

The Fire Brigades Union



Easy targets?

**Tackling attacks
on fire crews
in the UK**



A report by the Labour Research Department (LRD)
for the Fire Brigades Union

February 2008



Foreword



It is never acceptable for anyone to go to work and have to put up with verbal abuse or physical assault. Yet that is what fire crews are now facing on a daily basis in some areas of the United Kingdom.

It is almost unimaginable that firefighters trying to save a life or someone's home will be attacked or abused on the way to the incident or at the incident itself. Yet that is what is happening at least 40 times a day – and possibly a lot more often.

The consequences can be grave for the fire crews involved. Physical injury is an obvious outcome but the threat of attack or persistent verbal abuse can demoralise, cause anxiety and increase stress, all of which damage your health.

While fire crews and appliances are the direct targets the victims are those who live in these communities. A delay getting to a 999 incident can result in more serious injury or death for those trapped.

Most of these attacks are carried out by children and teenagers. But some involve adults and middle age men.

Frustration, boredom, alcohol and drug use can all fuel the problems of youngsters living on communities and estates that feel on the margins of society. The outcome can be recreational violence aimed at whatever represents the wider society these youngsters feel excluded from.

It may explain why the highest number of attacks are in areas characterised by poor housing, poverty and no facilities. Understanding why it happens is not to condone or accept it, but to help us address it.

When the fire service engages with these youngsters in these communities we know it works. The fire service can reach youngsters and communities that others struggle to make an impact on.

The Fire Brigades Union has again conducted extensive research into this important area. We have done so because it affects the health and safety of our members. We believe we have also carried out an important piece of work on behalf of the whole Fire and Rescue Service. Others within the service are taking this issue seriously but there remains too much neglect.

Government needs to take a lead rather than sitting on the sidelines ignoring the problem. There needs to be a Government-led national strategy backed up by long-term funding for and an expansion of our community engagement programmes.

Government has a central role to play. It is time for it to play it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Wrack". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY

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Executive summary

Attacks on fire crews – from physical abuse to missiles thrown to verbal abuse – continue to be a significant hazard in the fire service. There are few signs of improvement in recent years.

Official figures on attacks on firefighters are woefully inadequate. In England and Wales, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) claim that attacks have fallen from 1,300 in 2005-06 to 400 in 2006-07 is false. Figures in Scotland have recorded on average over 300 attacks a year for four years. Figures for Northern Ireland are not collected in the same way as the rest of the UK.

New figures collected from every fire and rescue service in the UK under the Freedom of Information Act suggest that officially there are more than 2,000 attacks on fire crews every year, over 40 a week or six a day. However under-reporting is rife and FBU representatives estimate that the figure is at least twice as high – and quite possibly far higher than that.

The DCLG does not have a coherent national strategy for reducing attacks on fire crews. It does not publish its figures for England and Wales. Its guidance is cursory and in places, contradictory. It appears to put few resources into tackling the problem centrally or providing support for local fire and rescue services. This contrasts with other departments and government bodies such as the NHS and the Health and Safety Executive, where centrally-driven initiatives to tackle violence at work are taken more seriously.

Some fire and rescue services have good policies for tackling violence towards all fire service personnel, which utilise the well-established health and safety approach of risk assessment and the deployment of prevention and control measures. However other authorities continue to deal with the issue under civil disturbance procedures.

There are many effective community, youth and education programmes run by fire and rescue services, which have integrated the issue of attacks on fire crews into their schemes of work and teaching strategies. These programmes offer the best long-term strategy for preventing attacks from taking place.

There are few public awareness or media campaigns that challenge attacks on firefighters, although examples of good practice (such as in Northern Ireland) do exist.

Firefighters are unhappy with the speed and quality of police responses when they are under attack, including

the deployment of community support officers in place of fully trained officers with the powers of arrest. Firefighters and FBU representatives are keen to maintain the neutrality of their profession from law enforcement and are unhappy with police riding in appliances.

This research found little evidence that Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) is an effective deterrent against attacks on firefighters. Many firefighters and FBU representatives said it undermined their efforts to foster better relations with the communities they serve. The current technical limitations of CCTV have meant that most camera footage is unsuitable for prosecutions.

There are a range of reporting systems in operation in fire and rescue services, making consistent data collection and analysis difficult. Although authorities generally encourage reporting, some systems are too cumbersome and time-consuming to achieve the desired result.

Only a few fire and rescue services comprehensively train their staff about tackling violence at work.

Key recommendations

The DCLG should develop a coherent national strategy to tackle attacks on fire crews, in consultation with the FBU and senior fire officers. It should include adequate reporting and collection methods and the production of comprehensive good practice guidance, backed by resources to help fire and rescue services implement local initiatives.

Fire and rescue services should develop separate "Violence at Work" policies that follow the health and safety approach of risk assessment, prevention and control, with built in monitoring and review involving fire service personnel and their representatives.

The DCLG and fire and rescue services should ensure that adequate funding streams are available for community youth and education programmes, and that these programmes tackle the issue of attacks as an integral part of these programmes.

The DCLG and fire and rescue services should run public awareness campaigns using the media and other channels to highlight the consequences of attacks on fire crews.

Fire and rescue services should introduce a moratorium on the use of CCTV until its implications have been thoroughly researched.

Fire and rescue services should assess their premises, appliances (including small vehicles) and equipment with regard to the risk of attacks on fire crews.

The DCLG and fire and rescue services should develop straightforward and easy to use reporting systems to fully measure the scale of attacks and their severity.

Fire and rescue services should train all fire service personnel on the issue of violence, during induction and as part of later training programmes.

Fire and rescue services should ensure that all fire service personnel that suffer an injury following an attack are not penalised further in terms of their pay and conditions. Fire authorities should have adequate rehabilitation arrangements in place for firefighters injured as a result of attacks by members of the public.

Introduction

Attacks on firefighters – from vicious personal assaults to bombarding by bricks, stones and concrete as well as countless verbal abuse – continue to be a persistent feature of a job already renowned for its danger.

Reports of attacks on firefighters are regularly featured by local newspapers, with the national media picking up on some of the worst examples.

In one month alone last year:

- a hoax caller lured firefighters from the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) to a 'car fire' where they were attacked with bricks, causing damage to the side of the appliance and hitting a window close to where a firefighter was sat. (Runcorn and Widnes World, 8 October 2007)
- a petrol bomb was hurled at a fire appliance tackling a rubbish blaze in Merseyside. (Liverpool Echo, 12 October 2007)
- a gas cylinder exploded after being planted inside a wheelie bin and set ablaze in Cleveland. (Evening Gazette, 27 October 2007)

In Lothian and Borders, firefighters have recorded attacks with mash hammers, spitting, bricks, knives, blocks of wood, lumps of concrete and coins. Last year one watch reported that a breeze block had been thrown off a bridge, crashing into the appliance.

Many of these crimes go unpunished. In Edinburgh, the youth who threw the breeze block was caught, but was only made to apologise to firefighters, with no further action taken.

Many of these attacks, if they are recorded at all, are counted as "near misses". But some firefighters don't escape the consequences and are injured by these attacks.

In a recent case in Nottinghamshire FRS, a retained firefighter who was seriously assaulted whilst on his fire fighting duties lost his other job as a miner as a result of his injuries. To make matters worse, he has been threatened with the sack if a medical says he is too sick to continue as a firefighter and no other role is found for him. He will also be denied a firefighters pension under new government regulations if dismissed. (Sunday Telegraph, 11 November 2007)

In October last year, a firefighter in the Lancashire FRS was taken to hospital after youths threw a brick through a fire appliance window. The crew were attending a fire and had stopped at a set of traffic

lights, when they were targeted by a group of youths hiding in an alley. The injured firefighter was taken to hospital. It took three hours to get a replacement appliance. (The Citizen, 2 October 2007).

In January last year in Avon FRS, an appliance approaching a fire was hit by rocks. When crew dismantled large amounts of broken patio slab was thrown at them. Three firefighters were hit and the crew were unable to finish work due to the danger." (Communication 15 August 2007)

Methodology

This report represents a further stage in the work of the FBU to tackle the issue of attacks on firefighters. It builds on the "Attacks on firefighters" report produced by the Labour Research Department (LRD) for the FBU in April 2005.

This new report aims to assess the progress made in the last two and a half years since the last "Attacks on firefighters" report.

The objectives of this report are:

- To establish the scale of attacks on firefighters
- To examine the national and local strategies in place to reduce attacks on firefighters
- To evaluate the prevention, control and management measures designed to tackle violence towards firefighters
- To identify examples of good practice in individual fire and rescue services which can be adopted and adapted by others

The research for this report was conducted in three phases between July and December 2007.

Firstly LRD contacted government agencies such as the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for statistics and information on the government's strategy for tackling violence against firefighters. Every fire and rescue service in the UK was asked to send their figures and policies on attacks on firefighters.

Secondly, LRD conducted a survey of FBU brigade secretaries to ascertain the views of key FBU representatives on the attacks on firefighters in their area.

Thirdly, eight fire and rescue services – Cleveland, Northern Ireland, Lothian and Borders, Cheshire, West Yorkshire, Royal Berkshire, South Wales and London were visited. FBU officials and safety representatives, ordinary firefighters and senior fire officers, health and safety managers, control room staff and an occupational health nurse provided a multifaceted assessment of the reality on the ground.

The report is a further contribution to the necessary national debate on this important problem. It recognises that, as one FBU executive member put it: "There are no quick-fix sound bites" to resolve attacks on firefighters. However there are things that can be done and actions that can be taken.

The report is intended for firefighters and other fire service personnel, union representatives, local managers and policy makers. It contains the most comprehensive figures on attacks on firefighters ever published in the UK. It also contains numerous examples of good practice. It is hoped that fire and rescue services, in consultation with the FBU, will use the report as part of their work to dramatically reduce attacks on fire service workers.

1 The scale of the problem

Attacks on fire service personnel take a variety of forms, including everyday verbal abuse through to objects thrown and to actual physical assault.

Vivienne Brunsden from Nottingham Trent University, writing in *Fire* magazine (December 2007), has usefully divided attacks into three distinct forms

- 1) **Physical attacks from a distance.** These are the typical or normal form of attack, carried out by a group of youths, mostly teenagers but sometimes also involving younger children, who throw stones or bricks at firefighters and appliances from a distance. Firefighters see this as an attack on the uniform or on the appliance, in other words against the role, not them as people.
- 2) **Close-up physical assault.** These are face-to-face attacks, which often have far more serious consequences. These attacks involve punches, stabbings or other types of actual physical harm to firefighters and other personnel.
- 3) **Verbal abuse.** This kind of attack is also considered "normal" and often disregarded because it takes place in a high-pressure situation. Verbal abuse routinely affects not only firefighters but also control room staff. For the latter, sexual harassment and hoax calls are the most commonly cited.

This research found examples of all these forms of attack. Sometimes all three take place in one recorded incident. The term "attacks" is used throughout this report to refer to any kind of verbal or physical assault, abuse or other kind of violence by members of the public towards fire service employees.

1.1 Official Statistics

The situation three years ago

The "Attacks on Firefighters" report produced by the Labour Research Department (LRD) for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in 2005 identified serious problems with the official statistics. Although the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) began collecting figures for attacks on firefighters from 1 April 2004, only 18 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England and Wales were able to provide data by the beginning of 2005. These ODPM figures found that there were 393 attacks from 1 April 2004 to 30 January 2005.

The situation in Scotland was somewhat better. The Scottish Executive began collating figures on attacks on firefighters in April 2003. In the first year of collection (April 2003 – March 2004), there were 389 attacks, and the following year there were 226 attacks recorded.

Three differences were evident in the Scottish figures from those in England and Wales. Firstly all eight Scottish Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) reported their figures. Secondly, the figures were published publicly in the Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Fire Services (HMFSI). The attacks were broken down into similar categories (i.e. verbal, physical, objects thrown) but the total figure was the sum of all these attacks, whereas the English and Welsh figures tended to count each incident as one, even though it might include multiple verbal and physical abuse.

In Northern Ireland, figures provided by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in February 2005 estimated that there had been 1,500 attacks on ambulance workers and firefighters in the previous three years.

Although these official figures provided some evidence of the problem, FBU representatives considered under-reporting to be a major factor.

New figures

Scotland

In Scotland, official figures for attacks on firefighters continue to be published publicly in the Annual Report of the HMFSI.

Between April 2005 and March 2006 there were 324 attacks on firefighters, while between April 2006 and March 2007 there were 316 attacks. A breakdown of the latest available figures is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Attacks on firefighters in Scotland 2006/07

Fire and rescue service	Verbal abuse	Physical (armed)	Physical (unarmed)	Missile	Other	Total attacks
Strathclyde	32	6	19	110	4	171
Lothian and Borders	22	3	4	35	7	71
Grampian	2		1	4	1	8
Fife	17		2	15	2	36
Highlands and Islands	2		1			3
Dumfries and Galloway	1			2		3
Central	6	1	1	6		14
Tayside	2	1		7		10
TOTAL	84	11	28	179	14	316

Source: HMFSI communication 29 October 2007, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services: Annual Report 2006-2007

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) is not obliged to report figures in the same format as either the English and Welsh or the Scottish authorities. The following breakdown was received.

The NIFRS also provided the text of a written answer from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, dated 5 July 2007, about the number of injuries to firefighters (and ambulance staff) over the

previous three years. The figures according to Michael McGimpsey, the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety were: 2004/05 – 9; 2005/06 – 7; and 2006/07 – 7.

Other figures provided suggest that these referred to the number of actual injuries to personnel, rather than to all attacks – and that the number of mobilised incidents gave a more accurate picture of attacks.

Table 2: Attacks on firefighters in Northern Ireland

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Damage to appliance	108	86	74	53	40	30
Injury to personnel	16	13	10	6	6	4

Source: Communication 3 December 2007

England and Wales

The least satisfactory statistics are still those produced for England and Wales, despite efforts to improve the reporting system.

Since the "Attacks on firefighters" report, the ODPM issued two circulars FSC 5-2005 and FSC 22-2006, dealing with "Fires and incidents of special interest (FOSI)", making it compulsory for fire and rescue services to report Category C incidents involving attacks on firefighters. In May 2006 the responsibilities of the ODPM for fire and resilience were transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Revised figures given to the Labour Research Department (LRD) for this research by the DCLG revealed that there were officially 647 attacks on firefighters between 1 April 2004 and 31 March 2005. The figure included 365 cases of objects thrown at firefighters and 228 cases of verbal abuse. However these figures came from returns from just 21 fire and rescue services.

The reporting situation since 2005 has improved. Some 44 out of 49 fire and rescue services reported their figures for attacks on firefighters to the DCLG for 2005-06, with only Shropshire, West Sussex, Oxfordshire, the Isle of Wight and Cornwall not included. Similarly, for 2006-07, 44 out of 49 fire and rescue services reported their figures, with Shropshire, Hertfordshire, East Sussex, Buckinghamshire and Somerset not included.

Table 3: Incidents of attacks on firefighters in England and Wales

	2005-06	2006-07
Harassment	287	64
Verbal abuse	550	206
Physical	42	1
Physical object thrown	708	189
Projectile	23	8
Sharp weapon	14	5
Gas chemical	20	1
TOTAL	1272	405

Source: DCLG communication 6 August 2007

Note that totals are not meant to aggregate all incidents.

However the DCLG figures provided for this research were remarkable for the apparently dramatic fall in the total number of incidents, as well as in objects thrown and even verbal abuse. According to the DCLG, the incidents of attacks on firefighters fell from almost 1,300 to just over 400 in the space of a year. Table 3 summarises these figures.

The full breakdown of the figures provided by the DCLG for these fire and rescue services is contained in Appendix I.

The DCLG did emphasise the limitations of the figures, given that "attacks" covers a wide variety of incidents. It also said that there were local variations and that there was "insufficient data to conclude trends". (Communication 21 June 2007)

The DCLG was therefore not prepared to comment further on the figures, despite repeated requests to do so, other than to say that they were "based on the returns" from fire and rescue services. (Communication 1 October 2007) This was particularly disappointing, given the scale of apparent improvements.

The DCLG figures suggest the total number of incidents of attacks on firefighters fell by more than two-thirds (68%), while object thrown fell by nearly three quarters (73%) and verbal abuse by nearly two-thirds (62%).

These dramatic falls in attacks would surely merit publicity. However the DCLG figures were not published publicly in any report. The sheer scale of the decreases draws into question the reliability of the figures. This scepticism was confirmed by the returns from individual fire and rescue services.

1.2 Fire and Rescue Service figures

LRD requested figures for attacks on firefighters from every fire and rescue service in the UK under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All 58 fire and rescue services in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for those years responded to the request and sent their figures.

The figures provided by the eight Scottish FRSs corresponded closely with those published annually by the Inspectorate. From the returns received, the totals were 329 attacks in 2005/06 and 309 in 2006/07.

We also received a more detailed breakdown for Northern Ireland over the past two years.

Table 4: Attacks on firefighters in Northern Ireland

	Damage	Damage	Injury	Hostile	Total	Civil	Mobilised
2005/06	51	2	5	284	342	716	548
2006/07	36	1	6	242	285	377	357

Source: NIFRS communication 21 August 2007

These figures were confirmed by FBU representatives, who estimated that between 400 and 700 civil disturbances occur annually when firefighters face attack. They also pointed out the number of hostile crowds has not fallen significantly in recent years.

In England and Wales, the statistics for 2005-06 came to a similar total to the official figures. Thus DCLG figures recorded 1,272 attacks, whilst the returns (which included the five fire and rescue services not included in DCLG figures) came to 1,359 attacks.

However the total for 2006-07 was much higher than those provided by the DCLG – of 405 attacks. Our figures added up to 1,504 attacks and are consistent with the previous year. This suggests that overall there has not been a fall in the number of attacks on firefighters and if anything, the number of recorded attacks is higher than the previous year. Table 5 contains the aggregate figures.

Table 5: Attacks on firefighters in England and Wales in 2005-06 and 2006-07

	2005-06	2006-07
TOTAL	1359	1504

Source: Compiled from Freedom of Information communications, August-September 2007

The figures broken down for each individual FRS for 2005-06 and 2006-07 are presented in Table 6. Although these figures are somewhat incomplete and subject to some confusion between the number of

incidents and the number of attacks, they at least provide a more accurate count of the returns made by FRSs in 2006-07 than the DCLG figures.

Table 6: Incidents of attacks on firefighters in England and Wales

Fire and rescue service	Total attacks 2005-06	Total attacks 2006-07	Fire and rescue service	Total attacks 2005-06	Total attacks 2006-07
Tyne and Wear	39	108	Hertfordshire	1	1
Cleveland	81	103	Cambridgeshire	29	15
Durham	40	83	Bedfordshire	4	4
Northumberland	3	3	Essex	17	17
West Yorkshire	135	117	Norfolk	1	3
South Yorkshire	90	148	Suffolk	4	3
North Yorkshire	1	6	London	9	18
Humberside	34	27	Kent	3	16
Greater Manchester	259	240	Surrey	1	3
Lancashire	26	38	East Sussex	6	6
Cumbria	1	10	West Sussex	0	3
Merseyside	189	145	Oxfordshire	0	0
Cheshire	36	29	Buckinghamshire	5	4
Nottinghamshire	26	37	Royal Berkshire	8	3
Derbyshire	4	8	Hampshire	0	0
Leicestershire	12	13	Dorset	6	6
Lincolnshire	11	10	Isle of Wight	0	0
Northamptonshire	6	21	Avon	14	10
Hereford and Worcester	4	4	Gloucestershire	2	2
West Midlands	140	106	Wiltshire	5	7
Staffordshire	23	27	Somerset	2	2
Warwickshire	11	14	Devon	7	11
Shropshire	7	7	Cornwall	1	0
North Wales	9	15			
Mid and West Wales	4	12			
South Wales	43	39	TOTAL	1459	1504

Source: Compiled from Freedom of Information communications August-September 2007

The uneven geographical distribution of attacks is clear from Table 7, which groups fire and rescue services by the English and Welsh regions of the FBU.

Table 7: Attacks on firefighters by FBU region

Region	Total attacks 2005-06	Total attacks 2006-07
Region 3 Tyne and Wear, Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland	163	297
Region 4 West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Humberside	260	298
Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire	511	462
Region 6 Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire	59	89
Region 7 Hereford and Worcester, West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Shropshire	185	158
Region 8 North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales	56	66
Region 9 Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk	56	43
Region 10 London	9	18
Region 11 Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex	10	28
Region 12 Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Royal Berkshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight	13	7
Region 13 Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Dorset, Cornwall	37	38

Source: Compiled from Freedom of Information communications August-September 2007

Analysis of the figures shows that some three-quarters of recorded attacks in 2006-07 took place in just ten fire and rescue services. These are set out in Table 8:

Table 8: Total number of incidents in selected Fire and Rescue Services, 2006-07

Fire and rescue service	Total incidents 2006-07
Greater Manchester	240
South Yorkshire	148
Merseyside	145
West Yorkshire	117
Tyne and Wear	108
West Midlands	106
Cleveland	103
Durham and Darlington	83
South Wales	39
Lancashire	38
TOTAL	1127

Source: Compiled from Freedom of Information communications August-September 2007

Why are the DCLG figures wrong?

The West Yorkshire FRS Occupational Health and Safety Department undertook an investigation of its own extensive figures to help with our research. Having audited the figures, it found only slight variations between figures reported to the local safety committee and those provided to the DCLG. The Unit suggested that the DCLG have only reported a "partial year" for 2006/07.

This seems to be confirmed by a parliamentary answer given by Angela Smith, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 21 November 2006, when she said reported attacks on firefighters for 2006-07 up to that point was 420 (Column 28W).

Despite the relatively straightforward system of sending in returns, it appears that the DCLG has simply not collated the figures it was sent by different fire and rescue services. Instead it has released figures based on a partial year's return, but represented these as the figures covering the whole of 2006-07.



Other reporting systems

Given the poor state of statistics on attacks on fire crews, any review of national data collection might look at reporting systems used in other sectors, which have positive and negative features.

For example the NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service (NHS SMS) collect figures on physical assaults. In 2006-07, it recorded 1,006 against the 31,000 ambulance workers in England. The previous year there were 1,107 physical assaults on ambulance staff.

Although the number of attacks on ambulance workers recorded by NHS SMS is high, these figures may also underestimate the real scale of the problem. The Healthcare Commission carries out an annual survey of NHS staff, which includes ambulance workers. Its survey provides figures on the scale of violence towards ambulance workers. Its most recent survey, conducted in October 2006 concluded that, "violence and abuse against [ambulance] staff remains unacceptably high". The 2006 survey estimated that 28% of staff in ambulance trusts had experienced physical violence from patients or their relatives in the previous 12 months, similar to levels found in the previous three years. Some 48% of staff experienced bullying, harassment or abuse from patients or their relatives in the previous 12 months.

The British Crime Survey counts assaults and threats separately, and adds them together to produce overall figures. Firefighters are counted under the category of "protective service occupations", which have the highest percentage (8.8%) of assaults and the highest percentage of overall violence at work (9.7%).

At the other extreme, figures provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recorded the following injuries to employees in the fire and rescue service in England, Scotland and Wales.

Table 9: Injuries to employees in the fire and rescue service in England, Scotland and Wales, caused by violence, 2001-02 to 2005-06

Year	Major injury	Over 3 day injury	Total
2001-02	1	12	13
2002-03		4	4
2003-04	2	6	8
2004-05	2	5	7
2005-06		4	4

Source: HSE communication 27 November 2007

1.3 Under-reporting

Official figures for the whole of the UK suggest that there are over 2,000 attacks on firefighters every year. This equates to over 40 attacks every week or six attacks every day.

Almost all those interviewed for this research argued that the number of attacks on fire crews is underestimated by the official figures. Some of these problems arise from the peculiar collection system devised by the DCLG. This only covers attacks on firefighters, thereby excluding control staff and quite possibly attacks on other fire service personnel when engaged in other duties, such as community fire safety.

The point was well made in the submission from the Avon FRS: "Clearly these are under-reported. Going round the stations I know that there are far more than these. We do have a formal method for reporting these (hence the data above) but for a variety of reasons (paperwork? feeling that nothing will be done?) firefighters do not let us know about these occurrences." (Communication 15 August 2007)

Clearly estimates of the true scale of the problem are difficult to obtain in the absence of a rigorous and consistent national system of reporting. However some participants in the research did attempt to quantify the matter.

FBU representatives in South Wales said that there were at least "daily" verbal attacks on firefighters and "weekly" objects thrown at them. This would equate to over 400 attacks a year – ten times the official figure. The FBU representatives said it could be as high as "four figures".

And the issue goes beyond operational firefighters. Two control room workers interviewed in Lothian and Borders FRS estimated that they were each verbally abused three or four times every week – which amounts to almost a thousand verbal attacks on staff in this one brigade alone in a year.

Our research also included a survey of a senior FBU representatives in each brigade.

Most confirmed that the official figures underestimated the true scale of attacks on firefighters. This was particularly true in brigades where official figures are relatively low. For example representatives from Lancashire, Cumbria, Warwickshire, Shropshire, Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Avon, Devon and Somerset, Hertfordshire, London and

Cornwall all estimated that attacks were at least twice as high – and in some cases ten times higher than officially reported.

Incidents or attacks?

One reason for disparities in the statistics is the persistent confusion between reporting incidents and reporting attacks. Officers from South Yorkshire FRS said that, in any one incident, several types of violence can be experienced, ranging from verbal abuse to missile thrown to actual physical assault. (Communication 6 November 2007)

As the Tyne and Wear FRS submission expressed it: "The total number of attacks will not equate to the individual attacks on firefighters as they may be subject to more than one kind of attack i.e. verbal and physical." (Communication 24 August 2007)

For example the Grampian FRS reported an attack where maintenance technicians working at a fire station were "verbally and physically assaulted" when an uninvited person entered the station. Similarly in Nottinghamshire FRS, an incident was reported where "youths gathered round a fire area and then got 'upset' when crew began to extinguish it. The youths then moved away and began to throw missiles. A 12 inch piece of wood hit the appliance and another missile hit the ladder on the appliance."

In each incident, more than one worker was affected by violence. The approach taken by the English and Welsh system, of recording incidents, acts to underestimate the scale of the problem actually experienced by individual firefighters and other personnel.

Why are attacks under-reported?

There are systematic as well as individual reasons why attacks go unreported. The systematic problems are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5.1. However firefighters provided their own reasons for under-reporting, which shed light on the difficulties involved.

Firefighters in Northern Ireland had a variety of reasons for not reporting attacks. Some said they "get used to it" while others believe it is "part of the job". Firefighters used to receive the Northern Ireland Allowance, a payment for attendance at civil disturbances, but this is now being phased out.

Although the level of attacks remains high, the phasing out of the allowance acts as a signal that at the highest level, the issue of attacks is not a priority.

Many firefighters said they don't report many incidents such as verbal abuse because they are so frequent. Others argued that only those where actual harm was done to a firefighter or to an appliance got reported. A manager pointed out that attacks are so diffuse that some cases are not necessarily recognised as an attack. The example cited was booby-trapped cars, where cylinders are deliberately planted in burning vehicles to create an explosion, which has the potential to seriously injure a firefighter.

Some arguments questioned the point of reporting attacks. Some firefighters argued that since the problem is likely to be caused by social deprivation, it

was not something the fire service or the FBU could tackle alone. Another line of reasoning was that perpetrators were rarely punished so what was the point of reporting attacks. In the absence of serious consequences, it was argued, youths knew that they could get away with attacks.

Management action (and inaction) is also likely to impact on reporting. Some firefighters argued that the state of play with ongoing prosecutions was not being communicated to them. Others went further, saying that they had not heard from anyone in senior management about the local violence strategy. Others wanted a clearer and simpler system or procedure for reporting, with onerous paperwork cited as a reason not to report attacks.



2. Strategies and policies

2.1 National guidance

The "Attacks on firefighters" report published by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in 2005 argued strongly for national recognition of the problem of attacks on firefighters and that "a national policy response" is needed "to replace the piecemeal approach that exists at the moment".

The report acknowledged that the Scottish Executive and a number of Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) had taken steps to prevent attacks on firefighters but that there was "no centrally driven campaign across other parts of the UK".

Since then, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has published Tackling Violence at Work: Good Practice Guidance Document for FRSs in March 2007. The guidance, known as FRS Circular 14/2007 applies in England and Wales, and was developed by a working group set up jointly by the Chief Fire Officers Operations Committee and the Practitioners' Forum (which includes representatives from the FBU, GMB, Unison and the Retained Firefighters Union). An identical circular, W-FRSC(07) 10 was issued in Wales in July 2007.

The guidance sought to "extend previously published guidance from DCOL 7/1993 (Item 2) on Civil Disturbances". It claims to follow the well-established health and safety approach used for other work-related hazards. Thus the guidance uses the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) definition of violence at work as: "Any occurrence in which a member of staff is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of or in the course of their employment." This definition includes both physical and verbal abuse.

The approach taken in the document is explicitly acknowledged as the one used in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, and the associated Approved Code of Practice, particularly with regard to Schedule 1 of those Regulations, 'General Principles of Prevention'. This requires employers to carry out risk assessments for violence at work and then implement prevention and control measures in a strict hierarchy – beginning with preventing attacks and where this is not reasonably practicable, to control them through changes in job design, working conditions, technology and other collective control methods, and only after that individual protection such as personal protective equipment (PPE).

The document makes 20 recommendations. These are explained under the following headings:

7.1 Control measures

- 7.1.1 Police Assistance
- 7.1.2 Dynamic Risk Assessment
- 7.1.3 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)
- 7.1.4 Communication Procedures
- 7.1.5 Incident Command System (ICS)
- 7.1.6 Aide Memoire
- 7.1.7 Vehicle and Equipment Security
- 7.1.8 Lone Working
- 7.1.9 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

7.2 Management related issues

- 7.2.1 Reporting of Violence at Work
- 7.2.2 Seasonal Trends
- 7.2.3 Training and Awareness
- 7.2.4 Media Strategy
- 7.2.5 In Depth Review of Social Behaviour
- 7.2.6 Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs)

7.3 Preventative measures

- 7.3.1 Youth Inclusion Strategies
- 7.3.2 Education and Public Awareness
- 7.3.3 Training

7.4 Data Capture measures

7.5 Welfare

The law on violence at work

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says that health and safety law applies to risks from violence, just as it does to other risks from work.

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act) places a legal duty on employers to ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees.

This means employees should work in a healthy and safe environment and that their welfare is considered in any work activity. Under the Act an employer has an obligation to ensure any potential risk of violence is eliminated or controlled.

Management Regulations 1999

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers must consider the risks to employees (including the risk of reasonably foreseeable violence); decide how significant these risks are; decide what to do to prevent or control the risks; and develop a clear management plan to achieve this.

Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 require employers to inform, and consult with, employees in good time on matters relating to their health and safety. Safety Reps may investigate any issues of concern under these Regulations on any aspect of violence that concerns the health and safety of employees, including stress from the fear of violence.

RIDDOR

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) employers must notify their enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, major injury, or incapacity for normal work for three or more days. This includes any act of physical violence done to a person at work.

Emergency workers

In Scotland, emergency workers have some additional legal protection from assault. The Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 made it a specific offence to assault, obstruct or hinder someone providing an emergency service or someone assisting an emergency worker in an emergency situation. The offence carries a maximum penalty of nine months in jail, a fine of £5,000 or both. More serious assaults are prosecuted under common law.

The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 came into force on 20 February 2007 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It made it an offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters and ambulance workers responding to emergency circumstances.

Under the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which came into force in July 2006, "Any person who assaults, resists, obstructs or impedes- (a) a fire and rescue officer in the execution of his duty; or (b) a person assisting a fire and rescue officer in the execution of his duty, shall be guilty of an offence." (Article 57)

Problems with FRS Circular 14/2007

As FRS Circular 14/2007 now sets the framework for individual fire and rescue services in England and Wales, it has been used as the basis for the investigation and the following chapters organised around its headings. However before looking at the recommendations in detail, it is worthwhile looking at the document as a whole and at some of the assumptions behind it.

The guidance has a number of weaknesses. Firstly, it leaves adopting of the guidance to individual fire and rescue services, rather than seeing the guidance as a minimum standard necessary for all authorities. This is particularly odd as many fire and rescue services already have well developed policies and procedures that already go much further than the guidance. Rather than seeking to level up towards the best practice found across the country, the guidance implies that it might not be necessary in some areas.

Secondly, although it states that, "Sharing information and having consistent policies and procedures should assist in reducing the likelihood of specific high-risk incidents arising", the nature of the circular means it is not mandatory on every fire and rescue service to have a policy.

Thirdly, although it aims to follow the well-established health and safety hierarchy of risk assessment, prevention and control, it rather strangely sets these out with control and management measures coming before prevention strategies – the opposite of the established hierarchy.

In fact, the circular reads like a collection of good ideas rather than presenting a coherent, integrated approach. Indeed some of the proposals contradict each other (for example community safety work and CCTV). It does not amount to a national strategy for tackling assaults on fire service personnel.

The Labour Research Department made repeated requests to the DCLG to discuss the problems with its figures and with the guidance it produces. However all these efforts were rebuffed. We were told that the erroneous figures were "based on returns to the Department from FRSs", that the only guidance it provided was the circular (14/2007) on its website and that "policy officials do not feel it would be appropriate for a direct conversation". (Communication 1 October 2007)

NHS violence at work strategies

The level of attacks on workers in the NHS – and on ambulance workers in particular – as well as the ways in which violence is tackled may provide some insights for driving down attacks on firefighters.

Within the NHS as a whole, the Department of Health launched the Zero Tolerance Zone campaign in England and Wales in 1999, with similar initiatives in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The NHS Security Management Service (NHS SMS), launched in 2003 has operational responsibility for security – including for attacks on staff – across the NHS. It is a body established by legislation and NHS trusts are required to follow its best practice guidance. The service also provides conflict resolution training and publishes figures on assaults annually in a report available on its website. (Communication 30 October 2007)

NHS SMS was happy to cooperate with this research and provided copies of its materials. This was in sharp contrast to the Department for Communities and Local Government, which has responsibility for the fire and rescue service.

The role of HSE

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has had some input into policy making on attacks on firefighters and was happy to cooperate with our research.

In November 2005 HSE produced a Sector Information Minute (SIM 7/2005/16) outlining inspectors interventions on various issues, including violence towards firefighters. It said: "RIDDOR [reporting] figures do not show that violence to staff is a significant cause of over 3-day injuries. However, this is far from the whole picture and the FRS [fire and rescue service] is finding that the incidence of attacks, both verbal and physical is increasing. It is becoming more common for either false calls to be made, or fires to be started, in order that firefighters can be ambushed. The issue has been recognised at national level and there is a lot of pressure from the FBU for action to be taken. The Practitioners' Forum and the national health and safety group are both considering the issue."

The Defence, Fire and Police services (DFP) unit within HSE responsible for this area expressed the desire to build up a database of community initiatives and how successful they have been. However this database has not so far been established.

The minute also instructs inspectors to "ensure that FRSs have policies and procedures in place that address the issue of violence to staff". (HSE 2005)

Enquires were made with HSE as part of this research, particularly regarding HSE's POW-V (Partnership on Work Related Violence) stakeholder group. The reply stated: "HSE commented on a draft version of the FRS Good Practice Guidance Document." HSE said that "the document seemed to provide sound procedures etc in line with the advice provided by HSE on V&A [violence and assault] - indeed HSE understands the task and finish group consulted the HSE V&A website during their deliberations".

However HSE added that, "No additional work was undertaken at the time and the group don't have any specific plans to work with the Fire and Rescue Service in the future." This was confirmed by a trade union representative on the committee. This contradicts the note contained in FRS Circular 14/2007, which said the "The Partnership on Work Related Violence, POW – V is currently looking at issues relating to the Protective Services."

HSE added that, "There are currently no centrally organised HSE inspections of the FRS although reactive inspections are still taking place if either a complaint or accident falls within HSE selection criteria for inspection – and this would of course include V&A issues. We are not aware of any current HSE investigations into V&A issues in the FRS. Any future centrally organised inspections could involve considering the implementation of V&A control measures in the guidance." (Communications 19 October and 30 November 2007)

HSE added that it welcomed the FBU report and it liaises closely with the union through its national health and safety officer.

2.2 Individual policies in Fire and Rescue Services

The Labour Research Department (LRD) made a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to every fire and rescue service (FRS) in the UK, asking for the policies and procedures in place to tackle attacks on firefighters. Every fire and rescue service responded to the request, sending a variety of documents in different formats that touched on the hazard of violence at work.

The best policies received contained the following items:

- Statement of intent
- Definitions of violence
- The law on violence at work
- Roles and responsibilities – managers and employees
- Prevention, control and management measures to tackle violence
- Action to be taken when an attack has taken place
- Monitoring and review of the policy
- Staff training requirements
- Support for staff involved in violence incidents
- Investigation of violence incidents

Some policies were cross-referenced to other related policy areas, such as lone working. Some of these issues will be dealt with under the prevention, control and management issues in subsequent chapters. But a number of general observations can be made.

Scotland

Strathclyde, Lothian and Borders, Grampian, Fife, Highlands and Islands and Dumfries and Galloway FRSs all sent a separate policy on violence at work – in other words a separate document from their procedure for dealing with civil disturbances. Central Scotland FRS said it was drafting a policy. A number of the policies were similar in structure and content, suggesting that some fire and rescue services have learned from the good practice of others.

These policies generally have a coherent structure, and cover the key areas. For example the Strathclyde FRS policy sets out a clear statement of intent, defines violence at work, identifies groups at risk, the law, the sources of violence at work and what procedures are in place to prevent and control it. The Lothian and Borders FRS policy also includes substantial sections on return to work and compensation. Although it was produced as early as 1992, interviewees said that it had not been reviewed since.

Statement of intent

All policies have a statement of opposition to attacks on fire service personnel and a commitment to tackle it.

For example Fife FRSs policy "recognises that the nature of the services it provides places particular groups of personnel at risk of verbal abuse and physical violence from members of the public". It adds that, "The Service and the Trade Unions agree that all reasonably practicable steps should be taken to identify and minimise the risk of violence to employees". (Communication 22 August 2007) The Highlands and Islands FRS policy "recognises that exposure to conflict is not an acceptable part of an employee's job". (Communication 21 August 2007)

The policies produced by Scottish fire and rescue services apply to all staff and specifically mention the involvement of trade unions as part of their commitment to address violence at work.

Definition of violence

Most fire and rescue services in Scotland use the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) definition for violence: "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

Lothian and Borders FRS defines violence at work slightly differently, as "the application of force, severe threat or serious abuse by members of the public, clients or any other persons towards employees of The Board arising out of the course of their employment whether or not they are on duty".

Its definition of violence includes a) physical assault; b) threatening behaviour, with or without a weapon; c) serious or persistent harassment (including racial or sexual harassment); and d) severe verbal abuse.

The important points here are that the policy applies to all employees "whether or not they are on duty" and are linked to other forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism. (Communication 31 July 2007)

The law on violence at work

Most policies note the importance of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, although the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 are not generally referred to.

The Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 is also highlighted in some policies. In some cases staff are advised of the application of the law. For example the Dumfries and Galloway policy warns staff that: "Under Section 1(2) of the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 no offence has been committed unless the person who assaults, obstructs or hinders knows or ought to know that the person being assaulted, obstructed or hindered is acting in an official capacity for the Fire Service. It is therefore extremely important that if faced with violent or aggressive behaviour and it is not blatantly obvious that personnel are carrying official Fire Service duties; (i.e. easily identifiable because of the wearing of fire kit or Fire Service uniform) they must inform the aggressor(s) that they are employed by the Fire Service and are carrying out official duties." (Communication 17 August 2007)

Monitoring and review

Some policies explicitly set out a procedure for assessing and reviewing the policy. Dumfries and Galloway FRS states that, "This policy will be reviewed annually and subject to amendment under the following circumstances: introduction of new legislation, amendment to current legislation, fact based intelligence or information and incident analysis or statistics". (Communication 17 August 2007)

Lothian and Borders FRS policy mentions the role of unions in monitoring: "This statement will be reviewed by The Board, or at the request of the Trade Unions, in the light of reported incidents and advice from reputable and qualified sources." (Communication 31 July 2007)

England and Wales

Fire and rescue services in England and Wales are expected to follow FRS Circular 14/2007. However the circular is silent on whether individual fire and rescue services should have a separate policy on violence at work.

Some fire and rescue services sent their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for civil disturbances. Most of these procedures explicitly referred to violence against firefighters and had been adapted to incorporate the issue. However not all violence against firefighters and other fire service personnel takes place during civil disturbances, and therefore it appears to make sense for fire and rescue services to have a separate violence at work policy.

Following our request, around two-fifths (20 out of 49) fire and rescue services sent separate policies. These were Cleveland, Durham and Darlington, Northumberland, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Cumbria, Merseyside, Lincolnshire, Hereford and Worcestershire, West Midlands, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Royal Berkshire, Dorset, the Isle of Wight and Gloucestershire FRSs.

Cleveland FRS had reviewed its policy in 2007. North Yorkshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Suffolk and Buckinghamshire FRSs all said their policy was a "work in progress" or "in development", while Nottinghamshire FRS's policy was "under review". The West Yorkshire, Northumberland and Merseyside FRSs policies on violence followed the HSE approach closely.

Statement of intent

Violence at work policies are often introduced by some sort of statement of intent, stating that the authority is opposed to attacks on staff. For example the Shropshire FRS policy states that: "As an employer any form of abuse directed towards employees, be it verbal or physical, will not be tolerated. It is not acceptable that employees may have to be subjected to any antisocial or potentially dangerous behaviour whilst fulfilling their duties." (Communication 3 August 2007)

One important element in the policy is that it should apply to all staff, from all types of operational firefighters as well as to other non-operational staff.

For example the Hertfordshire FRS personal safety policy says that, "These guidelines have been produced to cover a wide range of situations which ALL staff working for the Fire and Rescue Service may find themselves in from time to time." (Communication 8 August 2007) The Staffordshire FRS sent its "Safety Flash" bulletin, which included separate policies on threats (No.13, 2003) and on violence and aggression by intruders (No.26, 2005).

The West Midlands FRS policy on violence at work explicitly refers to "cooks, cleaners and support staff alone on station". It also uses the "safe person" concept, which is concerned with having "all the right support systems in place to ensure that people at work are safe". (Communication 15 August 2007)

Definitions of violence

Most of the fire and rescue services that sent their violence policies use a version of the HSE definition for violence. For example the Cumbria FRS policy says the Health and Safety Executive's working definition of violence is: "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public, in circumstances arising out of or in the course of his or her employment". (Communication 2 August 2007)

However other fire and rescue services use their own definitions of violence. The East Sussex FRS policy says: "Violence is defined as purposeful or reactive behaviour by an individual or a group that produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or emotionally, on other people." (Communication 15 August 2007)

Some policies go on to distinguish physical and verbal abuse. For example the Cleveland FRS has adopted the following definition of violence:

(a) Physical Assault

Causing Injury: assault, with or without a weapon, resulting in actual physical harm to the member of staff at the level of bruising/cuts/lacerations/hair pulling, or more serious injury.

Not Causing Injury: attempted assault with or without a weapon which did not result in actual physical harm to the member of staff.

(b) Sexual Assault/Abuse:

Sexual assault which has resulted in physical harm or sexual harassment as defined in the Equal Opportunities Policy Document.

(c) Threats: verbal or written, or by actions to the person or to property, or both.

(d) Property damage or thefts: of Brigade and personal property.

(Communication 12 September 2007)

The law on violence at work

The best policies refer to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the RIDDOR reporting regulations (see above). Some FRSs (e.g. Royal Berkshire) had already amended their policies to include a reference to the Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 that came into force in 2007.

Monitoring and review of the policy

Few fire and rescue service policies on violence received included a specific section on monitoring and review. However a notable exception was provided by the Cheshire FRS, which had produced a rigorous action plan based around the recommendations contained in Circular 14/2007 with an assessment of the current position, the next steps for action together with dates for implementation. A similar exercise by the Buckinghamshire FRS was also received. The Greater Manchester FRS had audited its procedures for dealing with attacks in the light of the circular and the Kent FRS said it would be doing so.

The Merseyside and Northumberland FRS policies stipulate that a Violence at Work Steering Group will be formed and will include lead officers and "representative bodies" to evaluate and review the policy.

Many policies do not explicitly refer to unions and their representatives or indeed to joint safety committees in monitoring and evaluating the policy. Other examples were found where consultation was less than satisfactory. Cleveland FBU representatives were told about changes to the authority's violence policy, but they were not fully consulted. They planned to raise the matter at the health and safety committee.

In South Wales FRS, the union had not yet been consulted on a new violence at work policy – although

managers did promise that full consultation would take place. FBU representatives made a constructive suggestion that a local working party could be set up to examine the problem and work on a new policy. They felt that if the working party consisted of operational personnel from fire stations and control rooms, that such a process would in all likelihood produce a better way forward, as firefighters would feel some ownership of the strategy.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) sent its standard operating procedure for civil disturbances – although a senior officer said during our fieldwork that this was in the process of being revised. Management had also audited their procedures in the light of FRS Circular 14/2007 – even though it does not apply to their authority.

Other documents received referred to changes in the law and to consultation. For example the communication “anticipated that the enactment and enforcement of the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, Article 57 will have a positive outcome”.

It also refers specifically to the involvement of the FBU. The communication states: “It is essential to recognise the involvement and joint working undertaken by the Fire Brigades Union in terms of participation in the Community Engagement Forum and providing access to their community groups and liaison agencies.” (Communication 21 August 2007)

The NIFRS materials also referred to joint working with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), although both unions and management felt that violence towards firefighters was not being emphasised in materials produced on attacks on emergency service workers.

2.3 Risk assessment

A small number of fire and rescue services included examples of risk assessment together with their policies.

The Scottish policies referred explicitly to risk assessment. In England and Wales, West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Warwickshire, North Wales, Hertfordshire and Wiltshire FRSs sent examples of risk assessments, while the NIFRS included a generic risk assessment form from its training materials, which could be adapted to assess the risks of violence.

One notable feature of the Scottish policies is the identification of risk groups within policies.

For example the Grampian FRS policy summarises employees who may be affected by violence at work are:

- (a) Operational Firefighters; may experience threats, assaults and abuse by members of the public whilst attending operational incidents, carrying out non-operational duties or whilst travelling to and from various work locations.
- (b) Lone Workers; these are employees who work alone or at a variety of locations and travel unaccompanied between them. The nature of their work means that they are very often required to operate alone on property, which is not controlled by the Service. Violence may go unreported until their colleagues miss the lone worker. Examples of lone workers include:
 - Welfare Officers
 - Community Safety Advisors, Community Firefighters and Legislation enforcement Officers.
 - Van Drivers
 - Communications Technicians
 - Transport Staff
 - Equipment Technicians
 - Flexi Duty Officers
 - Training Officers
- (c) Other Groups; employees such as cooks, cleaners and station assistants may be left alone in Service premises and approached by members of the public who perceive them to be soft targets.

(d) Control Room Staff; may experience threats or abuse from members of the Public who misuse the "999" system.

(Communication 9 August 2007)

Another useful approach is to identify the risks from particular types of attack. The North Wales FRS materials state that, "The generic risk assessment carried out by HM Fire Service Inspectorate has identified, from evidence, that the following hazards are the most common during incidents involving civil disturbance:

- Stabbings
- Laser pen attacks
- Hand thrown projectiles
- Physical assault
- Ambushes
- Booby traps in vehicles and buildings".

(Communication 1 August 2007)

Although some very good examples of violence at work policies and risk assessment were received, there were large variations in the quality of these documents. A more structured and uniform approach across the fire service would help spread best practice and level up the manner in which attacks on fire personnel are dealt with.



3. Prevention measures

Prevention measures are at the forefront of a genuine health and safety approach to tackling attacks on firefighters.

The point was well summed up by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS): "Only through sustained education and community engagement can the NIFRS make attacks on the emergency services socially unacceptable in our community and it is the community alone who can outlaw these attacks. To maintain progress the issue has to be continually reinforced, include the entire community and all the emergency service providers. This will only be achieved through sustained funding that targets the community as a whole." (Communication 21 August 2007)

In the course of the research many positive examples of prevention measures already implemented in a number of Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) were encountered, providing an existing database on which others can draw.

3.1 Youth Inclusion Strategies

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) FRS circular 14/2007 recommended that, "new and existing FRS youth inclusion strategies should incorporate initiatives to prevent/reduce the impact of VAW [violence at work] against all staff". It proposed that fire and rescue services consider "partnerships and collaboration with other Agencies".

Examples of youth inclusion and school strategies were received from the Northern Ireland, Lothian and Borders, Cleveland, Northumberland, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, London, Merseyside, Cheshire, Hereford and Worcester and South Wales FRSs.

England

A number of fire and rescue services in England provided information on their youth and education schemes.

The LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) programme in London was introduced after two firefighters from Tower Hamlets were attacked and hospitalised on bonfire night in 2001. Since it began in 2002 the programme has grown to nine teams across 26 boroughs running almost 100 courses a year. It has also provided training for other fire and rescue services embarking on similar programmes.

The programme involves a five day course with selected young people aged between 13 and 18, who have offended, are at risk of offending, or those that may have been victims of crime. Participants are referred by street workers, youth offending teams and by schools. The senior officer responsible for the project estimated that around 3,000 young people have passed through the scheme in the five years of its operation.

The programme is taught by operational firefighters (generally from fire stations in the borough) with the help of specialist trainers. Staff-pupil ratios are high (1: 2) to ensure safety and close supervision. The young people learn firefighting skills alongside real firefighters, as well as attitudes of safety and cooperation.

Because of its origins, the programme integrated tackling attacks on firefighters within the wider framework of community fire safety from the start. Firefighters use practical activities, DVDs and discussion to explain the consequences of fire setting, road traffic accidents and go on to deal with attacks on firefighters.

Senior officers and firefighters delivering the programme argued strongly that it had led to tangible improvements. Evaluations by independent agencies such as Morgan Harris Burrows have confirmed its achievements. These include reductions in fire setting and "noticeable reduction in attacks on firefighters" in the boroughs where it has operated, improved school attendance and achievement and further employment. The programme is introducing a BTEC certified course in 2008 to accredit the achievements of participants.

Firefighters also reported anecdotal examples where they had been out on a "shout" and had met young people after they had been on the courses. Recognition led to constructive engagement – including young people offering to help – rather than conflict. In schools, previously shy individuals were able to report their experience at length to their peers and spread the positive message about the fire service to large numbers of other young people.

The programme currently receives around £1 million in funding, roughly half from fire and rescue services and the other half from other public and private sources. The senior officer said he was concerned that future work would be threatened as many of these funders were not able to commit to long-term financing.

The West Yorkshire FRS has a well-established reputation for its work with young people on community fire safety for over fifteen years, as noted in the DCLG circular. Last year it put 450 young people through its early intervention programmes, run by a full-time former firefighter and delivered by operational personnel. Plans are in place to increase capacity to 1,200 students a year.

The courses generally lead to BTEC qualifications and cover arson, car crime, hoax calls and anti-social behaviour. Materials used on the course include PowerPoint presentations and DVDs on attacks. The footage is put together from local examples by the FRS's own visual services department. This included the infamous incident shown on TV Eye when a youth was filmed smashing a scaffolding pole in the windscreen of a fire appliance, which occurred in Hunslet. Tutors reported that most of those on the course were "horrified" by the attacks.

The two tutors said they were convinced that the programmes were a success on a number of levels. They reported cases where youths who had been on their courses, or younger brothers and sisters of those who had been through the programme, had engaged constructively with firefighters, recognising them for their work. They had received positive feedback from students and teachers, and had received a number of glowing testimonials. Some students had taken part in fire safety leafleting alongside firefighters.

The tutors accepted that their work is hard to quantify. One tutor expected the results to show "in ten years". However they were clear that it had already had a beneficial effect on the standing of the fire service in diverse local communities – including for reducing attacks on firefighters.

The Northumberland FRS policy on attacks on firefighters contained three examples of youth intervention activities. Firstly, FIREworks Youth Engagement Courses have been run aimed at 11–16 year olds already excluded, at risk of school exclusion or who have been through the youth justice system. The courses usually involve one day a week for 10 weeks and are designed to help young people understand fire safety, prevent arson, provide positive role models and help youngsters develop confidence and self esteem. The programme takes referrals from the Local Education Authorities, Youth Offending Teams, Youth Inclusion Programmes, Juvenile and Magistrates Courts.

Secondly, a Schools Education Programme has been running a Schools' Education Team since 2003. The programmes of study are predominantly delivered by school-based staff with support from Academy staff and/or operational crews. Thirdly, the Northumberland FRS ran a Street Engagement initiative in 2003, which involved a small-scale pilot from two fire stations. The scheme involved teams of volunteers providing additional support to operational crews engaged in responding to bonfire incidents. Whilst bonfire incidents were tackled by firefighters, the 'street engagement teams' liaised with young people in the vicinity of the fires and discussed deliberate fire setting. A subsequent review concluded that the work had resulted in significant benefits to NFRS and the communities in which the project was delivered, and a wider scheme was adopted the following year. (Communication 21 August 2007)

The Greater Manchester FRSs Children and Young People Strategy sets out the schemes run for young people. These include Life skills for school groups aged 10–16, Firefly for referred individuals aged 11–17, Community Fire Cadets for referred individuals aged 13–16, FIRETEAM for school groups aged 14–16 and the Prince's Trust for referred individuals aged 16–25. (Communication 8 August 2007)

Similarly, Merseyside FRS has youth engagement programmes designed to engage with young people who have been or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education. The BEACON Project is run during school term time for young people aged between 13 and 16 to attend one day a week for 12 weeks. The LIFE Project runs during the school holidays for young people aged 12 to 19 to attend for up to 5 days all in the one week. Students who are at risk of fire setting behaviour or who may be involved or close to becoming involved in anti-social behaviour are also eligible.

Cleveland FRS runs a one-week LIFE course for 10 young people, which it said was "successful" and "booked up for 12 months". This was confirmed by union representatives, who described the work as providing "positive role models" of firefighters. FBU representatives described a successful football game between firefighters and local youth, which had helped build mutual respect.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland fire and rescue service (NIFRS) has a well developed programme of activity for youth and school interventions. A senior officer showed researchers a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the steps the authority has taken to tackle attacks on firefighters.

The NIFRS youth schemes include:

- Fire Intervention – a one-day, one-to-one programme for young people involved in anti-social behaviour. Participants are referred by local community groups and/or individuals.
- The LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) Scheme – a five-day development programme for 14–19 year olds delivered at local fire stations. Participants are young people who have been excluded from school or who are in danger of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and are referred to the Scheme by local community groups.
- Drama and Action Days – programmes designed to engage local fire fighters and the community, targeting the issues surrounding attacks on fire crews and other anti-social behaviour such as hoax calls.

The NIFRS told us that 26 courses have been delivered to date. It has plans for a three day abbreviated scheme to be delivered within a correctional institution.

Existing primary and secondary schools' material have been amended to include the issue of attacks on the emergency services. The Key Stage 2 Primary Five 'Safety Team' pack has been amended to have a character specifically targeting attacks on firefighters and to discuss the impacts of these attacks with young children. The Firestorm secondary school package has been expanded to include a section around classroom based circle time, projects and interaction with fire service personnel to discuss the impacts of attacks on firefighters and on the local community.

NIFRS records show that over the three years from April 2004 until March 2007, 2,259 Key Stage 2 and 3 visits were made. Firefighters also reported their attendance at festivals and other public events. (Communication 19 November 2007)

The NIFRS service argued that its range of prevention measures have been successful in driving down the number of attacks during the recent Halloween period.

It also argued the schemes were cost effective, saving the authority time and money – for example for sickness absence due to injury.

Wales

In South Wales FRS, a Youth Liaison Team is involved in three projects of note. Firstly, some firefighters are on secondment with local Youth Improvement Schemes on estates where attacks on firefighters and fire setting are a problem. Secondly, the fire service runs an Arson Rap Project, an eight-week course, which addresses fire setting and violence against firefighters. It includes discussions and workshops during which the teenagers put together a rap which gets recorded on a CD. Thirdly the FireCon project forges links with Local Youth Offending Teams and Youth Inclusion Projects, who forward the names of children that are at risk of offending. The teenagers attend a day at a local Fire Service facility during which they talk about the possible outcomes of their actions and also dress up as firefighters to experience fires. (Communication 24 August 2007)

Managers confirmed that these programmes were still ongoing, and that a further project, FireCon plus – aimed at children with learning difficulties – was being developed. However resourcing issues were highlighted. It also runs a Fire Cadet programme. South Wales FRS also had programmes aimed at schools across the different key stages of compulsory education. However these programmes did not deal directly with attacks on firefighters.

Scotland

The Lothian and Borders FRS reported a number of examples of areas it is actively involved in to reduce the incidents of attacks on firefighters. It said the subject of attacks on firefighters "is not a stand alone subject but is integrated into our schools education programme lessons". It said that many Community Safety Strategies and Projects are "managed by station personnel as they have greater local knowledge being within the local community".

Lothian and Borders FRS runs various community programmes such as "Crucial Crew" and "Phoenix Crew", which are aimed at children with anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) against them. The authority said "we have found that youngsters from these groups

are more likely to be involved in attacks and therefore we target them in the education programme". It is also piloting a Secondary Schools Programme in one station area that targets S4 school kids and covers hoax calls, violence to firefighters and secondary fires. (Communication 31 July 2007)

A senior inspector of fire services for Scotland also highlighted a Space Unlimited project funded by the inspectorate, which looks at ways of reducing attacks on firefighters through peer group pressure. Space Unlimited has also produced an animation out of the project. (Communication 1 October 2007)

Evaluation

Most participants in this research were enthusiastic for this community safety work, though many acknowledged that its effectiveness in reducing attacks on firefighters could only be measured in the long term.

Some fire and rescue services have successfully integrated the issue of attacks on firefighters into fire-related youth crime programmes. However in other cases, locally produced schools packs, videos or DVDs do not tackle the issue of attacks on crews, or deal with them only tangentially.

Some firefighters spoke of links they had made with youth and community workers, who had helped intervene with local young people to prevent attacks. In certain cases, firefighters have visited youth centres to speak directly to young people, although some commented on how children at these centres are sometimes poorly supervised and "out of control" during visits.

Some said that during visits to fire stations, some young people had also misbehaved – for example throwing food or taking property belonging to the fire service. Other firefighters commented about poor behaviour in schools that detracted from the message they were giving. One watch said that on one occasion when they were attacked, youths who clambered on a fire appliance knew where to find equipment as a result of attending courses.

Another watch also said that they felt many of the young people involved in attacks would not be engaged by most of the youth and education schemes. A tutor in one fire and rescue service gave the example of a Fire Cadet programme where participants were

dropped off by their parents driving 4x4s to illustrate the profile of some schemes. Another watch expressed the view that bringing in offenders might also appear to reward wrong-doing, rather than concentrate on the "good ones" or those who "might be influenced".

One FBU safety rep who was enthusiastic about community safety work and had personally participated in the programme with young people said he was concerned about the funding for such programmes and that some firefighters were doing it on their own time, rather than as part of their paid work.

3.2 Education and Public Awareness

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that: "All FRSs should consider the need for targeted public awareness campaigns where it will assist in the reduction of VAW [violence at work] against staff."

Very few examples of education and public awareness activities specifically addressing attacks on firefighters were received. One watch commented that the situation in the fire service differed from other public sector jobs (for example the health service, bus and trains companies), where increasingly employers were warning members of the public that they would take legal action in the event of assaults on staff.

The main exception was the Northern Ireland FRS, which has recently produced a series of television advertisements with the message, "We're the target, you're the victim". One advert focuses on the consequences of attacks, showing a firefighter with blood running down their face, with a verbal warning that whilst getting treatment, the firefighter would not be fighting fires in the community.

As one document puts it: "Strategic media campaign designed not to glamorise attacks but to indicate to the entire community that an attack on the emergency services would result in the community becoming the ultimate victim. The material used a call to action, devoid of mimic opportunity." (Communication 19 November 2007)

A range of media outlets including radio, newspapers and bus panels have been used. Other posters were displayed in "black cabs" i.e. buses run by communities in areas where paramilitaries still have a large influence. Although criticised in some quarters for using these vehicles, both the NIFRS and the union

said it was vital to get the message to every part of the community, and this was one way to achieve that goal.

Another series of cartoon adverts featuring voices of local children discuss why attacks take place whilst again focussing on the consequences of attacks for individuals, their families and their communities. These are shown at the key times when children are watching television.

In Northern Ireland, firefighters said the FBU had played a big role in highlighting the issues in the media and that management had had to catch up with the union's press campaign.

The firefighters interviewed for the research were generally very enthusiastic about education campaigns designed to highlight the consequences of attacks. In Cheshire FRS, one watch suggested using the back of fire appliances, which are currently used for fire related public awareness or advertising, to make the point of the consequences of attacking firefighters.

3.3 Training

The DCLG circular 14/2007 said: "It is essential that staff who are responsible for the delivery of educational initiatives have received the appropriate training. These staff members, where appropriate should also have undergone relevant checks e.g. Criminal Records Bureau."

Some operational firefighters said they had been trained for community education work. Most were genuinely proud of the role they had played in enhancing the standing of firefighters among young people.

This research did not actively seek to verify whether staff had the appropriate training or checks for their role, although some firefighters did indicate that they had. However the Hereford and Worcester FRS sent its community education and child protection policies as well as information on its juvenile fire setting scheme and its work experience document.



PICTURE COURTESY OF EVENING GAZETTE, MIDDLESBROUGH

4. Control measures

Under the well-established health and safety hierarchy, where employers cannot prevent the exposure of employees to hazards such as violence at work, they have a duty to introduce measures to control the risks. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) circular 14/2007 contains nine types of control measure that Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) could introduce to limit attacks on firefighters.

4.1 Police Assistance

The DCLG circular notes that there is no nationally agreed scheme for dealing with incidents involving violence towards firefighters, with civil disturbance (CD) or local disturbance (LD) codes such as 'Charlie Delta' and 'Lima Delta' used for summoning police assistance. It points out the problem if different codes are used by neighbouring FRSs.

In Cleveland, Code Zero is used to summon police assistance. In Lothian and Borders and in South Wales, attacks are given a crime number to ensure they are investigated.

However the DCLG circular rather weakly recommended that fire and rescue services "consider developing a coded system and a memorandum of understanding with the Police where their assistance can be requested for LD incidents". Far better would be for the DCLG to agree a specific code with unions and chief fire officers. If this were a common code highlighting a specific attack on firefighters, it would leave the police in no doubt about an incident.

Most firefighters said they generally asked for police assistance when under attack using CD codes. However two pertinent issues were raised.

Firstly firefighters pointed out that even when they had come under attack, there were occasions when the police did not respond at all. Although they understood the issue of stretched resources, it is nevertheless little comfort to firefighters knowing that when they are under attack they may not even receive police assistance. One manager went as far as to say that firefighters had "no confidence" in getting a rapid police response when under attack.

A second related issue is the quality of the response. Aside from delays by police in attending an incident involving an attack on firefighters, some watches said they were concerned that the response sometimes consisted mainly or entirely of community support

officers (CSOs), who lack the training and powers of police officers. Firefighters in Cheshire spoke of an incident where CSOs in attendance were not effective in tackling the youths attacking the firefighters.

At the other extreme, the Merseyside FRS had used a "trojan fire engine" containing police officers in hot spot areas around bonfire night. (Wirral Globe, 12 October 2007). A local FBU representative said that the union did not support this approach, as it undermined the impartiality of the fire service, only antagonised community relations and caused "significant friction" with local youths. The union has received intelligence that, as a result of the "trojan horse" tactics, local youths have been saying firefighters were now "legitimate targets". (Communication 27 November 2007)

4.2 Dynamic Risk Assessment

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all managers and staff who have the potential to be directly affected by violence at work need to understand the dynamic risk assessment process and have the ability to apply it when faced with these situations.

Dynamic risk assessment was highlighted by most fire crews interviewed. For example some fire appliance drivers said that they would deliberately reverse into a cul-de-sac in a known area for attacks, in order to permit swift evacuation should it be necessary.

Researchers asked whether violence policies specified that firefighters could withdraw from a situation in which they came under attack. Some good examples were found. The North Wales FRS policy on civil disturbance specifies in several places what Incident Commanders (ICs) should do. For example: "The IC should continually risk assess the level of any adverse action towards the crew and take any action necessary to mitigate the possibility of injury to the crew. Ultimately this may mean that the crew are withdrawn from the area, irrespective of whether the task has been completed or not." (Communication 1 August 2007)

Similarly, the Wiltshire FRS sent very detailed risk assessments for civil disturbances, with specific sections on "attacks on personnel" as well as for ambush, booby traps, fireworks, missiles, petrol bombs and weapons. The control measures specified included "withdraw from the area of hostility", as well as working in pairs and wearing full personal protective equipment

(PPE). This is reinforced on a generic risk card, which specified that in such circumstances, firefighters should be "prepared to withdraw/evacuate". (Communication 31 July 2007)

A senior officer interviewed in Cleveland FRS said that officers in charge at incidents "close to the action" had latitude to withdraw when under attack. He highlighted an example from the Grangetown area of Middlesbrough where this had happened.

Firefighters were asked about their capacity to influence the decision to withdraw from a situation where they were coming under attack. Most said that in such circumstances, they would raise the matter with officers, with the expectation of withdrawing. Fire service managers agreed that this was acceptable.

However FBU representatives in South Wales pointed out that many firefighters were reluctant to withdraw from severe incidents, for example when someone is trapped in a house fire. As they put it: "We signed up to save lives" and that as a moral issue, many firefighters would have to be dragged away from a life-threatening incident, even if they were themselves under attack and in danger.

4.3 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) has generated a full and frank debate within the FBU and within the fire service in general since it was introduced on some appliances and outside certain fire stations.

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that fire authorities should "consider the use of CCTV in support of staff that may be exposed to violence at work in identified areas of high risk". It quotes a study by West Midlands FRS, which found that appliances fitted with CCTV had seen a 47% reduction in attacks, whereas appliances not fitted with the cameras had witnessed a 35% increase in attacks.

CCTV policies were received from Dumfries and Galloway, South Yorkshire, Humberside, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, West Midlands, Cleveland, Northumberland, Northamptonshire and Staffordshire, Lothian and Borders and South Wales FRSs. FBU representatives reported that CCTV was in use in Tyne and Wear, Warwickshire and Avon FRSs. The newly merged Devon and Somerset FRS has been conducting a trial with helmet cameras.

Some fire and rescue services have argued that cameras can be a useful deterrent and assist with evidence to identify perpetrators for prosecution. For example the Greater Manchester FRS policy on CCTV stated: "The aim of CCTV fitted to fire appliances is to reduce crime in the form of assaults/attacks on fire fighters by aiding prevention, through deterrent, and detection. Recording of any attacks/assaults, these may be used as evidence against the perpetrators of such attacks". (Communication 8 August 2007)

The Northumberland FRS policy on CCTV stated: "NFRS is running a pilot scheme with the aim of reducing attacks against operational staff. CCTV is fitted to an appliance that will be able to capture instances of anti-social behaviour directed at firefighters. This type of behaviour is unacceptable. CCTV has proved an effective tool in deterring theft and violence in other fire services, which gives confidence that this can be repeated in NFRS.

"The evidence from CCTV will be used as an information and learning tool to help deal with future incidents. However, in line with the commitment that this behaviour is unacceptable, there will be cases where the evidence gathered by CCTV will be used to assist the Crown Prosecution Service to bring those that perpetrate violence to justice. Clearly, this is a sensitive area that will be applied in a way that maintains the high standing of NFRS in the community." (Communication 21 August 2007)

In Lothian and Borders FRS, CCTV has been placed on appliances in three stations which have had the highest number of incidents of violence over previous years. An Operational Guidance Document on the use of the equipment has been written. Unfortunately this has not always had the desired effect, including an incident in January 2007 when "youths hung onto CCTV bracket" of an appliance. (Communication 31 July 2007) Even though the cameras have been in place since 2005, no data has been generated that is useful for prosecution. In one case of an attack, the footage "disappeared" from the system while in others, the quality of the images was too poor to be of use.

Some policies included safeguards on the use to which the images could be put, reflecting concerns raised by firefighters and the FBU. For example the Humberside FRS policy stated: "CCTV will be used in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation for the principal purposes of protecting operational employees against attacks or abusive behaviour. CCTV will not be used for covert surveillance and with the exception of

gross negligence or misconduct, may not be used in any conduct and performance proceedings.” (Communication 24 August 2007)

The Greater Manchester FRS CCTV policy stated that, “It is not the intention of the CCTV system to monitor the actions of the drivers or crew whilst mobile to or from an incident.” It added a realistic note of caution: “However it must be made clear that should an accident/incident occur whilst en-route or on the way back to home station, if the incident is recorded on CCTV, that data may be impounded by the Police as part of a subsequent investigation”.

The Devon and Somerset FRS also conducted a small-scale trial with helmet cameras, which local FBU representatives were monitoring closely. (Communication 4 December 2007)

Evaluation

Fire service personnel and FBU representatives were asked about CCTV and the comments were overwhelmingly critical. Several firefighters described CCTV as a “Big Brother” measure and others were anxious to avoid being presented as “coppers who squirt water”.

In Northern Ireland, firefighters were adamant that CCTV in general was counterproductive. They argued that cameras were badly received in the community – pointing out that paramilitaries had cut down a camera on a pole and shot out another in Belfast. They said that firefighters currently live in the communities they work in (unlike the police) and some feared that firefighters would have to leave if they came to be seen as part of the security services. They stressed that this would happen if firefighters were expected to act as witnesses in prosecutions.

FBU representatives concurred, saying CCTV cameras would compromise the neutrality of the fire service. NIFRS management expressed similar sentiment, arguing that CCTV turns appliances into a target. Its recent audit of violence strategy stated: “This has been considered and rejected by both management and the representative body. It is considered that an introduction of CCTV on appliances would place fire fighters in too much danger and presents the opportunity for appliances to be subject to attack, as they will be targeted, when it becomes public knowledge that they carry recording equipment that would be used in prosecutions.”

In Cleveland, FBU representatives said the key issue was “trust” and that CCTV would add to levels of distrust between firefighters and the communities they serve. Reps said that cameras made firefighters “an arm of the police” and “blurred the line” between the two services. They argued that crime reduction was not their main job and that being “police narks” opened them up to potentially more attacks. One said: “Turn them off and get the job done”.

In South Wales, the trial of cameras on appliances at one station was considered a failure. The CCTV images were considered too poor quality by the police to be used as evidence, except for some identification purposes in one school. When proposed at another station, firefighters opposed it “vehemently”, arguing that it made them an arm of the police and undermined their neutrality. A manager summed this up: “firefighters jealously guard their independence from the police”.

Firefighters also expressed the fear that management would use images against personnel for other purposes, such as disciplinary action. While our research was in progress, management in Cheshire FRS did use CCTV footage for disciplinary action, causing disquiet among firefighters and breaching an understanding with the FBU that cameras were solely for firefighter safety.

Others firefighters feared that cameras would be used for other law enforcement purposes, such as traffic offences and that this too would undermine their separate identity from the police. Finally, a number of watches and FBU representatives pointed to the costs of installing and maintaining the cameras, relative to the number of prosecutions likely to be gained from it.

Researchers asked fire crews about the prospect of being issued with cameras as part of their helmets. The overwhelming response was critical, arguing that it would turn individual firefighters into targets. FBU representatives also indicated that they were opposed to helmet cameras for the same reasons.

4.4 Communication Procedures

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that: "A communication strategy should be developed to enable intelligence to be gathered relating to community tension or spontaneous events and the subsequent need for that information to be communicated to all relevant staff and agencies. Any knowledge of potential attacks should be communicated to all relevant staff and agencies at the earliest possible opportunity using the most appropriate method."

In all the fire and rescue services visited, control staff and fire station managers said that intelligence on previous or expected attacks was made available to crews going into high risk areas. Watches interviewed also had a detailed knowledge of areas where attacks had gone on.

However some watches were concerned about how individual firefighters could communicate with each other when under attack. One watch in Royal Berkshire suggested issuing individual firefighters with radios or at least panic buttons, so that others on the job and control staff could be made aware immediately that an attack was in progress.



4.5 Incident Command System (ICS)

The incident command system provides the framework for the management of operational incidents. The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that: "In carrying out strategic and systematic risk assessments, FRSs may wish to give guidance on VAW [violence at work] to operational commanders in relation to tactical modes to be adopted when developing SOPs."

Watches and operational commanders said tactics were used to avoid confrontation. These include turning blue lights off and approaching incidents more slowly, making an initial assessment about the risks of the fire involved, and if it presented a very low risk to people or property (e.g. on open ground), not rushing in to extinguish it. Other firefighters said they might approach a call from a particular high-risk area by a different route as well as parking the appliance ready to leave quickly if necessary.

4.6 Aide Memoire

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services should have "procedural guidance in place that may be quickly accessed whilst en-route, attending incidents or undertaking other fire service activities".

Our research did find some examples of aide memoire and other brief guidance for operational personnel advising on what to do in the event of an attack. Examples were received from Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Cleveland FRSs. In Northern Ireland a "stand and run card" is used. In Royal Berkshire FRS, the abusive behaviour policy has detailed advice for employees on how to conduct themselves in the event of an attack – although this was not available in an easy to access format.

4.7 Vehicle and Equipment Security

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services consider the need for suitably protected glazing for new and existing operational appliances and the provision of central locking for crew cabs and or lockers on operational appliances, in developing their appliance specifications.

In all the fire and rescue services visited, fire appliances were fitted with reinforced glass, which provides some protection for crew members under attack.

However some firefighters raised concerns about the strength of side windows, where a film had been used to prevent shattering. Others had concerns about older or substitute appliances when existing fire engines were out of service (sometimes after an attack).

A related issue was ventilation inside the appliances, which is often poor, leading to very hot conditions for firefighters travelling to and from fires (particularly when wearing PPE). Cabs don't have air conditioning, which means firefighters often open windows in order to ventilate them. But this of course increases their vulnerability to injury from attack, particularly from objects thrown.

Firefighters generally expressed the wish to work in larger numbers in areas where they might be at risk of attacks. Firefighters in one fire and rescue service raised concerns about new targeted response vehicles (TRVs) staffed by three firefighters, who may be more vulnerable to attacks at certain incidents such as small fires. They felt that it was on jobs such as small fires or car fires where youths would often ambush appliances, and that firefighters in TRVs would be more vulnerable to attack with fewer numbers and smaller vehicles. As one watch put it, "small jobs, small crews, higher risks". Firefighters argued that risk assessments ought to be carried out on the vehicles in the light of increased risk of attacks on firefighters – and were not aware that any had been carried out.

A different equipment issue was raised by one FBU representative, who said he wanted appliances to carry spit-testing kits, like those introduced by some bus companies, so that the evidence of spit that hits firefighters can be collected to assist with prosecutions. In October last year firefighters in Tyne and Wear were issued with DNA swab testing kits to help track down offenders who spit at them. All crews in the service will carry the "spit kits" to allow evidence to be sent to the police. (BBC News website, 17 October 2007)

4.8 Lone Working

Lone working – defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision” is an issue of growing importance in the fire service. Others work in twos and threes in control rooms or making home fire safety visits. An increased risk of violent attack is one of the risks faced by lone workers.

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services should have suitable measures in place to avoid or minimise the impact of lone working. This includes suspension of particular activities, provision of additional persons i.e. ‘doubling up’ and provision of additional support/monitoring measures.

Examples of lone working policies were received from Durham and Darlington, Lancashire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire FRSs. Researchers asked participants during our field research about possible areas of concern, such as community fire safety visits to homes. All reported that visits take place at least in pairs.

However we did speak to a canteen worker who reported incidents of intruders when she was alone in the kitchen, as firefighters were out on a job. Although, not completely alone in the building, she said she was in an isolated area and could easily have been attacked.

4.9 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The DCLG circular 14/2007 said that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is a necessary part of any operational firefighters' equipment to deal with the effects of fighting fires. It may also provide some protection from attack, although in general this is not its intended purpose.

This was illustrated in our research in an example from the Grampian FRS, where a firefighter was “bitten by dog on hand but wearing protective glove”.

Firefighters and FBU representatives interviewed were generally happy with the PPE they were issued with. The circular recommended that all fire and rescue services should provide guidance as to the level of PPE to be worn. An example of how this might work was provided by a health and safety manager in West Yorkshire FRS, who said that helmets with full-face visors (i.e. not covering just the eyes) had been purchased in part to provide better protection from attacks.



5. Management issues

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) circular 14/2007 contains six types of management measure that Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) could introduce to tackle attacks on firefighters. This chapter also incorporates the circular's recommendations on data capture and welfare.

5.1 Reporting of Violence at Work

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services must "ensure that they have an effective reporting procedure in place and that staff report all acts of violence at work. This should include the ability to locally analyse this information as part of its on-going systematic risk assessment review. Any procedure must facilitate the easy reporting of every occurrence. Any local procedures for reporting must feed into any national arrangements for collation and analysis".

A number of reporting systems go beyond the minimum required by the DCLG.

West Yorkshire FRS has a well-developed system of collecting data on attacks. To make reporting easy, each fire station has a "memory board", a laminated A3 sized form pinned on the notice board. Firefighters who have been attacked can note the type of attack and the profile of the attackers on the board. These notes are then typed up by station clerks and sent to the health and safety department at headquarters.

Firefighters can also phone the control room or the health and safety department to report attacks. Tick box reporting forms are also available on the fire service intranet.

West Yorkshire FRS also sent an example of an anonymous staff questionnaire on violence, able to be completed in 5-10 minutes. The health and safety manager who sent out the questionnaire reported that the return on the survey was an impressive 80%, and had indicated that attacks were not falling, as some reported figures had suggested. (Communication 8 August 2007)

Researchers also observed a recently installed computerised system in use in South Wales, which control staff said was easy to use and meant that they could record any incidents mentioned over the radio. Although the system still depends on officers in charge calling attention to an attack, it probably captures more attacks than most other systems. Data on recent

attacks in South Wales had certainly risen, suggesting the new system was an improvement that other FRS might learn from.

Some FRSs have taken steps to encourage reporting, both of attacks and of injuries sustained at work, some of which will arise from attacks. In South Yorkshire FRS, a system of mandatory reporting was introduced in April 2005 so officers in charge have to report on any attacks immediately after an appliance returns to the fire station. (Communication 7 August 2007) The Cornwall, Devon and Somerset FRSs sent a copy of their reporting form for injuries, which include diagrams to make the process easier. (Communication 11 September 2007)

Strathclyde FRS sent an example of a poster on Violence at Work (Safety Flash No.3/05). The graphic shows two people verbally abusing a firefighter followed by a similar picture of them threatening the firefighter with a knife. The large caption reads "If you don't report it, incidents like this can lead to a situation like this. The poster contains a hotline number for reporting attacks and states that "collation of information and statistics is essential to the development of campaigns and strategies to combat violence at work". (Communication 20 August 2007)

However many firefighters said they found reporting attacks to be cumbersome and difficult. Since most reports would not be subject to the requirements of a prosecution, it was felt that reporting as if this were likely would also be counterproductive. Firefighters returning from an exhausting incident in some fire and rescue services are expected to fill out long forms (some effectively three pages of text), sometimes online on the intranet, in order to report an attack. These factors cut against routine reporting.

At the same time some watches had helpful and constructive suggestions for improving the system.

In Lothian and Borders FRS, one watch suggested having a dedicated phone line so that firefighters could report attacks and have them logged without having to do the paperwork themselves. Some suggested that control staff, who often have a good overview of what is happening with incidents, could be responsible for receiving these phone reports and collating them. Not surprisingly, control staff were not keen on this idea at all.

In Northern Ireland, FBU representatives argued that any new system should be "firefighter friendly", with minimal time needed to record it. A paper form already

run off and available in the mess room was suggested, so firefighters could simply pick it up, fill it in and return it to management. The form itself should consist mainly of tick boxes, with little need for comment. Symbols could be used to indicate if it was an incident that should be followed up with a view to further action such as prosecutions.

The DCLG circular 14/2007 added that, "FRSs must have efficient arrangements in place to pursue legal actions against perpetrators directing VAW [violence at work] at staff with use of specific offences and other measures against emergency service workers contained in available legislation".

Few prosecutions were reported during our research, apart from an expected prosecution in Cheshire and a recent case in West Yorkshire, where a member of the public was fined for threatening a community safety worker. Very few of the prosecutions reported had used CCTV pictures from an appliance. A parliamentary answer by the Solicitor-General on 28 November 2007 revealed that "as of November 2007, two offences under sections 2 and 4 of the Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 had reached a first hearing; one was prosecuted by CPS West Mercia and the other by CPS Gloucestershire".

5.2 Seasonal Trends

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that fire and rescue services should "consider the development of specific plans for reducing the impact of seasonal events such as bonfire night on attacks on firefighters".

A number of fire service personnel referred to seasonal patterns, such as the marching season in Northern Ireland and of course Halloween and bonfire night. Some FRSs sent examples of month by month figures, although surprisingly these did not all show a spike in November as might have been expected. DCLG figures obtained did not analyse trends in this way.

5.3 Training and Awareness

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services should "ensure that staff who may be at risk from [violence at work] are provided with an appropriate level of training or familiarisation for their role".

The guidance added: "The input should be related to local needs, circumstances and procedures. It should ideally be provided to staff prior to potential exposure. It should form part of organisational induction and in the ongoing development and maintenance of understanding."

A small number of fire and rescue services sent information on the training they provide covering attacks on firefighters.

Lothian and Borders FRS said it was the first authority in the UK to have had training on 'de-escalation' techniques. This training was given to two stations that have ongoing issues with violence to crews. (Communication 31 July 2007)

The Northumberland FRS policy on violence towards staff has a section on training. The course content includes:

- Exploring feelings around aggression and violence
- Assault cycles and other theoretical underpinnings
- Practical strategies for dealing with difficult situations
- Respecting signs and situations
- Worker safety; a basic introduction to breakaway techniques and the legal context
- Teamwork and implications for the work

The emphasis in the training is on diffusing situations with guidance on protective measures for personal safety and control measures. The policy is clear that "It does not extend to restraint". The training is targeted at operational staff but NFRS says it is open to "any other member of staff who can face this type of threatening environment". (Communication 21 August 2007)

In the South Wales FRS, a firefighter from each watch of a station that receives a relatively high number of occurrences of attacks was given conflict resolution training. The training was provided by a company called Conflict Solutions, run by two ex-police officers. The idea was that the trained firefighters would then disseminate the ideas to their colleagues.

Researchers spoke to a firefighter who had received the training. He said it was "useful". Some firefighters and FBU representatives argued that all firefighters should receive general training on violence at work during their induction, supplemented by further training if they

worked in areas of increased risk. It was pointed out that with only one member per watch getting training, should they be absent at the time of an incident, they would not be able to put the learning into practice with their colleagues.

Another issue raised by a number of watches was the legal rights firefighters have in conflict situations. This could also be dealt with as part of training programmes.

There were a handful of examples of measures taken to raise awareness of the issue. Some fire and rescue services circulated newsletters such as "Safety Flash", "Burning Issue" and "News to You" which have covered attacks.

A common complaint from watches interviewed was that communication from the top was poor and that senior fire officers did not visit fire stations to discuss matters like attacks with firefighters themselves. There is obvious utility in managers taking time to do this: they will hear first hand what works and what doesn't – and will be able to draw upon a wealth of practical ideas and strategies to combat the problem.

5.4 Media Strategy

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that all fire and rescue services should "develop and adopt a media strategy or specific reports which are relevant to the local circumstances".

Media reports of attacks on firefighters are not difficult to come by – especially in local newspapers. The FBU itself puts news of fire-related incidents on its website – and some of these concern assaults.

The best example of a media strategy witnessed first hand came from Northern Ireland, discussed in Chapter 4.2 on Education and public awareness. The strategy includes television, radio and poster advertising of the consequences of attacks, emphasising that members of the public who attack firefighters are undermining the service their families, communities and indeed themselves rely on in times of emergency.

Specific examples were observed during our research. After an incident in Cleveland FRS, where a cylinder had been exploded in a wheelie bin, a press conference was held at headquarters, with the remains of the cylinder put on display for photographers.

(Evening Gazette, 27 October 2007). In Cheshire FRS local managers described an incident where large bricks had been thrown at an appliance, hitting the window. Researchers were shown examples where fire officers had used the local press to impress the message that such attacks were "just scandalous" and unacceptable. (Runcorn and Widnes World, 8 October 2007)

One FBU representative in Scotland pointed out that fire and rescue services don't as a rule tell the public, as other employers do, that "we will prosecute anyone who attacks our people" or "we will seek the strongest penalties against those who attack firefighters".

Another concern was raised by FBU representatives in South Wales and echoed by firefighters there. They argued that raising the issue in the media or elsewhere (such as in schools) ran the risk of copycat attacks. FBU reps said they were "reluctant to bring the issue to the surface, because it might give young people the idea".

5.5 In Depth Review of Social Behaviour

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that "an in depth review should be considered into the effects of anti social behaviour in relation to activities connected to fire and rescue services". It added: "Such a review is likely to be far reaching and will require association with a University. FRS should be requested to establish if any individuals are carrying out such research and national support be provided as required."

Many participants in this study argued that too little research has been carried out on attacks on firefighters. However LRD found that some important work is going on at present.

Vivienne Brunsden from Nottingham Trent University has recently conducted research on attacks on firefighters in one FRS, presenting the results at last year's Fire Service College Annual Conference. In South Wales FRS, diversity officer Sabrina Cohen-Hatton had also studied attacks on firefighters internationally as part of her masters' degree. Fire magazine has published articles by these researchers outlining their findings.

Avon FRS is part-funding research (together with the Great Western Research Initiative) by two PhD students from the University of the West of England, which is relevant to this field. The Merseyside and Greater

Manchester FRSs have also carried out some research in recent years.

Other fire and rescue services might consider supporting similar research. However they might reasonably expect the DCLG to conduct its own large-scale research, or contribute funding towards these projects.

5.6 Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs)

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that FRSs should "advise staff to maintain a neutral stance and not get involved in activities normally undertaken by the police service e.g. such as crowd control, vehicle removal etc where there is a threat to violence to staff".

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) received all dealt with these issues. There was strong support for the principle of neutrality from most of the fire crews interviewed.

5.7 Data Capture measures

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that in addition to the minimum requirements covered by fire service circulars, fire and rescue services should "make arrangements to collect data for all occurrences of violence at work".

A number of fire and rescue services have developed systems to better capture data on attacks on all staff, which others might learn from.

Although all eight fire and rescue services in Scotland have submitted figures consistently to the Scottish Executive, some services compile their own more detailed figures. In Strathclyde FRS, records are kept for each incident, listing the fire station involved, the "immediate" and "contributory" cause, as well as location and "accident type". Grampian FRS also lists incidents by station and has a short description of the attack.

The Lothian and Borders FRS lists attacks by date and time, address, fire station involved as well as the type of attack, with space for additional comments and whether police were requested. Incident forms contain a reminder to "send an e-mail to Linda Shanahan". (Shanahan is a former FBU official seconded to the Scottish Executive to work on strategies to reduce attacks on public sector workers.) Firefighters on one

watch argued that it was important not to collect figures for their own sake – i.e. as "just statistics", without feedback and without action being taken.

In England and Wales, a variety of responses were also received, ranging from the monthly FOSI returns to more elaborate analyses of the figures as well as actual descriptions of individual attacks.

West Yorkshire FRS has data on nine different types of attacks, collated monthly by the health and safety department, which are made available at safety committee meetings. Analysis of attacks includes a severity rating, graded 1 to 5, to provide a more rigorous method of tracking the problem over time.

The Cheshire FRS has a spreadsheet of attacks with a short description of what happened. The West Midlands FRS provided breakdown by types of attack, which included attacks by booby traps/cylinders, gun/knife, missiles, nuisance, physical contact, verbal, threatening behaviour, laser pens and injuries. Humberside FRS also provided month by month figures with a breakdown by type of attack.

South Yorkshire FRS has a monthly breakdown of attacks on firefighters going back to 2000 with analysis of type and by individual fire station. In 2005 it made it mandatory for officers in charge to report every incident on their return to the fire station, which has led to more accurate figures.

The Nottinghamshire FRS compiles detailed descriptions of each attack on firefighters, which are collated in a spreadsheet. The Leicestershire FRS figures also include a brief description of the attacks while the Royal Berkshire and Hertfordshire FRSs include racial abuse in its figures.

5.8 Welfare

The DCLG circular 14/2007 recommended that fire and rescue services should have a robust welfare strategy that includes: staff awareness of the signs and symptoms following violence at work; a recognition of the problems facing victims of violence at work; a simple reporting and recording process; a system of referral to occupational health; and an ability to provide and/or access appropriate and timely support.

A small number of examples of welfare policies received dealt explicitly with attacks on firefighters, with respect to sickness absence and return to work.

The Lothian and Borders FRS policy was a good example. It stated: "A member of staff who is absent from work as a result of a reported incident of violence shall be entitled to receive sickness allowances in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Scheme of Conditions of Service. Where a member of staff exhausts his/her entitlement to sickness allowance, the Firemaster shall submit a report to The Fire Board concerning the possible extension of sickness allowances. This report shall contain the Medical Adviser's opinion of the employee's medical condition and future fitness to return to work."

The policy stipulates that the Firemaster should consider certain measures for members of staff returning to duty after an attack, such as:

- part-time work;
- temporary transfer to other duties;
- "refresher training" as part of his/her return to work;
- temporary restriction in the range of duties required of the member of staff; and
- temporary additional supervision and monitoring.

It stated that: "Any such measures should be fully discussed and, if possible, agreed with the member of staff. The member of staff shall have the right to be represented by their employee representative. In all circumstances, the member of staff shall incur no loss of contractual earnings during the relevant period."

It added: "If, after returning to work, a member of staff who has been the victim of an incident of violence at work requests a transfer to other duties, such a request shall be treated sympathetically."
(Communication 31 July 2007)

During our field research fire service managers and FBU representatives were asked about the sickness absence and return to work policy following an attack. Most said that there was sufficient discretion in the policy to ensure that firefighters were not penalised after an attack.

However a new sickness absence policy in Cleveland FRS does not specify that a firefighter injured from an attack at work would not trigger the new procedure. Although a senior officer said such matters should be dealt with "sympathetically", the union locally said that it had not yet won such discretion in writing and without it, the system was open to abuse by management.

Some comments were also received on how the effects of attacks on firefighters might better be understood. One occupational health nurse argued strongly that attacks on firefighters should be treated as trauma, with significant mental health implications for stress, anxiety and depression. She said that a range of techniques could be used to support firefighters and help them deal with the knowledge that they may be attacked, as well as looking after those actually injured in attacks. The emphasis should be on "destigmatising" the issue, she said.



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6. Findings

6.1. The scale of the problem

- 6.1.1 Official figures on the scale of attacks on fire service personnel for the UK as a whole are woefully inadequate. Different recording systems operate in Northern Ireland and in Scotland, compared with England and Wales. There are variations between different fire and rescue services (FRSs).
- 6.1.2 The only figures published annually are those in Scotland. These suggest the level of attacks on firefighters have remained fairly constant for the last four years, with on average over 300 attacks per year.
- 6.1.3 The scale of attacks in Northern Ireland has only been made public when ministerial questions have been put on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Although civil disturbance calls and mobilised incidents have fallen, hostile crowds have remained at a similar level for the past two years.
- 6.1.4 The official figures collected by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for England and Wales are not published publicly. Despite changes to the reporting system in England and Wales in the last two years (FRS Circular 22/2006), official figures do not adequately capture the true scale of the problem. The figures obtained from the DCLG suggesting that attacks on firefighters in England and Wales fell from around 1,300 in 2005-06 to just over 400 in 2006-07 are false.
- 6.1.5 Official figures obtained from every fire and rescue service in England and Wales suggest that overall, attacks went up from 1,359 in 2005-06 to 1,504 in 2006-07.
- 6.1.6 Official figures for the whole of the UK over the last two years do not suggest that the number of attacks or their ferocity is falling. Officially there are over 2,000 attacks on firefighters every year. This equates to over 40 attacks every week or six attacks every day. However these statistics still significantly underestimate the real scale of the problem. The real figures are at least twice as high and quite possibly many times higher than those officially recorded.

- 6.1.7 None of the reporting systems adequately capture the wide range of attacks on fire service personnel. Some staff, for example in control rooms who face frequent verbal abuse, are not generally included. Some incidents that involve multiple attacks on a number of firefighters are often recorded as only one case. This radically underestimates the level of violence towards staff working for fire and rescue services.

6.2. Strategies and policies

- 6.2.1 There have been two significant developments at national level regarding attacks on firefighters over the past three years. Firstly, the Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 (and the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005) have made it an offence to hinder or obstruct an emergency worker such as a firefighter. Secondly, the DCLG has issued FRS circular 14/2007 (and in Wales W-FRSC(07) 10), which sets out good practice guidance on tackling violence towards firefighters.
- 6.2.2 However there is still no national strategy for reducing attacks on fire crews, particularly in England. The DCLG circular is not mandatory, and provides only a cursory summary of prevention, control and management measures that fire and rescue services might adopt to tackle the problem. Some of these strategies are contradictory – for example community engagement schemes and CCTV. The DCLG effectively devolves the problem and leaves local fire and rescue services to deal with attacks. Given the poor state of its figures on attacks and the limitations of the guidance, the DCLG cannot effectively engage in evidence-based policy making on the problem.
- 6.2.3 The DCLG's approach contrasts with other departments and government bodies such as the NHS and the Health and Safety Executive, where centrally-driven initiatives to tackle violence at work are taken more seriously.
- 6.2.4 Policies on violence at work vary widely across different fire and rescue services. The best practice in general was found where there is a "violence towards staff" policy separate from standard operating procedures for civil disturbances.

6.2.5 The best policies follow the well-established hierarchy found in other areas of health and safety. They include clear definitions of violence, refer to all staff, involve risk assessment and then prevention and control measures, along with the capacity to monitor and review.

6.2.6 A few violence policies explicitly state that unions have been consulted and are part of the monitoring and review process. Some evidence was found that health and safety committees have discussed violence figures and policies to tackle them. There were few signs of direct consultation with crew and other staff on the issue.

6.3. Prevention measures

6.3.1 The most effective strategy for preventing attacks on fire service personnel are the community education programmes aimed at young people.

6.3.2 There are a number of effective youth programmes in operation in fire and rescue services, often run in conjunction with other agencies. These provide a range of targeted courses across the 10-25 age range for young people considered most likely to be involved in fire-related crimes. The best programmes integrate the issue of attacks on firefighters within their schemes of work, using a variety of methods (practical activity, group work) and specific materials (including DVDs and printed guides) to tackle the reasons behind attacks and the consequences for individuals, families and communities of these attacks.

6.3.3 There are also a range of effective school programmes on fire safety that include attacks on firefighters. The best of these provide differentiated schemes of work from nursery age across all four key stages, integrating with existing school programmes such as personal and social education and citizenship. The best programmes use a variety of methods and specific materials to highlight the consequences of attacking firefighters.

6.3.4 Fire crews have also engaged in wider community events, such as festivals, galas, fairs and other public events. Some have

participated in sports events as part of building stronger community relations.

6.3.5 Most fire service personnel contacted for this research were enthusiastic about community safety strategies in general and keen for them to tackle the issue of attacks. Some constructive criticisms were raised, including the type (or absence) of specific materials on attacks, the profile of the young people targeted, behaviour on courses and the resources available to develop and expand these programmes.

6.3.6 There were few general education and public awareness programmes specifically targeting attacks on fire personnel observed during this research, despite the enthusiasm of most firefighters for such a campaign. The comprehensive programme developed in Northern Ireland has used a range of materials and media to highlight the consequences of attacks.

6.4. Control measures

6.4.1 Although firefighters welcome police assistance when under attack, concerns were raised about police involvement during this research. Although communication systems are in place to summon police assistance, there is no uniform code to highlight firefighters under attack. Some firefighters complained that either police did not attend when they were under attack, or that a limited presence (such as by community support officers) meant it was not effective. FBU representatives were particularly opposed to "trojan horse" tactics of police officers riding "shotgun" with firefighters on appliances.

6.4.2 Dynamic risk assessment was discussed and observed during this research and generally felt to be effective. Firefighters have the support of local management to withdraw from situations when they come under attack.

6.4.3 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) is the most high profile control measure that has been introduced in recent years in many fire and rescue services to tackle attacks on firefighters. Supporters of CCTV argue that it acts as a deterrent, assists with the detection



PICTURE COURTESY OF EVENING GAZETTE, MIDDLESBROUGH

and prosecution of perpetrators and is useful for training purposes. However little direct evidence was found during this research to support such assertions.

- 6.4.4 This research found widespread criticism and opposition towards the use of CCTV to tackle the problem of attacks. In particular many firefighters and FBU representatives argued that it undermined their relations with communities (built up in other programmes) and gave them a policing role they did not want. Other objections included the poor quality and range of images, which meant that there have been few prosecutions, the cost of supplying and maintaining the cameras and the use to which images might be put for other matters, such as disciplining firefighters. Some felt that whatever safeguards are in place, CCTV images could still be seized by police and used against the wishes of firefighters.
- 6.4.5 All the fire and rescue services that sent information had communication procedures for sharing intelligence on attacks and incident command systems to vary tactics according to the risks of attack.
- 6.4.6 Vehicle and equipment security, in the form of reinforced windscreen glass and central locking were present on most appliances in use in the fire and rescue services visited. However some firefighters raised concerns about the strength of side windows – especially on replacement appliances, as well as poor ventilation in cabs, which means appliances often have windows open while en route. Some firefighters and FBU representatives were concerned about the use of smaller targeted response vehicles (TRVs).
- 6.4.7 Lone working is a growing issue in fire and rescue services. Some fire and rescue services have policies on lone working, which are linked to the violence at work policy.
- 6.4.8 Although most firefighters were happy with their personal protective equipment, spit kits were suggested as an additional measure.

6.5. Management issues

- 6.5.1 Some fire and rescue services are making consistent efforts to get fire crews to report attacks, in order to measure the scale of violence. The best systems make it quick and easy for staff to register that an attack has taken place, using methods such as laminated memory boards, phone calls and if forms are necessary, then short tick-box designs. A few fire and rescue services are using other methods to gather information on attacks, such as questionnaires or encouraging firefighters to report using posters and newsletters.
- 6.5.2 Nevertheless many attacks, both physical and verbal, go unreported because of cumbersome and time-consuming reporting systems. Long, detailed forms requiring essay length answers, or forms only available on the intranet, act as a barrier to firefighters recording attacks.
- 6.5.3 In practice most attacks will not become the subject of prosecution and therefore attacks do not need to be recorded as if they will. Few examples of prosecutions were cited during the research and staff were not always made aware of the efforts by fire service managers to secure prosecutions.
- 6.5.4 A small number of fire and rescue services provided information on training for fire crews in dealing with attacks. Conflict resolution and “de-escalation” training, focusing on the causes of attacks, the law, how to avoid attacks and what to do in the event of a confrontation was generally welcomed by firefighters, control staff and by FBU representatives. The main concern was that such training should be available to all personnel, through their induction and as part of specialist training. Firefighters also wanted more effective two-way communication with managers on the issue of attacks.
- 6.5.5 Most fire and rescue services use the media to highlight the issue of attacks. Many local papers carry reports of attacks with comments from fire officers and FBU representatives. Although some firefighters fear that the wrong kind of media exposure can lead to copycat attacks, most supported the idea of a media strategy like the one used in Northern Ireland,

- focusing on the consequences of attacks for both firefighters and communities.
- 6.5.6 A small number of fire and rescue services have conducted or supported research into attacks on firefighters. However it was generally felt that more research was needed and that this funding should be provided centrally to supplement local initiatives.
- 6.5.7 The data capture measures in fire and rescue services vary as much as reporting processes. Some fire and rescue services have conducted detailed analyses of attacks and provide these to management, unions and to safety committees. The best of these profile the location and type of attack on a monthly basis, and are integrated with risk assessments. However even these systems do not capture the real scale of attacks.
- 6.5.8 Generally the welfare of firefighters injured as a result of an attack is dealt with adequately, with discretionary provision for time off and rehabilitation, including phased return to work and other temporary measures.
- 6.5.9 However there are some cases where firefighters have been penalised as a result of being attacked, including facing disciplinary procedures for absence and even losing their jobs and pensions. And little work has been done to understand the impact of attacks on the mental health of fire service personnel.



7. Recommendations

7.1. The scale of the problem

- 7.1.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) should overhaul its classification system to ensure that all attacks on fire service personnel are recorded. The intention should be to capture the real scale of the problem, even if this initially leads to a steep rise in the official figures.
- 7.1.2 The DCLG should publish figures for attacks on firefighters in England and Wales in an annual publication available to the public, along with an analysis of trends and an assessment of progress made over the previous year.
- 7.1.3 The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) should publish figures on attacks in the same format as elsewhere in the UK, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 7.1.4 All fire and rescue services should communicate their figures on attacks, with suitable analysis, to all fire service personnel and to FBU representatives. Violence should be a standing item for discussion on health and safety committees.

7.2. Strategies and policies

- 7.2.1 The DCLG should develop a high profile, coherent and comprehensive national strategy for driving down attacks on firefighters, in consultation with trade unions and employers' organisations. This could include developing policy and risk assessment templates, creating a database of good practice and publishing detailed guidance and case studies free of charge to help fire and rescue services. Strategies in operation in other sectors, such as the NHS could also be evaluated.
- 7.2.2 Individual fire and rescue services should devise separate "Violence at Work" policies that apply to all staff, after wide consultation with fire service personnel and unions. These are necessary because not all civil disturbances involve attacks on firefighters and because some attacks on fire service personnel take place outside of normal operations, such as attacks on fire stations and on non-operational personnel.

- 7.2.3 The review process could include setting up a working party composed mainly of operational personnel, auditing existing policy in the light of DCLG guidance and other research, conducting risk assessments on violence and developing practical and coherent strategies on reporting, prevention and control and management measures to tackle the problem. Fire and rescue services should adapt their policy to local circumstances, as required.
- 7.2.4 Senior local officers should talk directly to firefighters and to FBU representatives about attacks. Managers will hear first hand about the hazards faced in their brigade, about what works and what doesn't – and will be able to draw upon a wealth of practical ideas and strategies to combat the problem.

7.3. Prevention measures

- 7.3.1 The DCLG should build up a database of good practice on community initiatives that relate to attacks on fire service personnel and how successful they have been, as suggested by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- 7.3.2 The DCLG should produce practical materials on attacks on firefighters, in collaboration with local fire and rescue services initiatives, for use in schools, youth centres and on particular programmes. This might include DVD footage and high quality printed materials.
- 7.3.3 The DCLG should ensure that all fire and rescue services have adequate funding streams for the youth and community safety work in relation to attacks.
- 7.3.4 Fire and rescue services should share good practice on community fire safety to ensure that attacks on fire service personnel is integrated fully into programmes.
- 7.3.5 The government and fire and rescue services should ensure that all firefighters who participate in youth and community education work receive ongoing professional training for these roles.

7.4. Control measures

- 7.4.1 The DCLG and fire and rescue services should develop a common code for alerting the police to an attack on fire service personnel.
- 7.4.2 The police should ensure that they have sufficient resources to respond adequately to requests by firefighters for assistance. The police should respond in ways that do not compromise fire service personnel – avoiding for example ‘trojan horse’ tactics of riding in fire appliances.
- 7.4.3 There should be a moratorium on the use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). Fire and rescue services that currently use CCTV should carry out a review, in consultation with fire service personnel and the FBU, to determine whether it is necessary and desirable to continue with the use of cameras on appliances.
- 7.4.4 Fire and rescue services should not introduce new cameras, including in helmets, without thorough consultation with fire service personnel as well as with national and local representatives of the FBU.
- 7.4.5 All fire and rescue services should produce an aide memoire for personnel on dealing with attacks, which can be displayed inside fire stations and in the cabs of appliances.
- 7.4.6 Fire and rescue services should assess their premises, appliances and equipment, including replacement vehicles and new targeted response vehicles (TRVs), for their suitability in the event of a physical attack.
- 7.4.7 Fire and rescue services should develop lone working policies that explicitly include the risks of violence towards staff and how to avoid and control these risks.

7.5. Management issues

- 7.5.1 Fire and rescue services should review their own methods of reporting attacks and devise a simple and easy to use system for recording all verbal and physical assaults. This should be done in consultation with fire service personnel at all levels and the FBU.

- 7.5.2 Fire and rescue services should utilise other methods of gathering information on attacks, such as questionnaires and focus groups with watches and control staff, to get direct input on the problem and how workers affected understand it.
- 7.5.3 Fire and rescue services should include attacks on firefighters and how to deal with them as part of induction programmes for new fire service personnel.
- 7.5.4 Fire and rescue services should offer de-escalation/conflict resolution training to all firefighters, starting with those working in high-risk areas with a history of attacks.
- 7.5.5 Fire and rescue services should develop a coherent media strategy around attacks on fire service personnel, in consultation with the FBU. The DCLG should provide additional resources for television advertisements and other more expensive forms of media work.
- 7.5.6 The DCLG should fund research in conjunction with fire and rescue services into the reasons why firefighters are attacked and what can be done to stop it. The research should examine approaches used in other sectors, especially in the health service for ambulance workers, to assess whether good practice can be utilised by the fire service.
- 7.5.7 Fire and rescue services should ensure that no fire service personnel are penalised in their pay, conditions and pensions as a result of sustaining an injury at work from an attack. Adequate arrangements should be in place to help rehabilitate firefighters injured by attacks.

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Appendix: DCLG figures for attacks on firefighters

Table A1: Attacks on firefighters in England and Wales 2005-2006

Fire and rescue service	Harassment	Verbal abuse	Physical	Object thrown	Projectile	Sharp weapon	Gas chemical	Total incidents
Tyne and Wear	13	16	0	24	0	1	0	33
Cleveland	13	59	2	59	2	0	0	96
Durham	3	12	0	22	0	0	0	28
Northumberland	2	4	0	5	0	0	1	10
West Yorkshire	26	56	2	47	0	0	4	111
South Yorkshire	17	32	3	37	0	0	0	60
North Yorkshire	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Humberside	14	19	1	24	1	0	1	33
Greater Manchester	52	84	3	101	2	1	1	223
Lancashire	11	19	1	12	0	2	0	28
Cumbria	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Merseyside	30	57	7	133	4	3	2	172
Cheshire	7	5	1	26	1	0	0	31
Nottinghamshire	6	7	2	21	0	0	0	31
Derbyshire	4	3	1	7	0	0	0	9
Leicestershire	3	9	1	6	0	0	0	12
Lincolnshire	1	8	0	0	1	0	0	9
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	4
Hereford and Worcester	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
West Midlands	34	43	6	69	1	3	6	136
Staffordshire	4	9	1	14	1	0	0	23
Warwickshire	5	13	0	13	0	0	0	21
Shropshire								
North Wales	3	9	2	5	0	0	0	19
Mid and West Wales	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	4
South Wales	4	9	1	25	2	0	1	34
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Cambridgeshire	5	25	3	0	2	1	2	29
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	5
Essex	1	7	2	7	1	0	1	17
Norfolk	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2
Suffolk	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	4
London	1	0	0	7	2	1	1	11
Kent	0	9	0	1	0	0	0	10
Surrey	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
East Sussex	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
West Sussex								
Oxfordshire								
Buckinghamshire	3	1	0	3	1	0	0	6
Royal Berkshire	4	4	1	3	0	0	0	8
Hampshire	3	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
Dorset	2	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
Isle of Wight								
Avon	4	4	0	9	0	1	0	13
Gloucestershire	1	5	1	2	0	0	0	8
Wiltshire	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Somerset	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	3
Devon	4	7	0	2	0	1	0	8
Cornwall								

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, communication 6 August 2007

in 2005-06 and 2006-07

Table A2: Attacks on firefighters in England and Wales 2006-2007

Fire and rescue service	Harassment	Verbal abuse	Physical	Object thrown	Projectile	Sharp weapon	Gas chemical	Total incidents
Tyne and Wear	4	9	0	10	0	0	0	16
Cleveland	1	25	0	15	0	0	0	34
Durham	4	11	0	9	0	0	0	16
Northumberland	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
West Yorkshire	9	12	9	8	1	0	0	20
South Yorkshire	7	16	0	9	1	0	0	24
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Humberside	4	6	0	6	0	0	0	10
Greater Manchester	9	32	9	15	9	2	9	64
Lancashire	0	6	1	6	0	0	0	10
Cumbria	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
Merseyside	8	15	0	30	1	0	0	42
Cheshire	0	1	0	3	0	2	0	6
Nottinghamshire	2	5	0	11	0	0	0	18
Derbyshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Leicestershire	2	4	0	2	0	0	0	5
Lincolnshire	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Northamptonshire	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	4
Hereford and Worcester	1	1		1				1
West Midlands	4	18	0	18	1	0	1	35
Staffordshire	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	8
Warwickshire	1	6	0	4	1	0	0	11
Shropshire								
North Wales	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	8
Mid and West Wales	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
South Wales	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Hertfordshire								
Cambridgeshire	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	6
Bedfordshire	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	2
Essex	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	4
Norfolk	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Suffolk	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2
London	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	6
Kent	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	3
Surrey	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
East Sussex								
West Sussex	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oxfordshire	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Buckinghamshire								
Royal Berkshire	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Hampshire	1	2	0	4	0	0	0	5
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Isle of Wight	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Avon	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	5
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	3
Wiltshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Somerset								
Devon	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cornwall	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government, communication 6 August 2007



Fire Brigades Union

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

Tel: 020 8541 1765

Fax: 020 8546 5187

www.fbu.org.uk

