDS) staff to do more if whole-time (full-time) firefighters are unavailable; and
- using suitably trained senior managers and support staff to crew fire engines.

**23** Fire and rescue services use one or more of these approaches to help stay resilient. What works well for one service may not work in other areas, but the best services are finding ways to plan for every eventuality.

**Case study 1****Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is successfully maintaining 'business as usual'**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has good business continuity plans in place that are well tested. The service identifies its critical activities and plans deal with all reasonable eventualities. It has had a peer review of these plans by external experts. The service carries out frequent testing, both real and simulated. As a result, staff and partners know about plans and the service has a good understanding of the staff, skills and equipment it needs to provide good levels of emergency cover.

The service adopts a self-sufficient model for industrial action known as 'business as usual'. The service appealed directly to staff to protect the community ahead of any other issue. Some 218 staff supported the approach and signed local agreements that guarantee their availability. This ensures a third of all firefighters are available. This took place despite much opposition from some staff groups and therefore the initiative needed strong leadership from managers and members. The service has proved it can provide a suitable service and that specialist assets and equipment are available.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**24** Fire and rescue services with the best business continuity arrangements have plans that show how services deal with specific local risks when resources are not available. They show a strong link with Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), which show the way staff and equipment are deployed when everything is working normally. Services need to consider important public events and changes in risk when planning for business continuity.

Case study 2

### **Dorset Fire and Rescue Service is a small service doing well and planning for new risks**

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service is a relatively small service that plans well for the future. The service makes sure it has enough capacity to deal with disruptions caused by big events. Weymouth is hosting the sailing events of the Olympic Games in 2012, and public services in Dorset are planning how to deal with any disruptions that might arise. The Fire and Rescue Service and its partners have integrated their plans so there is clear understanding of how services will be deployed if fewer staff are available. The Service has specific plans in place to deal with the Olympics, and these consider access to specialist equipment, medical services and transport in and out of Weymouth harbour. Plans also address different scenarios such as industrial action, bad weather, terrorist attack and flu pandemic. As a result, Dorset is better prepared for emergencies.

*Source: Audit Commission*

### **Fire and rescue services understand the effects of disruption on their services**

**26** Most fire and rescue services have identified their critical activities, with plans in place to deliver an acceptable level of service. Plans are generally in place to deliver critical activities. Over 90 per cent of business continuity plans show that support services, community fire safety activity and training reduce in volume, or stop altogether when there is a significant staff absence. The fire and rescue services' priority during periods of disruption is to continue to provide a response to emergencies.

**27** Nearly two thirds of services have a process in place that manages a gradual or partial loss of its resources. These plans ensure the best use is made of what remains available. The best services match the available skills and capacity to local risks. Those services that do not have specific degradation plans have other ways of prioritising their services when there are fewer staff available.

**Case study 3****Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is a county council service that makes the best use of its staff to deliver good value for money**

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has good business continuity plans that deliver good value for money. The service identifies all critical activities and levels of service, and there is good integration with the County Council's plans. The service has a high-absence level operating (HALO) procedure in place and this is well tested. The service engages local people to help decide what service is appropriate, and what levels have to be maintained if disrupted. Because of good community engagement, plans are more practical and tailored to suit vulnerable people.

What makes Oxfordshire's plans stand out is that they are scrutinised by various committees. Councillors consider plans for value for money by looking at costed options and comparing these with the cost of getting help from a private contractor. The use of retained duty system (RDS) staff during disruptions is well thought through and based on what is appropriate locally. The cost of not providing enough emergency cover is also considered.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**28** Fire and rescue services that experience disruptions to services learn valuable lessons and are better prepared to deal with future disruption. Fire and rescue services are also learning from each other about the best way to plan for industrial action, although services could be improved further.

**Those fire and rescue services that have experienced disruption are better prepared for the future**

Case study 4

### South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service is learning from experience

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service successfully managed disruptions to services caused by industrial action in late 2009. Staff groups strongly resisted changes to shift times and the service had to deal with significant staff unrest. Emergency fire cover remained unaffected with operational fire service managers crewing fire appliances and trained support staff driving small incident units. This worked well and because of good preparation there were no negative effects on public safety.

The service learnt a great deal. It found that effective communication with communities and the media are vital, backed up by good engagement with all partners and staff. The ability of staff groups to make their own news content on camera and online meant effective communication was more important than ever as the dispute became more prolonged. A key message from the service is not to underestimate the political interest generated by the announcement of strike action, the importance of strong support from the Authority, and the secondary effects of strike action which impact upon the work of the rest of the organisation. The amount of management time and staff anxiety that the situation caused did have an impact on the ability of the service to make progress with its overall priorities. The service has updated its plans and a great deal of learning from South Yorkshire's experience is taking place across the country.

*Source: Audit Commission*

### Fire and rescue services deliver effective public safety messages when services are disrupted

**29** Services have well-established plans to ensure members of the public are kept informed if there is a loss or reduction of service. If the public have the right information they can make an informed choice and can then take more responsibility for their own safety. Arrangements for increasing public awareness are well tested. In Lancashire in the winter of 2009/10, firefighters could not get into work because of bad weather. So the fire and rescue service kept the public well informed about what was going on through local radio station bulletins. Over 60 per cent of fire and rescue services combine media arrangements with partners, and communications are becoming more sophisticated.

**Case study 5****Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service uses new technology to good effect to inform the public during emergencies.**

In large-scale emergency situations, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service immediately gives regular warning and information updates to the local media including newspapers, radio and television and local community websites. News agencies are also informed which helps to reach a wider audience. The messages give up-to-date guidance and advice to the public on how to look after themselves, family, friends and neighbours. A multi-agency approach is also taken and the Service agrees consistent messages with partners within the Local Resilience Forum and other local organisations, to reach all areas of the local community.

Hampshire is also innovative in its use of new technology to reach a wider audience. The Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service website is regularly updated with the latest information. Links are provided to government websites such as Directgov. The service also uses social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and others to spread safety messages further and used its social media successfully during the adverse weather conditions in 2009/2010. The service makes sure it makes direct contact with care organisations, hospitals, schools and voluntary groups in order to reach vulnerable people. These arrangements were well tested during periods of bad weather. Hampshire learnt a lot from this experience and messages are now tailored to different audiences.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**30** Fire and rescue services recognise there is more scope to work with other emergency services and councils on how and when they communicate and engage with the public. Services could make savings by combining safety messages with their partners. Only five fire and rescue services said they consult the public on what is an 'appropriate' level of service during a disruption. Services also recognise they need to do more to communicate with vulnerable and diverse groups.

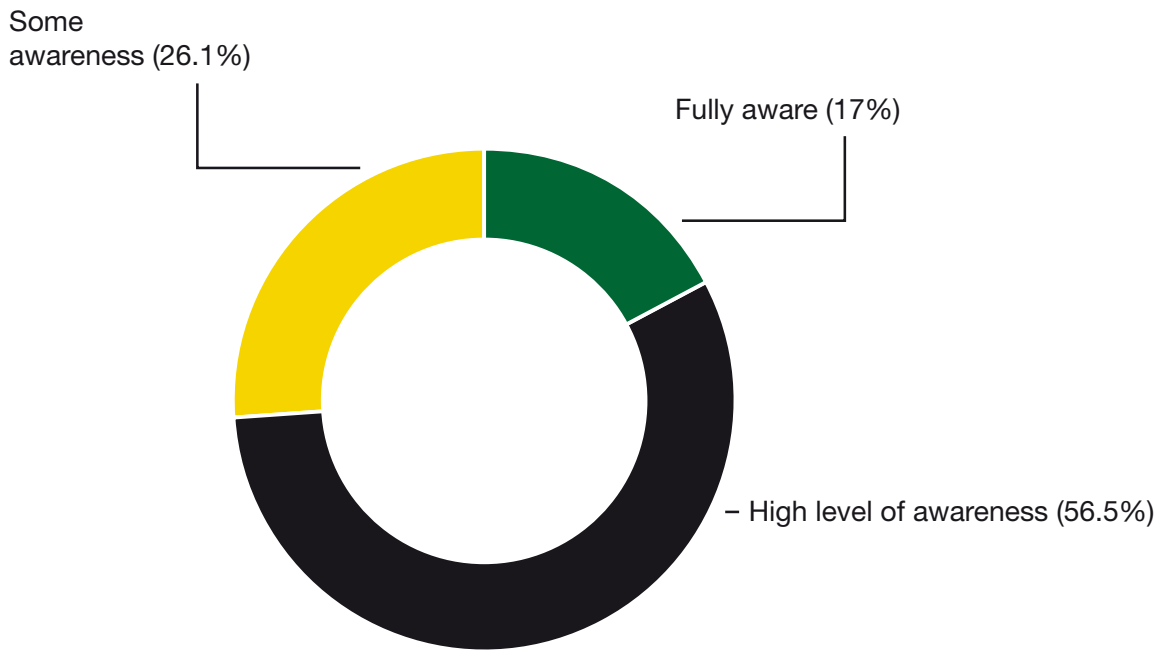
**31** The timing and quality of communications is also important. If services communicate problems too early it could cause unnecessary public anxiety. But if they leave it too late, then messages may not get through, increasing risk to public safety.

**32** Communication of plans with partners could be better. Internal partners, especially those services within a county council, have a high level of awareness of business continuity plans. But external partners' awareness of plans is poor. Good awareness is important because of the knock-on effects on other emergency services, partners, suppliers and community groups.

Figure 3 and 4 show internal partners are more aware of plans than external partners.

---

Figure 3: **Are internal stakeholders aware of your business continuity strategy?**

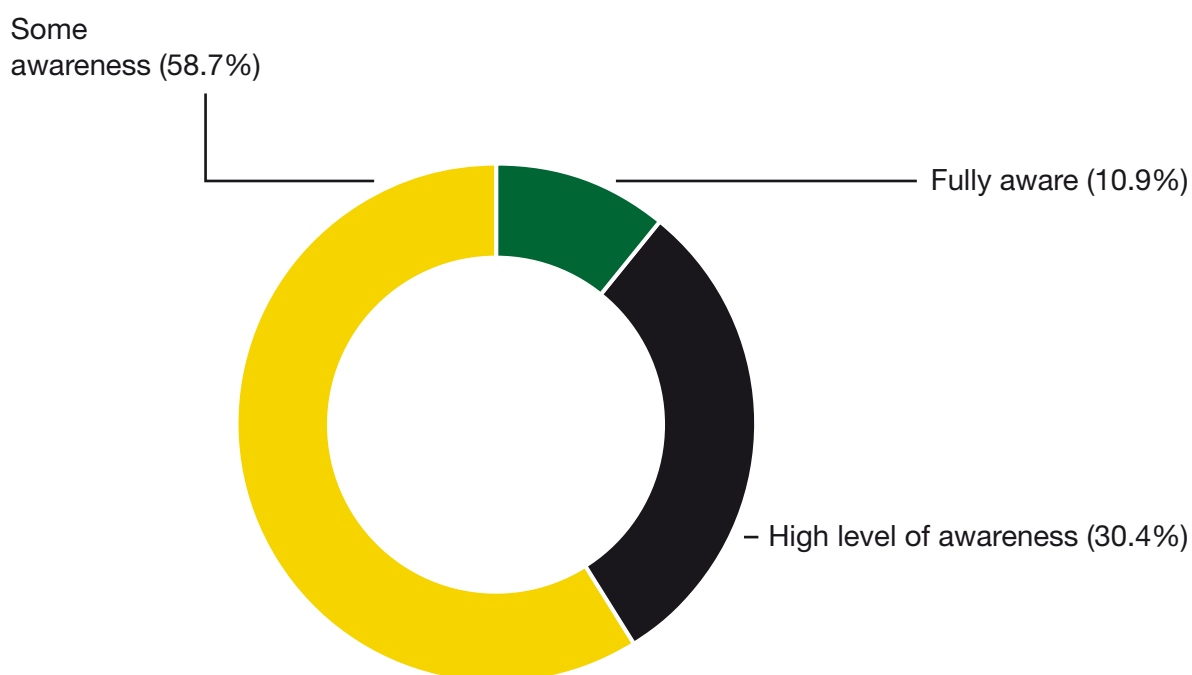


Source: Audit Commission

---



Figure 4: **Are external stakeholders aware of your business continuity strategy?**



Source: Audit Commission

**33** Some serious risks and inconsistencies to business continuity management remain. Recent experiences show that services may not be able to deal with every disruption especially when staff numbers significantly reduce.

**34** Our work reveals some common failings with business continuity arrangements. Some services could do more to:

- test and exercise their plans to see if they work under different circumstances. Less than a quarter of services test and exercise all their plans. Those services who test and exercise their plans have a better understanding of what they need to do to cope with problems in the future;
- consider the effects of reduced services on vulnerable people – only nine services highlight this issue in their plans;
- learn about business continuity management from other organisations. Only two services highlight what they are learning from organisations outside the fire and rescue service;
- consider any knock-on effects on other emergency services, partnerships and suppliers – this is important because services are increasingly working collaboratively. Contractors should also have good business continuity plans; and
- improve consistency by referring to a British Standard such as BS25999. However, fire and rescue services delivered by councils are better aligned with British Standards and as a result, it is clearer what the service has to do.

**Fire and Rescue services do not always have the capacity to provide emergency cover for longer periods**

## **Longer periods of disruption pose a greater risk to public safety**

**35** Most services have plans that are flexible and deal well with short-term disruptions such as those caused by transport problems or adverse weather. There are some good plans to deal with longer-term disruptions such as flu pandemics. In the event of a flu pandemic, the effects will be felt across most parts of the service and by their suppliers and contractors. However, services can predict the onset and numbers of available staff would change slowly allowing them to adapt and develop their plans.

**36** A sudden and widespread absence of a large number of staff across a number of fire and rescue services – particularly over a longer period of time – has the biggest effect on the service. Therefore this presents a greater risk to public safety.

**37** A third of firefighters within England work part time. They crew over half the fire stations. Retained duty system (RDS) firefighters are available on call close to their local fire station for a minimum number of hours a week, plus regular training. Contracts can vary but most staff are paid a retainer plus a call-out fee for incidents attended. This system is more widely used in rural areas.

**38** Many services rely on retained staff to help cope with staff absence in the short term. We recognise that some fire and rescue services have coped with mass absences of up to four weeks by using retained and other non-operational staff. But the evidence is that this approach is not resilient for longer periods, especially for extended strike action. Also, this will not work in fire and rescue services that employ few, or as with London, no retained staff.

## **Using private contractors can give more resilience but is expensive and may not represent value for money**

**39** Fire and rescue services also think that reliance on retained staff outside their normal working hours will have a knock-on effect on goodwill from staff, their families and employers. Staff morale, sickness absence and retention could be affected. This is important when services are recruiting fewer retained staff and nationally, 14 per cent of available positions remain unfilled.

**40** An increasing number of private companies can provide backup services. Fire and rescue services could decide to use private companies if current and future risks are high and unmanageable; they have the money available to pay for outside help; and it represents good value for money.

**Case study 6****London Fire Brigade (LFB) is increasing capacity to deal with key national and local risks**

London is a centre for finance, government and tourism, and host for the 2012 Olympics. This means that the consequences of not being able to cope with a disruption to services are significant. London Fire Brigade carefully considered these risks and decided that more backup is needed to its operational services. A range of options was considered. LFB now contracts an external provider to supplement existing resources in times of need.

The contractor offers sufficient capability to guarantee that 16 per cent of London's fire engines are available at all times. This is fewer than would normally be provided but is based on a careful consideration of costs compared to other options and the risks in not providing such a service. The contracted service is capable of being deployed independently, or with available London Fire Brigade staff. LFB deploys its fire engines based on an analysis of where they need to be placed to offer the best protection against risk in London. Because of these risks, the approach represents appropriate value for money for local people, despite the high cost of the contract.

The skills, availability and training of the contractor's operational staff are assured through detailed contract arrangements. LFB has a comprehensive training and exercise programme in place for all departments and this is closely linked with the contractor's plans. LFB regularly tests its plans to find out if the technical, logistical, administrative, procedural and operational systems work effectively. Managers issue reports after every exercise to capture learning. As a result, London Fire Brigade makes sure it has enough staff with the right skills to provide a basic service, even during the most significant disruption.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**41** The government has invested £330 million<sup>i</sup> in a programme to improve the fire and rescue service's capacity to deal with major emergencies and new threats to public safety. This programme is called 'New Dimensions'. It includes buying more sophisticated equipment and providing training to deal with major terrorist incidents or natural disasters. New Dimensions gives services the ability to achieve more by dealing with large-scale emergencies more effectively. For example, services now have the ability to decontaminate large numbers of people if they are exposed to harmful chemicals. And urban search and rescue (USAR) services can rescue people quicker and more safely from collapsed structures.

**42** Not all specialist equipment used to deal with more serious emergencies will be available during periods of disruption. Less than a third of fire and rescue services are able to make New Dimension assets available under these circumstances. Only 3 out of 46 fire and rescue services say they consider the effects of disruption on urban search and rescue services. Those fire and rescue services that are unable to maintain New Dimension assets, say that providing local operational cover will take priority.

**43** However, if the disruption is due to a strike and a large-scale emergency occurs, the government expects firefighters to return to work. The government bases these assumptions on the 'Provision of Emergency or Essential Services' section contained in Trades Union Congress (TUC) guidance from 1979.

**44** The recall of staff under these circumstances is not necessarily a simple matter. The time it takes to contact staff could mean a delay in making specialist assets and services available.

**Fire and rescue services could be better prepared for disruption if they improve regional and local collaboration**

**45** Fire and rescue services would benefit from collaborating with other emergency services and organisations to reduce the impact of disruption on the community. Too few locally agreed community risk registers make any planning assumptions for the absence of firefighters. Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) own and develop community risk registers. An LRF is a group of services, usually led by the local police authority, that take a strategic overview of planning for emergencies. Some registers show this as a high risk, but other LRFs show them as a low risk, even in similar areas dealing with similar risks. Those assumptions and risks that are considered are not consistently reported or assessed.

**46** Services do work closely with other emergency services in many areas, and there are obvious benefits to the community in doing so. Services of different types, with different levels of resources can still manage well.

<sup>i</sup> We have taken this number from the National Audit Office review 'New Dimension – Enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services' capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents' report dated 29 October 2008.

**Case study 7**

## **The Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service helps its communities stay safe and well protected during large-scale emergencies**

The Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service is the smallest service in the UK but still has to provide the same roles as other fire services. The service employs 39 staff, including volunteers, some part-time administrative staff and the Chief Fire Officer. Staff often have many different roles and therefore emergency services are well integrated. What makes this fire and rescue service so special is that it continues to deal with the unique environment of the Isles and has close relationships with the communities it serves.

The Isles need to be prepared for large-scale emergencies and be self-sufficient until help can arrive. Bad weather can quickly isolate the Isles from the mainland, so the community has to be able to work together and know what to do in an emergency. The fire and rescue service has joint business continuity plans that are agreed with the Isles of Scilly Council and other services.

The service tests its plans with scenarios based on local risks such as helicopter fires, extreme weather, flooding and boat accidents. Communication with the public is good and the local radio station is an excellent source of safety information. As a result, the community knows what to do to stay safe with the help of the fire and rescue service.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**47** Some fire and rescue services rely on help from elsewhere within their own region to provide fire cover in times of industrial action. The South East Regional Management Board has developed some good plans to deal with industrial action. However, this is the exception. Those services recently experiencing industrial action are learning that a clear understanding of what councils and emergency services, including police and ambulance services, can do to help is important.

**48** Services are also learning about working with a wider range of partners. A good example of this is the flooding in Cumbria that took place in 2009.

## Case study 8

### **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service works well with other services to deal with floods and help the local community recover**

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service carried on delivering most of its services while dealing with significant flooding. It learned a lot from experiences in 2005 which helped ensure good preparation for the severe and protracted floods of November 2009. Since 2005 the service invested in better equipment and training and worked closely with local authority, other emergency services, and voluntary partners to plan their future flood response. It also invested in better data sharing and information systems.

Coordination also improved and this helped bring in more specialist equipment and staff. Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services also supported Cumbria FRS by providing specialist staff and equipment. This extra help also meant that staff from Cumbria were able to deal with other local emergencies.

However Cumbria FRS's role didn't stop at rescue and evacuations. To minimise the impact of the floods, water rescue teams helped the Environment Agency with the removal of large items of debris from bridges and buildings close to water. And as the water began to subside, basements of properties were pumped out. The service provided one of its fire stations as a feeding station to support the welfare of all those dealing with the emergency. As a result, emergency services had a faster, more coordinated and better targeted response to the 2009 floods which minimised the immediate impact on the people in Cumbria.

*Source: Audit Commission*

**49** This section relates to the specific questions that we asked fire and rescue services for CLG and the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor.

**50** Control rooms are essential in ensuring staff and equipment reach incidents. Therefore they must be able to withstand a range of potential disruptions. All services have specific plans to ensure that control rooms remain resilient. But there are some issues that services need to resolve.

**51** Few services have automated announcements to provide callers with helpful information while phone operators are busy with other calls. Only 3 out of 46 fire and rescue services state they have automated announcements for use in exceptional circumstances. One of these three services reports that all such arrangements are managed by a private company. The other two services plan to develop such arrangements in future.

**52** Too many fire and rescue services run the risk of having their control centre backup plans affected by severe weather. Most fire and rescue services ‘buddy-up’ their control centres with other fire or police authorities. This helps deal with high numbers of 999 calls. But around half of fire and rescue services have buddies who are neighbouring authorities, with only 17 having buddies that are more geographically distant. This means that bad weather may affect both control centres.

**53** All fire and rescue services have plans in place to increase staff capacity in control rooms to deal with large-scale emergencies and industrial action. The survey found that 28 services have ‘Recall to Duty’ plans in place for control room staff. Some services have extra staff trained to handle emergency calls. Services make limited use of overtime to provide extra help.

**Fire and rescue services are improving the capacity of control rooms to deal with disruptions**

Case study 9

## East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service's control room is more secure

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has learned from previous experiences of major disruptions to its control room. It now has much more secure and resilient arrangements following the major flooding which occurred across many parts of East Sussex and Brighton in October 2000, resulting in a major disruption to its control room and centralised computer system. The flooding was greater than any previous estimates and badly affected the equipment room. The service's previous backup systems also failed. Bad weather also affected nearby emergency services.

The service later carried out a detailed evaluation of operational and business risks. This resulted in the decision to relocate the control room to Eastbourne entirely away from flood risk. In addition, business continuity arrangements were improved across all service functions through the installation of a separately located backup IT system. New equipment, training and more resilient backup communication systems were introduced. ESFRS provided advice nationally to try to help others learn from its lessons.

*Source: Audit Commission*



## Recommendations

We have produced recommendations to help improve business continuity further in the fire and rescue service. We believe most of these recommendations need to be taken forward by partners and fire and rescue authority members.

Fire and rescue services should:

- involve local people more in deciding what an appropriate level of service means for them;
- be clear about how plans for emergency cover meet those requirements;
- carry out further testing and exercising of plans to assure services that they have enough capacity and skills to provide enough cover;
- collaborate further with partners and other fire and rescue services to build capacity and maximise resilience in a way that shows the best value for money for local people;
- develop tools and self-help guidance within the fire and rescue service to help services be even better prepared; and
- look outside the Service at the plans of others, particularly in the National Health Service and other emergency services, to see if more can be learned.

Currently,<sup>i</sup> the Audit Commission is supporting the sector in developing its capacity to improve business continuity by highlighting and sharing good practice and recommending what could improve.

<sup>i</sup> On 13 August 2010, the Secretary of State for CLG announced the Commission would be disbanded from 2012/13.

## Questions that elected members in fire and rescue authorities could ask

**54** These questions are for fire and rescue authority members to ask their officers. If services paid more attention to business continuity they could improve their ability to deal with change and disruptions.

- Does the service have a clear, practical plan to deal with a range of possible disruptions?
- Does the plan identify how essential services including mobilising and operational support will be maintained?
- What does the service learn from testing and exercising its plans, and how is this used to make improvements?
- What has the service learnt from its partners and other organisations?
- How does the service engage community groups to take more responsibility for their own safety at times when services may be limited?

## Glossary of terms

<b>Appliance</b>	Services use this term to describe all firefighting vehicles, including the standard fire engine or pump (see below).
<b>BS 25999-1:2006</b>	This British Standard contains guidance that describes the principles and terminology of business continuity management (BCM). The Standard is based on good practice and is applicable to all types of organisation.
<b>Business continuity</b>	According to BC 25999-1:2006, business continuity is ‘the strategic and tactical capability of an organisation to plan for and respond to incidents and business disruptions to continue business operations at an acceptable predefined level’.
<b>Business continuity management</b>	According to the Cabinet Office, good business continuity management helps organisations identify their key services and the threats to them. Planning and exercising minimises the impact of potential disruption. It also aids the prompt resumption of service, helping to protect public safety and reputation. To be successful, BCM must be an integral part of an organisation’s management processes.
<b>Community fire safety (CFS)</b>	The range of fire prevention activities undertaken by the fire and rescue service, often in partnership with other agencies. Some activities are mandatory such as ensuring compliance with the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO).
<b>Control centre</b>	Usually contains the contact centre that deals with 999 calls. This centre must remain functioning so the service can mobilise crews and pumps to emergencies.
<b>Crew</b>	The firefighters needed to operate an appliance at an incident.
<b>Emergency Fire Crew Capability (EFCC)</b>	An ability to deploy a contingency level of service.
<b>Fire and rescue authority (FRA)</b>	A committee of up to 30 elected councillors from the constituent district and unitary authorities in an area, responsible for major budgeting and strategic decision making for their local fire service. Of the 46 FRAs, 15 are part of councils and integrate their governance arrangements.

---

<b>Fire and Rescue Service National Framework</b>	Sets out the government's expectations in 2008-11 for fire and rescue authorities. The government states the Framework is a foundation on which to help build local solutions. The top three key priorities for the National Framework are: delivery of an increased resilience capability; Fire and rescue authorities taking ownership and successfully delivering the intent of the Equality and Diversity Strategy; and that in a tighter fiscal climate, fire and rescue authorities meet public expectations of a modern, efficient and effective public service.
<b>Integrated risk management plan (IRMP)</b>	A fire and rescue service's plan to tackle existing and potential risks to their communities through a combination of fire protection and prevention work and response.
<b>Local resilience forum (LRFs)</b>	A group of services, usually led by the local police authority, that take a strategic overview of planning for emergencies. LRFs are a statutory requirement based on police authority boundaries.
<b>Pump</b>	Fire appliances with the capacity to pump water for firefighting.
<b>Regional control centre (RCC)</b>	Part of a network of nine centres across England that will take calls for and mobilise all fire services. This new network replaces the individual control centres currently managed by fire services.
<b>Resilience</b>	The ability of an organisation to deal with difficulties and still be able to provide an appropriate level of the service. The level of resilience depends on thorough assessment of risk, and a matching of resources to deal with and respond to them. In general terms, the more resilient the organisation, the more likely the public will be kept safe.
<b>Retained duty system (RDS)</b>	Firefighters that are recruited to be available on call, close to their local fire station for a certain minimum number of hours a week, plus regular training. They get paid a retainer plus a call-out fee for incidents attended. The RDS is more widely used in rural areas.
<b>Regional management board (RMB)</b>	Set up by central government to manage the move to Regional Control Centres and promote other regional collaboration.
<b>Satisfactory business continuity</b>	Meeting the requirements set out in the National Framework 2008-11.
<b>Watch</b>	The team of firefighters whose work rotas coincide so they are regularly on duty together at a particular station.
<b>Wholetime</b>	The usual term for full-time firefighter contracts that comprise a regular rotating pattern of day shifts, night shifts, flexible shifts and some off-duty time.

---

## Appendix 1: Explanation of our survey

- 1** We developed an online survey after significant consultation with partners and with help from expert peers. We prepopulated the survey with information we already had about business continuity management in each fire and rescue service. This reduced the burden of completion.
- 2** The survey contains several methods of data collection including limited-field free text boxes, scaled responses, and services can attach documents.
- 3** We divided the survey into three sections.
  - Section 1 asks questions about generic business continuity management.
  - Section 2 looks at the FRAs plans to deal with a mass absence of staff.
  - Section 3 deals with the capacity of the service to deal with disruptions.
- 4** We based the first section on the question in the Cabinet Office's Contingency Planning Self-Assessment Tool (CPSAT). Sixteen FRAs have completed this survey and we think it is a good way of using existing information.
- 5** We received responses from 46 out of 46 FRAs.

## Appendix 2

### Findings for each fire and rescue service

We have fed back our findings to each fire and rescue service (FRS) and asked them for comments. The text below is a result of that consultation.

Fire and Rescue Authority	Summary of observations and findings
<b>Avon Fire Authority</b>	Avon FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity (BC). The Service identifies most of its critical activities. Good communication plans are in place. Most business continuity management (BCM) plans are exercised and improvements are made as a result. Clear degradation plans are in place. The Service is learning from the 'Winter Willow' flu exercise and has an action plan in place. Staff policies and computer (FSEC) modelling are in place and show the capacity at each station and what incidents each has been responding to for the last three years. The FRS has a very proactive partnership approach with the military, as evidenced by its work during the REMOUNT exercise. It also has a track record of revising its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) following actual incidents. The FRS could show it learns from other fire and rescue services and from outside the Service. Internal and external stakeholders have some degree of awareness of the BC strategy. The FRS is working towards full compliance with BS25999 and can guarantee use and access to the New Dimension assets. However, the availability of specialist trained staff may be limited. This is important because this is equipment used to deal with large-scale emergencies.
<b>Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority</b>	Overall, Bedfordshire and Luton FRS has satisfactory business continuity arrangements in place. The Service makes sure that critical activities are identified and there are plans in place to cover most. The majority of plans include realistic assumptions, action plans and key tasks and, in some, communications strategies. Managers give good support to plans. The Service's plans are flexible and are updated, but only some stakeholders are aware of the strategy. Some elements of plans are aligned to the British Standard. Learning from events takes place and changes are made as a result. The FRS is confident that staff required are adequately trained, but not confident that all staff are aware of their role within BC arrangements. There are adequate plans to deal with a mass absence of staff and these are periodically tested. The FRS identifies capacity to deal with disruptions to services. It has also identified capacity to deal with disruptions to services and taken action to ensure sufficient availability of staff. The Service's call handling arrangements are in place and fire control staff in control can work flexibly to deal with an event.

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority</b>	<p>Buckinghamshire FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. The FRS has identified the most critical activities. Communication plans are good and well tested in the bad weather of 2009/10. Most plans are exercised and things change as a result. The FRS has clear degradation plans in place based on FSEC modelling. Staff policies are in place, and the numbers and skills of staff are identified in degradation policies. The Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) has its own BCM plan. The FRS has tested flu and bad weather plans, and desktop exercise for industrial relations. A learning point is the impact on multi-agency and partnership working. The FRS is signed up to a peer review process and is fully aligned with the British Standard BS25999. However, plans are not always kept up to date and BCM is not mainstreamed into other plans. Plans cannot guarantee the same high levels of public safety as in normal circumstances, and the Service is not confident that all partners or staff are aware of what it will do in the event of a disruption. The FRS cannot guarantee the availability of New Dimension assets. However, the Service is aware of these issues and work is underway to address them.</p>
<b>Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Cambridgeshire FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. The FRS is carrying out exercises, has developed a communications toolkit and has a flu plan in place. It is self-assessing to BS25999 as compliant. Audits are planned for the end of 2010. The Service uses a recall-to-duty system, and resilience agreements are in place. It is developing better data modelling to help plan ahead, and a new contract is being explored with a private contractor for emergency fire response for December 2010. However, the Service currently only exercises and tests some plans, and external partners have limited awareness of what will happen when large numbers of staff are absent. New Dimension support is not clear, although this is under review, and buddy arrangements for the control centre are with neighbours. The Service has no automated announcements.</p>
<b>Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Cheshire Fire and Rescue BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The Service identifies critical activities together with acceptable levels of service. Business continuity plans are in place for critical activities. There are procedures in place to update and maintain plans. Peer reviews and good practice have been used to support this. Contingency refresher training takes place annually, together with some testing of plans. Cheshire has undertaken some work to identify what capacity it needs to enact its plans. The Service's planning assumptions around the number of staff likely to be available are tested. Backup arrangements for the Service's control room are in place with another FRS. Cheshire has fully aligned arrangements to BS25999 and undergone an external audit. The Service has a high level of internal awareness of BCM arrangements but external partners are not so well informed. The Service is aware of these issues and plans to do more to address them.</p>

**Fire and Rescue Authority**      **Summary of observations and findings**

**Cleveland Fire Authority**      Cleveland FRS has sound arrangements in place to ensure its service continuity. The Service has identified all critical activities together with acceptable levels of service. Business Continuity plans are in place, including a flu pandemic plan, positive industrial relations strategy and human resources plan for managing on reduced staff numbers. Documented procedures for updating and maintaining all plans are in place. The Service is learning from peer reviews and good practice. The FRS tests its plans. Cleveland has identified what capacity it needs to activate its plans in the event of disruption. It has plans based on a ‘collapsing organisation structure’ which detail how services will be prioritised, response standards reviewed and resources deployed as staff numbers reduce. The Service is reviewing its plans including New Dimension assets. Backup arrangements for its control room are in place with Cleveland Police. Cleveland is not confident that all staff are aware of BCM arrangements and it is providing training to address this.

**Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service**      Cornwall FRS has adequate plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. Appropriate BCM plans are in place for critical activities and deal with the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. Arrangements are improving. The Service tests some plans but not enough, and there is high reliance placed on maintaining Retained Duty System (RDS) availability. The FRS has a new BCM strategy updated and in place, but this has not yet been well tested. The Service has a robust needs analysis in place which includes three years’ worth of analysis data for each station. This shows what incidents occur when and at what time of the day – and this shows what staff are required at what time. Therefore service degradation assumptions are clear and form part of a four-stage process. It is clear how and when plans would fail. However, staff training on them is limited, and only some plans have their key tasks allocated. Internal and external stakeholders are not always well informed of plans. In addition, the FRS only aligns some elements with BS25999. This is important as it is the national standard for BCM across the public and private sector. Plans do not show if there is enough capacity in place and where it is coming from; for example, RDS or WT staff. New Dimension assets are not available in mass staff absence. The knock-on effect and impact on other partners and the supply chain is also not clear; for example, co-responding, rescue aspects, suppliers of fuel and services etc.



<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The Service identifies its critical activities and acceptable levels of service, and there is a robust plan in place. The Resilient Durham and Darlington Plan covers a range of situations including flu and industrial action, supported by a degradation plan based on an absolute minimum of appliances deployed at strategic locations. The Service's plans have undergone a third-party audit which identified some minor improvements. Plans were exercised in November 2009. Planning assumptions have been amended as a result of the audit feedback and exercises. The Service has formal arrangements in place with another local service and Durham Police for call handling during an emergency. Partners' awareness of business continuity arrangements is good.
<b>Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. Cumbria has identified critical activities in some areas together with acceptable levels of service. Plans are in place for most critical activities and cover flu, industrial action and severe weather. Plans were tested for real by the 2009 Cumbria floods when the Service dealt with extended disruption. Procedures for updating and maintaining plans are less clear. Training is provided on plans but there is only some awareness by internal and external stakeholders. The Service provides no assurances around the availability of New Dimensions assets as part of its arrangements. Cumbria has undertaken some work to identify what capacity it needs to manage a disruption to services. The Service has call handling arrangements in place with two other fire and rescue services. Business continuity arrangements are fully aligned to BS25999, as part of the overall approach of Cumbria County Council.
<b>Derbyshire Fire Authority</b>	Overall, Derbyshire FRS has satisfactory business continuity management arrangements in place. Some plans are exercised, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Internal stakeholders have a high awareness but only some external stakeholders are aware of the business continuity plans. Some parts of the organisation are aligned to the British Standard BS25999. The Service has plans in place to deal with a mass absence of staff, and capacity to deal with disruptions to the service is identified. Staff planning assumptions are based on experience. For example, past industrial action and severe weather. However, in times of industrial action the FRS is reliant on employees who are not in the union and those who are still willing to work. The level of absence is not known until the event. This is a risk to the FRS.
<b>Devon and Somerset Fire Authority</b>	Overall, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's business continuity arrangements are satisfactory. The Service has identified critical activities and managers give their full support to plans. Plans are flexible and updated, but with no external verification yet. Appropriate BCM plans are in place for all critical activities and to deal with the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. >>>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Devon and Somerset Fire Authority</b>	The Service is testing plans, although this could be done more frequently. Plans are aligned with BS25999 but understanding amongst all front-line staff is not well known. The Service knows where capacity is drawn from and identifies what skills are needed. Planning assumptions are realistic and there is a great deal of learning from real and simulated events.
<b>Dorset Fire Authority</b>	Dorset FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. The FRS has identified all critical activities and core tasks. Responsibilities are clearly articulated. Training plans are good and it is clear who does what and when. The Service exercises most plans and things change as a result. It has clear degradation plans in place. Good communications plans are in place and tested. The FRS is fully aligned with BS25999. Further detailed tests and an audit are planned. Assumptions for an industrial dispute are well articulated. A recall-to-duty system is in place for control room staff. External stakeholders have good awareness of plans. The Service has appropriate BCM plans in place for all critical activities and to deal with the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. It tests its plans but could do more. The knock-on effect on partnerships could be clearer; for example, rescue aspects of the Service and co-responding. Due to the crewing systems employed, the FRS cannot guarantee the availability of New Dimension assets. Overall, plans are detailed and support the organisation in staying resilient to ensure public safety. The Service has arrangements in place to address any areas for improvement.
<b>East Sussex Fire Authority</b>	East Sussex FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. The Service identifies all critical activities and levels of service. An audit of BS25999 is planned in line with the South-East Regional Management Board (RMB) business plan. The Service tests its business continuity plans for effectiveness. Good communication plans are in places which are practical and tailored to suit vulnerable people. The Service has a project plan in place to improve arrangements further. Flu and severe weather plans are well tested. There are arrangements to test specific elements of the Service's industrial action business continuity plans and discussions are underway with a contractor to consider this further. However, there is a lack of clarity within the Service about when to enact plans. In addition, there is the need to improve the awareness by external stakeholders of the FRS's business continuity management plans. The skills levels needed to develop plans, and the capacity to deliver the arrangements if enacted, is unclear in some areas. For example, the New Dimension availability and support in times of mass staff absence is not clear, and buddy arrangements for control centre are only with neighbours. The FRS recognises that it has more work to do to improve overall business continuity and has put arrangements in place.

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Essex County Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Essex FRS has sound business continuity arrangements. It has suitable plans in place across a range of critical activities where mass absence may occur, including industrial action, flu pandemic and fuel strikes. Assumptions are realistic for each scenario. For example, a strike plan is in place assuming up to 80 per cent absence through industrial action, with good assurance from senior offices that cover would be maintained as a result of this planning. The FRS has attempted as far as possible to ensure sufficient availability of staff for the scenarios, including a flu plan. The Service has business continuity arrangements in place for New Dimensions assets. Departmental business continuity plans underpin strategic-level plans. Buddy arrangements have been reviewed and staffing arrangements for fire control are flexible enough to increase capacity at busy times. Overall, plans to deal with mass absence of staff are robust and have good support from senior managers. The Service is increasing capacity to develop this and a continuity coordinator has been assigned. Its degradation plans are being developed but have yet to be tested. Therefore, prospects of improvement are positive. However, there are no queuing arrangements or automated responses in place to ensure the public is kept informed during any disruption.</p>
<b>Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service</b>	<p>Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. It has appropriate BCM plans in place for all critical activities and to deal with the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. The Service tests its plans but more could be done and there is high reliance placed on maintaining Retained Duty System (RDS) availability. The Service communicates well with the public in times of disruption. Gloucestershire identifies what capacity it needs to deliver its BCM plans in event of disruption. The Service makes sure it has sufficient capacity to deal with short-term disruptions from retained duty system staff and through recall-to-duty arrangements for the control room. Backup arrangements for the Service's control room – including high numbers of 999 calls – are in place and have been well tested. But plans cannot guarantee the same high levels of public safety as in normal circumstances.</p>
<b>Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue BCM arrangements are sound. The Service's strategic business continuity management plan outlines minimum levels of service and covers all critical activities. This strategic plan has robust action plans in place which are regularly updated to reflect changes. The Service's degradation plan ensures a tiered reduction of resources for control room staff, vehicles and firefighters. It has no arrangements in place to maintain availability of New Dimensions assets. Plans are tested. Greater Manchester has arrangements in place to secure the capacity it needs to activate its business continuity plans. Enough capacity is assured by multi-skilling staff for critical functions, and by having resilience contracts and a recall-to-duty policy. The Service's fallback arrangements are in place with other fire and rescue services to handle calls.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Appropriate BCM plans are in place for all critical activities and the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. Senior staff and members know what to do and when things need to happen. The Service's plans and assumptions underlying those plans are being developed further in light of recent experience. Internal and external stakeholder awareness is good. There has been lots of testing and there is good collaboration on this with other emergency services. The FRS has identified what capacity it needs and understands the limitations of the plans. Some of the very specialised equipment and vehicles which form part of national arrangements and require highly specialist staff may not be available. In emergency situations, Hampshire FRS sends out messages to the public and provides guidance on how to look after family, friends and neighbours. Good backup arrangements for the Service's control room to deal with high numbers of 999 calls are in place.</p>
<b>Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority</b>	<p>Overall, Hereford and Worcester FRS has satisfactory business continuity management arrangements in place. The FRS has good plans in place to deal with a mass absence of staff. The Service identifies all critical activities and managers give good support for plans. It exercises the majority of plans, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Stakeholders have a high awareness of the Service's BC plans. The FRS is fully aligned to the British Standard and has undergone third-party audit. There are good arrangements in place for communicating to the public that are recently exercised and tested. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs to deal with disruptions to services. Its degradation arrangements are outlined in its Operational Intervention Resilience Plan which divides the Service in three sections that include flexi-duty, wholetime and the retained duty system (RDS). All sections are tested for all three scenarios – flu pandemic, industrial action and severe weather.</p>
<b>Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Overall, Hertfordshire FRS has satisfactory business continuity management arrangements in place. The Service identifies all critical activities. Service managers and elected members give good support for plans. The Service exercises the majority of plans, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Stakeholders have a high awareness of the BC plans. Some elements of the plans are aligned to the British Standard. The FRS has adequate plans in place to deal with a mass absence of staff. Hertfordshire has good arrangements in place for communicating to the public. The FRS is ensuring sufficient capacity is available to deal with disruptions to services. Hertfordshire's plans describe what to do when dealing with industrial action, flu, and severe weather. Availability of vehicles and equipment are included in business continuity plans. A third-party contract is being considered that looks at extra provision of fully trained crews. The Service's call queuing arrangements and call handling arrangements are in place and are tested.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Humberside Fire Authority</b>	<p>Business continuity management arrangements are satisfactory. Humberside FRS has plans in place to deal with a mass absence of staff that can cope with local disruptions. However, scenarios having a national context would cause significant challenges to such arrangements. The Service's BC arrangements are well supported and most plans are exercised. Learning is captured and changes are made. BC awareness by internal and external stakeholders of the BC strategy is well targeted. The FRS is working towards alignment of BC arrangements to the British Standard but has not yet undertaken formal audit by external audit. The intention is to provide 100 per cent of New Dimensions assets but currently this cannot be guaranteed during all disruptions. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs to deal with disruptions to services, strengthened by operational resilience and training programmes delivering additional staff with the right skills. The Service's call queuing, call handling and overflow arrangements are well managed and there are flexible fire control arrangements in place. Further improvements are planned, including alternative mobilising options.</p>
<b>Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service</b>	<p>The Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service's business continuity arrangements are satisfactory because they are improving quickly and senior managers have a good grip of the issues. The FRS has recently identified acceptable levels of service for a few critical activities. Key tasks are allocated and public communication strategies are in place, and most plans assumptions are tested. The Service carries out testing and exercising. The FRS has had a peer review and plans are fully supported by senior staff. Staff and external partners are improving their awareness of plans. The FRS recognises it has more to do on training its staff to deal with reduced numbers. There remains a concern over capacity with sustained emergencies over 24 hours. However, firefighters are well motivated and well led, a lot is learnt from dealing with severe weather, and there is good support from other fire and rescue services.</p>
<b>Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service</b>	<p>The Isles of Scilly FRS can cope with disruptions to services for a reasonable period of time. The Isles benefit from strong community resilience and good lines of communication within communities. The Service employs retained duty system (part-time) staff – many of which are employed as airport firefighters. The current staffing levels include additional volunteers, increasing the retained staff from 38 to 53. The Coastguard and other emergency services can give additional help and their staff have had some basic training in firefighting. The Service has agreed arrangements with Cornwall FRS to provide additional services to the islands, and provide additional specialist help. Each island is equipped with suitable vehicles that are used over rough terrain. Local New Dimension assets are a stopgap for the delivery of other help from Cornwall or South-West FRS. The knock-on effect on partnerships is not clear, and call centre backups are limited.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority</b>	<p>Kent FRS has satisfactory business continuity plans in place that have been tested, and resources needed are identified. The Service identifies all critical activities and managers give good support to these plans. Its plans, and assumptions underlying them, are being developed further in light of recent experience. Internal and external stakeholders have good awareness of plan. The Service tests its plans and there is good collaboration with other emergency services on this. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs and understands the limitations of the plans. Plans are mostly aligned with the British Standard BS25999, but the Service recognises there is some need to ensure that plans are reviewed and updated. The Service learns from real and simulated events.</p>
<b>Lancashire Combined Fire Authority</b>	<p>Lancashire FRS has sound business continuity arrangements. It identifies all critical activities in plans which are flexible, tested and updated. Internal awareness and involvement in business continuity is good. Staff are signed up to local resilience agreements and local fire stations have their own continuity plans. The Service identifies what capacity it needs, based on realistic planning assumptions. However, where capacity is drawn from and what skills are needed could be clearer. External stakeholder awareness of the Service's arrangements is limited. The Service is doing more to address these issues.</p>
<b>Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority</b>	<p>Overall, Leicestershire and Rutland Fire and Rescue Service's business continuity management arrangements are satisfactory. The Service has robust business continuity plans in place covering all critical activities and managers give good support for plans. Its plans are exercised, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Internal stakeholders have high levels of awareness and external stakeholders have some awareness of the business continuity strategy. Some elements of the plans are aligned to the British Standard but have not yet undergone third-party audit. Staff required to deliver business continuity planning are adequately trained but the FRS is not confident that all staff are aware of their role within the business continuity arrangements. The Service has good arrangements in place for communicating to the public. It has comprehensive service procedures in place to deal with severe weather and human pandemic influenza that contain realistic planning assumptions. The Service recognises its plans for industrial action need further clarity regarding capacity and skills. More is planned to address this. The Service has arrangements in place to ensure availability of New Dimensions assets. The FRS maintains plans to ensure the most efficient deployment of available staff resources and this is specifically outlined within the Operational Degradation Plan. This plan also ensures that the available assets and resources are deployed in accordance with maintaining the highest level of response capability. Planning assumptions are realistic. The Service's call queuing arrangements and call handling arrangements are in place and are appropriate. Current fire control staff arrangements provide sufficient flexibility to increase capacity during spate conditions. Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service maintains good industrial relationships with all representative bodies and this is integral to their overall BCM strategy.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Lincolnshire Fire Authority</b>	<p>Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The Service exercises some plans, learning is captured and changes are made as a result. Internal and external stakeholders have some awareness of the BC strategy. The Service is fully aligned to the British Standard but has not yet undergone third-party audit. Good plans are in place to deal with a mass absence of staff. The FRS ensures there is capacity in place to deal with short-term local disruptions. Availability of sufficient staff has been ensured through various ways – for example, utilising operational staff – and station and departmental plans contain acceptable levels of staff based on time matrix. However, it is not clear whether enough staff can be employed to satisfy this need in the time given. The availability of vehicles is ensured through adequate degradation plans. There is also a contract with a private contractor to provide frontline vehicles and servicing arrangements. The Service's call queuing arrangements and call handling arrangements are in place. Fire control staff arrangements provide sufficient flexibility to increase capacity during disruptions.</p>
<b>London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority</b>	<p>Overall, London Fire Brigade (LFB) has satisfactory business continuity plans in place that are appropriate to the local and national risks it has to manage. It has identified critical activities, and the impact of a disruption of each part of LFB and its partners is well thought through. London's plans are excellent – they are flexible and regularly updated. External verification of them has started. There has been lots of testing – real and simulated. LFB identifies what capacity it needs based on the level of risk. A self-sufficient model is adopted for disruptions using a private sector contractor. Plans are fully aligned with BS25999, but understanding amongst frontline staff could be better. Where capacity is drawn from is clear, and what skills are needed are identified. LFB's planning assumptions are realistic, and there has been lots of learning from previous emergencies and experiences. LFB has purchased an appropriate level of resilience and this is important because of the risks inherent in London. These consider new risks, including international events such as the Olympics in 2012.</p>
<b>Merseyside Fire And Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Overall, Merseyside FRS has satisfactory business continuity plans in place that are well tested, and resources needed are identified. The Service identifies its critical activities and managers give good support to plans. Its plans are flexible and updated, and they have been externally verified. Internal stakeholder and external stakeholder awareness is good. The Service carries out lots of testing – real and simulation – and a self-sufficient model has been adopted for industrial action known as 'business as usual'. The Service is improving its staff engagement, despite some union hostility, and 218 staff have signed up to local resilient agreements. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs. Its plans are fully aligned with BS25999 and understanding amongst all frontline staff is improving.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Norfolk Fire Service</b>	<p>Overall, Norfolk FRS business continuity management arrangements are satisfactory and more work is taking place to ensure there are enough staff with the right skills to deal with a wide range of disruptions. The Service exercises and tests some plans, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Internal and external stakeholders have some awareness of the BC strategy. Some elements of the organisation are fully aligned to the British Standard but have not yet undergone third-party audit. Availability of sufficient staff is ensured through various ways; for example, close links with neighbouring FRAs, buddy arrangements, recall policy for control room staff, 4x4 vehicles to transport control room staff in severe weather. The Service has good arrangements in place for communicating to the public. Business continuity plans for industrial action which date from 2003 are being updated. A pandemic flu plan is in place with planning assumptions based on worst case scenarios. New dimension assets are not included in business continuity arrangements. However, they suggest that if New Dimension assets are not available they would have to call upon regional and national support.</p>
<b>North Yorkshire Fire And Rescue Authority</b>	<p>North Yorkshire FRS has sound arrangements and capacity in place to ensure its service continuity can be maintained. The Service identifies critical activities and acceptable levels of service in an overarching business continuity management plan. This plan contains a critical service delivery action plan that sets out various levels of resources that can be made available with different staffing levels and the location of these resources. Specific plans are in place for flu, severe weather and industrial action. The availability of New Dimension assets are considered a low priority. As a result of testing plans through recent severe weather and flooding, the planning assumptions appear accurate. In all real incidents normal services levels have resumed within 24 hours. Longer-term continuity plans, although in place, have not been tested to the same degree. The Service maintains competency levels for staff responsible under the business continuity plan via an exercise programme which covers a range of potential scenarios.</p>
<b>Northamptonshire Fire Authority</b>	<p>Northamptonshire FRS has sound business continuity management arrangements. The Service's business continuity plans include departmental plans in place covering all critical activities. The majority of plans are exercised, learning is captured and action agreed. Internal and external stakeholders have a high level of awareness of the plans and arrangements. The Service fully aligns business continuity to British Standard 25999 and has undergone third-party audit. New Dimension assets are included in business continuity arrangements. A degradation plan enables available resources to be strategically located to achieve the safest risk-based response for the community. The Service has arrangements to ensure availability of vehicles, equipment and staff. Fall back call handing arrangements are in place with another fire and rescue service.</p>



<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Northumberland Fire Authority</b>	<p>Northumberland FRS has sound plans and satisfactory arrangements in place to ensure business continuity. All critical activities have been identified, together with acceptable levels of service. Minimum staffing requirements for critical service delivery are identified in the Business Continuity and Resilient Northumberland Plans. Managers and members give a high level of commitment to business continuity and are mainstreaming all management processes. Procedures are in place for updating and maintaining plans, and the majority of plans are exercised with learning informing changes. The Service has satisfactory arrangements in place to secure the capacity it needs to activate its continuity plans. Its plans ensure the delivery of risk-critical services, reallocation of available resources and retraining of staff if required. When only a minimal level of response is available, New Dimension assets are not guaranteed to be available. Northumberland has fallback call handling arrangements with a local fire service and is in discussion with another national service to provide continuity in times of severe weather.</p>
<b>Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. Its business continuity plans are in place covering most critical activities and there is good support for plans. Most plans are exercised, learning is captured and action agreed. Staff required to deliver business continuity planning are adequately trained for the majority of plans. Public safety information and communications are good. However, the Service is not confident that all staff are aware of their role within the business continuity arrangements, but are addressing this as a matter of urgency. The Service has arrangements in place to maintain availability of most New Dimensions assets. If a 999 call is not answered within a specific time it diverts to another local FRS or Nottinghamshire Police.</p>
<b>Oxfordshire Fire Authority</b>	<p>Oxfordshire FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. It identifies all critical activities and expected levels of service. Plans are continuously updated, and reviewed following regular training and exercises. Flu and severe weather plans are well tested and there are plans to further enhance arrangements regarding potential industrial disputes. Good integration with county council plans is helping. A High Absence Level Operating (HALO) procedure is in place and tested. Partners are aware of the FRS's plans. Good communication plans are in place, which are practical and tailored to suit vulnerable people. The Service has a project plan in place to improve arrangements further. Capacity appears to be well considered and in place for most aspects of response activity. Discussions are underway with an external private sector contractor to improve this further. The Service provides training for extra call handling staff. The FRS is aligned to BS25999, but the skill levels and capacity needed are unclear in some places; for example, the New Dimension availability. The FRS recognises it has more to do to clarify this and an audit of BS25999 is programmed in line with South-East Regional Management Board (RMB) plans.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Royal Berkshire Fire Authority</b>	<p>Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's plans and arrangements for business continuity are satisfactory. The Service identifies most of its critical activities. Good communication plans are in place and well tested in the bad weather of 2009/10. Most plans are exercised and things change as a result. The FRS has clear degradation plans in place based on data modelling. Staff policies in place, and the numbers and skills of staff are identified in degradation policies. The Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Service has its own BCM plan. The FRS tests flu and bad weather plans, and a desktop exercise for industrial relations is planned. The Service is working on understanding the impact of disruptions on multi-agency and partnership working. The FRS has signed up to a peer review process and is fully aligned with BS25999. But plans cannot guarantee the same high levels of public safety as it can in normal circumstances. And the Service is not confident that all partners or staff are aware of what it will do in the event of a disruption. And significantly, the FRS cannot guarantee the availability of New Dimension assets.</p>
<b>Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority</b>	<p>BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The FRS has adequate plans in place to deal with a mass absence of staff. BC arrangements are supported and some plans are exercised. Learning is captured and changes made as a result. Awareness by internal and external stakeholders of the BC strategy is limited but improving. The Service is fully aligned to the British Standard BS25999 but has not yet undertaken formal audit by external audit. The intention is to provide 100 per cent of New Dimensions assets but this is not guaranteed. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs to deal with disruptions to services but it is not clear if sufficient staff are available or have the skills required. The Service's call queuing and call handling arrangements are managed by BT and Cable and Wireless and there are flexible fire control arrangements in place. However, the Service is aware of these issues and plans to do more to address them.</p>
<b>South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>South Yorkshire FRS has satisfactory arrangements in place to ensure its service continuity. The Service identifies all critical activities across the organisation plus acceptable levels of service. Staff training is provided for the majority of plans. Plans are exercised and there is a documented process for capturing lessons and changes are made as a result. The Service makes effective planning assumptions and arrangements are in place for resource mobilisation and call handling; for example, volunteers are available through a recall process. The Service's plans were well tested by a recent industrial dispute, and are effective. The Service continued to provide emergency response cover, using its own appliances and staff. Effective communication plans are in place, and arrangements made for New Dimension assets are improving.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The FRS bases its business continuity arrangements on planning assumptions learnt from previous experiences. The Service's plans are also supported by good local information and two-way communications with staff and their representative bodies. Flu and severe weather plans were tested twice in the last twelve months and other plans are under review. Business continuity arrangements include the availability of New Dimension assets. The FRS has adequate call handling arrangements in place. Degradation plans are based on responding to local risks. But it is not clear if there is enough capacity in place or the skills needed to deal with disruptions to services in the event of a national strike. However, the FRS is confident it can provide a suitably scaled down response to emergencies as staff numbers reduce.</p>
<b>Suffolk Fire Authority</b>	<p>Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's business continuity management arrangements are satisfactory. The Service's plans are sound and it is clear who is responsible for what task. Plans are in place to deal with a mass absence of staff. The majority of plans are exercised and learning is captured. Stakeholders have a high level of awareness of the business continuity strategy. Some elements of the organisation are aligned to the British Standard. The FRS is confident that plans are easily understood by those who have a role to play, and are flexible to deal with varying sizes and types of emergency. Staff required to deliver business continuity planning are adequately trained but the FRS is not confident that all staff are aware of their role within the business continuity arrangements. There are good working relationships with all representative bodies to minimise the potential for industrial action and various protocols ensure there is minimum appliance availability. Arrangements for provision of New Dimensions assets are being considered. Call queuing arrangements are in place to provide callers with information and buddy arrangements are sound. Fire control staffing can be sufficiently flexible to increase capacity during spate conditions. Arrangements are in place to discourage non-essential calls during exceptional circumstances.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
<b>Surrey Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Surrey FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. The Service identifies all critical activities and levels of service, and officers are committed to plans. An audit of BS25999 by regional FRS peers is being carried out and will be followed up by an external audit. Good communication plans are in place which are practical and tailored to suit vulnerable people. External stakeholders have limited awareness of the Service's BCM plans. However, the Service is developing its links with key partners. Its degradation plans go down to having one appliance available and it is not clear how useful this would be. Its plans are in place to improve arrangements around capacity and discussions are underway with an external private sector contractor to improve this further. Surrey's flu and severe weather plans are well tested and there is some work to do in relation to the development and testing of plans to deal with industrial action. New Dimension resources would be made available but buddy arrangements for the control centre are currently only with neighbours. However, Surrey FRS's BCM planning assumptions appear well thought through and the Service is aware of where it needs to improve and has plans in place to do this.</p>
<b>Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Tyne and Wear FRS has satisfactory business continuity plans and arrangements in place. It is working towards BS25999, the British Standard for Business Continuity. The Service has plans in place for flu, industrial action and severe weather and these plans identify some areas of support services which are critical in service continuity terms. There is some testing of plans. The Service's plans provide for the degradation of service based on a reduced number of appliances at key locations whilst maintaining 10 minute travel times. Its plans cover the availability of New Dimensions assets. The Service is confident that it has arrangements in place to be self reliant in case of mass staff absence. There are recall-to-duty arrangements in place and refresher training for day duty staff. Local and national fallback arrangements are in place for call handling. Internal and external stakeholders have some awareness of business continuity.</p>
<b>Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>Warwickshire FRS has satisfactory business continuity management arrangements in place. The Service's business continuity plans are in place covering all critical activities and there is good support for plans. Stakeholders have a high level of awareness of the Service's plans and staff are adequately trained. The Service's degradation plans are scalable to address progressively reducing staffing, and some testing has taken place. No provision has been made for New Dimensions assets in the Service's business continuity arrangements. The Service's planning assumptions are based on being able to maintain a sufficient level emergency response for a reasonable time and that all vehicles and equipment would be available.</p>

<b>Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<b>Summary of observations and findings</b>
----------------------------------	---

<b>West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	<p>West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service's BCM arrangements are satisfactory. Its plans cover all critical activities and managers give good support to plans. The majority of plans are exercised, learning is captured and changes made as a result. Stakeholders have a high level of awareness of the business continuity. Staff are adequately trained and the Service is confident that all staff are aware of their roles within the business continuity arrangements. The Service's key fire stations ('Hot Stations') are identified based on degradation scenarios which are supported with estates strategy to provide backup utilities to increase resilience. The Service has a 'Gold' agreement in place for New Dimension assets to be deployed. Adequate arrangements are in place for skilling non-operational officers and working from home to ensure sufficient availability of staff to deliver an appropriate service. However, it is not clear if these arrangements provide enough capacity or the right skills needed to deal with any disruption to services. The Service's fallback arrangements for call handling are in place with a local FRS.</p>
--	--

<b>West Sussex Fire Authority</b>	<p>West Sussex FRS has satisfactory plans and arrangements in place for business continuity. It identifies all critical activities and levels of service. Fire service staff and the County Council are committed to these plans. West Sussex complies with the British Standard BS25999 and, as well as internal audits, a separate peer group audit is planned by the South-East Regional Management Board. The Service tests its business continuity plans for effectiveness. Good communication plans are in place which are very practical and tailored to suit vulnerable people. A project plan is in place to improve arrangements further. Discussions are underway with an external private sector contractor to see if anything can be improved. The Service and Council's flu and severe weather plans are well tested and there are more planned to test industrial relations plans. The Service has appropriate BCM plans in place for all critical activities and to deal with the most serious disruptions including flu, industrial action and bad weather. The Service is testing its plans for staff absence. At present there is high reliance placed on maintaining Retained Duty System (RDS) availability. New Dimension availability in times of mass staff absence may be compromised by industrial action. Buddy arrangements are with the neighbouring FRS.</p>
-----------------------------------	--

Fire and Rescue Authority	Summary of observations and findings
<b>West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	West Yorkshire FRS has sound arrangements in place to ensure its service continuity. Critical activities and acceptable levels of service are identified, and plans are in place to maintain them. The majority of plans were tested recently and learning has informed improvements, such as increasing training and awareness of business continuity for staff. The Service has arrangements in place to ensure availability of New Dimensions assets. Its detailed degradation plan includes the crewing of a minimum number of fire appliances. The Service identifies what capacity it needs to activate its continuity plans. Minimum service standards are based on worst case planning assumptions and a range of flexible working arrangements are in place to sustain this standard over a short period. The Service's backup call handing arrangements are in place with two other fire services.
<b>Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority</b>	BCM arrangements are satisfactory. The fire and rescue service's plans deal with a mass absence of staff. BC arrangements are supported by staff and some plans are exercised. Internal and external stakeholders have some awareness of the BC strategy. The Service is partly aligned to the British Standard BS25999. Its provision of New Dimensions assets is not guaranteed and plans relating to brigade control are unclear. The FRS identifies what capacity it needs to deal with disruptions to services and includes public and firefighter safety in these plans. However, it is not clear if sufficient and adequately trained staff would be available during longer periods of disruption. The Service cannot guarantee the same high levels of public safety as it can in normal circumstances.

If you require a copy of this document in an alternative format or in a language other than English, please call: **0844 798 7070**

If you require a printed copy of this document, please call: **0800 50 20 30** or email: [ac-orders@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:ac-orders@audit-commission.gov.uk)

This document is available on our website.

We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please email: [nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk)



**Audit Commission**

1st Floor  
Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4HQ

Telephone: **0844 798 3131**  
Fax: 0844 798 2945  
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

**[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)**