

Peer Review of ACT Fire and Rescue Service Management and Command Structures

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"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out nor more doubtful of success nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things; for the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order; this lukewarmness arising partly from the incredulity of mankind who does not truly believe in anything new until they actually have experience of it"

Machiavelli, The Prince.

Purpose of the review

The objective of the review of ACT Fire and Rescue (ACTF&R) Management and Command structures is to "peer review" the efficacy of the current command structures within ACTF&R and provide options to improve efficiency.

Introduction

Senior Managers are always the highest salaried employees in an organisation and exist to give steerage and enhance service delivery. This peer review is intended to provide ideas and possibilities for the Territory's Government on its Fire and Rescue provisions. In doing so, it compares several of the approaches taken by ACTF&R with those undertaken in Buckinghamshire, England, which has gone through a rapid transformation programme rendering it the lowest cost Fire Authority in England whilst delivering very high quality outcomes in terms of public and firefighter safety. The differences in context are important however and it is recognised that, for a variety of reasons, simply transferring the techniques and ideas from another area would require significant preparatory work including planning, consultation and debate.

Some years ago, the UK's Fire and Rescue Services were re-focussed to adopt a hierarchical approach to lowering Fire risks in our communities. The mantra: "Preventing, Protecting, Responding" is more than a slogan – it represents a mindset by which the first approach is to prevent risks from realising in the first instance – this includes high level design and engineering, and education; if they cannot be adequately mitigated by preventative strategies, the next approach is to identify and arrange for the presence of protection for people in buildings – this covers a wide range of active and passive engineering and education approaches to be adopted; finally, if risk cannot be satisfactorily managed by the higher approaches, to arrange for suitable operational responses to be established.

It is recognised that there are significant cultural differences between Australia and the UK in terms of how societal risk and fire risk in particular is conceived and it is therefore clear that not all strategies and ideas that have been successful in the UK could be similarly so in the Australian environment without significant adjustment to the arrangements which govern fire management.

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Compared to many areas of similar size, population and risk profile, the ACT is comparatively very well endowed with fire and rescue response resources. The reasons for this seem to be multi-factorial:

- Canberra is both the Territory and national capital,
- There is significant instrument government and allied agency infrastructure to protect,
- Geographically, external assistance can be several hours away,
- It has an arrangement in which few managers come from other jurisdictions and therefore there seems to be a natural tendency to defend the existing arrangements.

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Executive Summary

There appears to be a collective and accepted view that fiscal challenges will require new ways of working within all areas under the responsibility of the ESA and in turn ACTF&R, and, in all likelihood, spending reductions in future years. This was clear in all stakeholders with which the review interacted and is further evidenced by the fact that the JACS directorate, through the expenditure review process currently underway, is reviewing the cost of providing all of the services it oversees. That is not to say that a broad consensus is apparent on where and how efficiencies may be achieved. A detailed consultation based around future provision and the associated costs, which is not necessarily grounded in the historical decisions, or current arrangements, would seem to be required. By involving service users as well as those engaged in current provision, a better, more inclusive and informed outcome is possible.

There is seemingly considerable scope to take some costs out of the managerial arrangements of the ACTF&R with no detriment to service delivery or increase in risk. It might arguably be described as extravagant to create and maintain a managerial structure based around dealing with the most testing emergencies which happen increasingly infrequently; which has been demonstrated by activity analyses undertaken during the expenditure review. Complementing a reduction programme for managerial cost with some re-programming around the fundamental requirements of managers to exercise prudence and cost control might provide unexpected results.

From an external viewpoint there seems to be scope to rationalise within the ESA current senior staffing arrangements. Within the ESA, the employment of a system in which each Chief Officer is supported by a Deputy could be rationalised to streamline, allow cleaner lines of accountability and reduce costs.

It is apparent that some of the usual and fundamental responsibilities of senior managers are not required of the senior officers of the ACTF&R. There seems to be scope to give further responsibilities to senior Fire Officers to allow them to drive the efficiencies that might be required. Their involvement is vital to drive and deliver change and their current lack of it (seemingly through the historic arrangement rather by some design) is problematic.

The ACTF&R has a number of adopted positions which create a significant and burdensome managerial requirement in terms of cost and resources. These include:

- The requirement for Station Officers to command all Fire Appliances and

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- The requirement for all structural fires to be attended by at least one supervisory Commander.

There is scope for a review of these positions so that comparative costings can be assessed. By setting these costs against the operational and managerial requirements of the organisation in future, the managerial structures could be established based upon anticipated need.

The production, promulgation and routine use of, a Corporate Communications strategy will assist greatly to overcome fears and doubts about the change agenda.

There is evidence of a growing involvement in a range of Fire Safety activities but the work undertaken by the operational crews, although laudable, does not appear to support any particular risk-reduction strategy and this could be more focussed and directed. Additionally, there is a lack of a robust tracking and reporting system related to these activities and their benefits.

The allocation of training resources within the Service seems appropriate and effective.

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Summary of Recommendations

1. The ACTF&R should seek to implement personal performance management arrangements, as anticipated by the ACTF&R Enterprise Agreement, which detail the expectations of each staff member, at all levels, within the service. There would seemingly be merit in widening the concept of performance appraisals to incorporate all staff within the scope of the Commissioner at all levels.
2. Consideration should be given to the introduction of financial management responsibilities into the roles of all managers within the ACTF&R. This should extend to budget construction following the planning process each year, be linked to the business plan of the Service, and personal performance plans. This recommendation might extend to all ESA management for consistency.
3. A new emphasis on organisational performance management needs to be taken which uses performance indicators as measures of achievement of government, directorate, agency and service aims and objectives rather than merely reporting for benchmarking purposes.
4. Future enterprise bargaining agreements need to focus upon those areas which are anticipated, such as staff pay and conditions, and avoid the inclusion of managerial issues such as rostering, crewing levels and management of absenteeism.
5. The proactive Fire Safety and risk-reduction activities of operational firefighters could be more targeted and focussed upon risk to citizens in their homes. There are currently commendable examples of activities taking place but no picture of what these do to adjust risk levels or what attributable costs are incurred in these activities.
6. The ESA, and in turn the ACTF&R, should adopt a fresh approach to risk-assessment and utilise data and trends, such as the recent ORH review activities, to assess likely future requirements. This will allow for an informed debate on resource requirements to take place.
7. Visibly and meaningfully engaging staff and their representatives will be vital going forward.

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Methodology used in the review

Extensive reading of a range of Commonwealth and ACT Government and sector documents was complemented by a series of discussions with staff of the ACTF&R, the ESA and the JACS Directorate.

Visits to ESA Headquarters and discussions with a wide range of managers and other stakeholders were supplemented by visits to Ainslie and Fyshwick Fire Stations in which the openness, welcoming approach and enthusiasm demonstrated by ACTF&R personnel made the process both informative and enjoyable.

It is clear that the ACTF&R has enjoyed many years of good investment and the firefighters spoken with demonstrated professionalism and passion for their Service. Indeed, in recognition of the changing nature of the operational demand they face, they offered a willingness to undertake more functions.

The nature of the methodology forced the reviewer to note areas not necessarily contained within the scope of the review and these are listed late in the report without agenda.

Background - UK position and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue

The UK Government's austerity agenda (for most public services) started following the formation of the coalition government in 2010 and was announced late that year. For those services that were not to be protected, (essentially Health and Education were) a 25 per cent cut in central government grant was indicated over 4 years to 2014-15. Furthermore, a strict control over local taxation increases was enacted, effectively causing a "freeze" for 4 years. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority had only two income sources, one of which was frozen and the other cut by 25 per cent.

Over the decade up to 2010, overall attendance at incidents by UK Fire Services has dropped by 40 per cent, and attendance at fires by almost half. Through a focus on prevention rather than reaction, the exemplary "Fire Kills" programme has succeeded in driving down home fires and deaths dramatically. Home and business owners have never been safer than they are today, due to the efforts of the UK Fire Service.

"Despite these changes, no similar significant change in the makeup or cost of the service has taken place. Fire and rescue authorities do now need to transform themselves to reflect the entirely different era of risk and demand they now operate in" (Sir Ken Knight, Facing the Future, 2013).

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In the mid-2000s, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue was in a bad state. In 2006 they were one of five Services found to be performing below minimum requirements in the Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Their numbers of fires, fire deaths and injuries and fires being started deliberately were disproportionately high. The Service was badly demoralised by these criticisms. Staff who were there at the time describe the "glass ceiling" of ambition - a Service which did not feel capable of bettering itself or improving its performance.

By 2009, a peer review found that Bucks FRS was improving at meeting statutory obligations for response and for prevention. However, this had become a justification for not examining what could be done to improve the value for money for the taxpayer. The CPA found that management was in a terrible state of disarray. Staff who served there describe the Service as being run like a social club or family business - there was a great sense of camaraderie and support, but no focus on improving quality and increasing cost efficiency.

In 2010, the new management of Bucks FRS had actually predicted the probable outcome of the forthcoming Spending Review before it came. Consequently, its financial modelling had come up with the worst-case scenario for the cuts, and when this scenario came into being they were prepared for what to do, and had plans established. These plans took the form of the *"Moving Forward"* agenda. This was an ambitious programme of changes designed to update and refocus the Service. Its key principles included transparency, targeted local service delivery, and clear lines of accountability. Most radically, *Moving Forward* enshrined the new identity of the service: as an efficiently run business.

From this, Bucks Fire and Rescue developed a new Public Safety Plan, which totally re-defined the policy by which it was led. A top priority was ensuring that cuts could be made without damaging front-line resilience. Bucks planned not to cut the number of fire stations, not to make redundancies, not to damage incident attendance speed or weight. Changes were to be made based on the opinions of firefighters on the ground and following consultation with the public. Prevention, Protection and Response were enshrined as the key principles of the Service.

Prior to 2010, managers at Bucks FRS had felt, in line with the general public sector attitude, that throwing more money at a problem was the only way to solve it. Now, a new business-like attitude had taken over. Rather than looking at where more money could be used, this Service was looking at where money did not need to be spent and where spending could be reduced. This corporate outlook also changed the way the public was seen. Their role as tax-payer became key: the public were consumers, paying to get a good service. The Service now understood the importance of this reciprocal relationship: the

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service they provided had to be justified not only in terms of how good it was, but in terms of how much the public were getting for their tax money.

I have previously described how the Bucks FRS approach was conceived: "almost all challenges which had occurred over the years had been perceived as technical ones and had consequently been tackled using technical (and often expensive) solutions. This would inevitably lead to growth in the provision of fire stations and crews because people labouring under a "technical" mindset could only surmise that more people and more homes would mean more risk. We recognised early on that a falling demand for emergency responses (which did seem counter-intuitive even to us) was an adaptive challenge which could only be successfully tackled using adaptive solutions".

The outcomes are clear: Bucks is now the lowest cost Combined Fire Authority in England to its taxpayers whilst enjoying very high comparative safety levels for both its citizens and firefighters. It has low ratios of senior managers to firefighters and devolves financial management down to as low a level as possible within the organisation. These outcomes are no "flash in the pan" – they are measures that have been maintained for over a year now and seem set to continue for the foreseeable future. They have not been achieved without challenge and the courage shown by both senior managers and their political backers has been vital. There have been barriers and challenges along the route but the team is clear that these are normal in any reform of public service organisations. Speaking of how they deal with challenge, Jones is forthright: "The democratic processes which oversee public services are supposed to challenge the management of those organisations and we should have no fear of that. When you try to change anything in a largely unreformed service, there will be critics and opponents – we should not be overly concerned about their views unless they identify fundamental flaws in the strategy or aims of the change programme. You have to learn to embrace challenge and analyse whether they have anything to add: after all, we might have missed something".

Bucks FRS Operational Senior Command Staff Reductions	
January 2010	January 2015
CFO	CFO
DCFO	Chief Operating Officer
3 ACFO's	
5 Area Managers	3 Area Managers
8 Group Managers	6 Group Managers
32 Station Managers	24 Station Managers

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Whilst this reduction in management has been accompanied by a slow decline in the number of firefighters and support staff, the ratio of senior staff cost to lower grade staff continues to show a healthy trend.

Strategic Backdrop for ACTF&R

A document studied which offered a fair amount of comparative data is the **"Report on Government Services 2014, Volume D: Emergency Management"** (ROGS 2014). It identifies the ACTFS as being one of the highest spending in "\$ per person" in Australia. At the same time, it is identified as one of two which are predominantly funded by Government grants, that is through a government payment for output (GPO). This in itself creates a direct and particular vulnerability. If, as seems likely according to Federal treasury briefings, grants will fall to public services in future, the viability of current service provision seems likely to be directly challenged by its own resource demands.

That document also offers details of the numbers of professional staff employed by each service but given the varied geography and particular challenges of each state, these do not offer valid comparators from which conclusions might be reliably drawn. Table D.2 of that report (ROGS 2014) shows that the ACTF&R enjoys comparatively fast response times but comparatively high costs per person. On almost all operational measures, the ACT seems to be noting good outcomes but on almost all reported measures seems comparatively expensive.

The existence of ROGS is welcomed because it offers good opportunities for comparative benchmarking within the sector but there is little evidence of the ACTF&R using those benchmarks to drive service improvements or cost control methodologies.

The ACTF&R arrangements are inextricably tied to many other elements of the Territory's government and improved value has been sought by the outsourcing of certain aspects of its support requirement such as payroll administration, and some aspects of safety management and financial management. Staff within the Service consider that transaction to be something of a "land grab" and doubt the efficiency of doing so. Upon being challenged, several examples of where the Service continues to bear the administrative burden of the apparently outsourced functions were offered. If true, the administrative costs associated are not likely to be delivering efficient outcomes. In any case, some delineation of the expectations of both the new administrative support arrangements and the Service managers on each of the areas outsourced might assist to limit duplication of effort. To this end, the Service could more effectively adopt the use of IT systems to become *data rich* thus minimising the apparent "person dependence" culture which seems prevalent.

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The ACTF&R is being pressurised by a number of varying factors in terms of how it delivers its services. As well as the usual requirement to deliver good quality services at the best cost possible to taxpayers, future fiscal reduction seems to be indicated by a collection of measures. Added to this, there is a marked trend towards a safer society, the extrapolation of which forces the Territory government to review likely future requirements for the purposes of both ensuring that taxpayers are protected in future and that those taxes are prudently expended.

The review studied a set of proposals submitted collectively by a team of senior officers (identified as the SOG-Senior Officers Group), which offered ideas for more effective service delivery. The main thrust of those proposals were:

- Closer working to the point of merger of the ACTF&R and the Volunteer Brigades (to facilitate joint operations in the BAZ)
- The proposals go further to propose a "single fire service for the ACT". No view is offered on the likelihood of wide support for such an idea and it may very well have merit.
- The existence and role of the ESA is challenged, describing it as an "unhelpful overlay" and proposing that it acts as a supportive entity driven by Service Level Agreements. Once more, no judgement is offered on those proposals which seem to be driven from a genuine desire for change and influence.
- Finally, the proposals call for "open and direct costings" of all services, which seems to be eminently sensible but not as a special piece of work. Such budget monitoring and reporting should be a routine administrative function driven by the requirements for transparency and good business delivery.

Perhaps more concerning is what is not contained within those proposals. The instincts of such a senior collection of leaders to comment upon, and seek to change, *top structure* is normal and understood. There seems to be no acceptance (within those proposals) that there may also be opportunities for efficiencies and service improvement within the ACTF&R. It is contended that the good ideas put forward should be duly considered but alongside a wider set of proposed efficiency adjustments.

The review also considered the ACT RFS submission to the ESA treasury review. Once more, its proposals are naturally focussed on that organisations' wishes and interests but little is evident as to how the efficiency review might gain efficiencies from adoption of those proposals.

The significant strategic Human Resource challenges presented by the workforces of the ACTAS and the ACTF&R are recognised by the JACS directorate and many workstreams are active in considering future possibilities and seeking to identify ways of controlling costs.

There was no discernible approach to ensuring that stakeholders are accurately informed of the views of senior managers within the ESA and the ACTF&R.

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Corporate Communications are vital when driving change agendas and a formal communications strategy which encompasses staff, managers, overseers, the media and the Ministry would allow for consistency to develop and, over time, confidence to grow.

Senior Managerial Provisions and Emergency Planning Assumptions

An old adage states that "form follows function" but that is often not the case in publicly funded services. To fully comprehend why this is the case takes in depth study but the fact that the *bottom line* is often not a primary focus is contributory. In recent years within the UK public services, managers have been forced on cost control and delivering value for taxpayers and the outcome for almost all publicly provided services is that significant funding cuts have not led to poorer performing public services.

The current structure of management in the ACTF&R does not appear to have been predicated upon the command requirements of the operational demand faced (which would seemingly be far lower in resource terms based on risk and response data). Nor does it appear to have been predicated upon the managerial requirements of the organisation (which, in comparative terms, would also seemingly be somewhat lower, principally because a number of what most might consider to be normal managerial functions are not delegated or devolved). It seems likely that this structure has evolved over many years during which financial resources were incrementally increasing and little pressure was evident upon staff costs. With reference to the previously quoted adage, it might be argued that, as far as the development of managerial structures within the ACTF&R are concerned, "form followed finance".

Using data provide through the expenditure review process, some simple comparisons of staff costs for 2012-13 indicate an unusual distribution which seems to be linked to a lack of control of costs. The ranks of Station Officer and Commander for example cost the Service over 25 per cent more than is allowed for in payment of salary terms. It was noted that the nominal pay level for the commander position is \$108,969 per annum but simple arithmetical assessments of the actual wages and salary cost last year showed an average of around \$147,000. (this is replicated on the Station Officer grade which shows an actual of around \$123,000 against a nominal cost of \$91,216). Other grades were not studied but these examples demonstrate a significant challenge to financial planning and forecasting and help to emphasise why costs such as these should be controlled by the line of management.

When Fire Services are required to reduce expenditure, a sharp focus is brought upon staff costs because they typically make up more than 80 per cent of expenditure (in ACTF&R, these costs are unclear to the review because of some apparent uncertainty over what the true costs of the ACTF&R actually are). Regardless of location or nation, all oversight political bodies are reluctant to make funding cuts which might have an adverse impact upon the safety of

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voters – this is quite understandable and, from an observers viewpoint, laudable.

It is therefore incumbent upon Fire Agencies to:

1. Accurately assess and report risk levels and to make assessments of the likely impacts of proposed changes.
2. Demonstrate that their plans and strategies mitigate those risks to an extent that is tolerable.
3. Ensure that any protective arrangements provided deliver good value to the taxpayers who pay for them.

In the UK, these are achieved by a process of Integrated Risk Management Planning which requires Fire Authorities to consult directly with those affected by changes such as staffing reduction or station closures. Typically, this is undertaken every 4 or 5 years and the details of the recent consultation undertaken by Bucks FRS (which will be publicly reported in mid-December 2014) is referred to herein.

The review considered the amount of managerial resource allocated within the ACTF&R and concludes that the proportion of staff in the ACTF&R who are paid at managerial grades seems comparatively high at first glance. The main contributory factors appear to be that:

- A policy decision has been taken that all structural fires will have a commander in attendance, and
- All front line pumping appliances will be commanded by a Station Officer

This review offers no views on those policy decisions but concludes that they contribute significantly to the cost distribution and higher than anticipated overall salary bill. In studying what commanders actually do at structural fires it seems (from anecdotal reports) that a fair proportion of the managerial effort is directed at managing external and higher influences rather than directing the Service's operations. The situation is slightly exacerbated by the fact that a proportion of these senior managers (whose roles' existence is seemingly justified on operational command requirements) are not classified as "on road". This is in sharp contrast to the command methodologies utilised in the UK. It is not clear whether this occurs in other Australian FRS's.

Noting the classification arrangements and viewed in the context of the Australian urban fire fighting agencies, the role of "Senior Firefighter" in ACTF&R is an interesting one. Whilst it is achieved by progression, there are clearly supervisory aspects of the job description and there may be scope to utilise Senior Firefighters as Officers in Charge of fire appliances in future. Expressions noted such as: "assists in the command, control and co-ordination of personnel and resources under the direction of higher level employees" and "provides leadership, guidance and assistance" help to highlight certain managerial expectations and this role has the potential to take on more command responsibilities with minimal adjustment to the role requirements (and consequently remuneration).

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When taking over Bucks FRS, I enquired of senior officers: What "worst case" assumptions are made in terms of planning for fire command requirements? The response was, a ten pump, an 8 pump and two 5 pump fires occurring simultaneously. I then enquired how often this had realised and how frequently it had nearly realised.

Whilst it was pleasing to me that the operational commanders had made some assessment of what "spate demand" conditions might look like, the assessment had taken little account of the actual likelihood of such simultaneous occurrences. Reviewing those assumptions to something more akin to what might be realistically encountered and referring to trends in emergency incidents allowed us to re-engineer the provision of senior fire officers to a lower number with no detrimental impact upon the Services' business outcomes.

Repeating this question to ACTF&R during the review drew some interesting responses, but none which consistently indicated that it had been considered (or recorded) as a strategy. The absence of a recorded position on this issue demonstrates that the emergency management needs of the Service have not formally driven the staffing requirement of senior officers. This situation helps to demonstrate how a degree of over-provision can occur quite organically in the managerial levels of emergency response organisations and further shows the extent to which the Services' decisions to populate its command system has contributed to (apparently and comparatively high) costs of senior staff.

An unintended consequence of over-providing supervisory managers can sometimes be the limitation of the development of subordinates. The Station Officers encountered by the review all seemed intelligent, capable and professional and the reviewer was left in no doubt of their ability to manage mid-sized emergency incidents without the oversight higher level supervisors.

It is clear that there is scope to adjust operational mobilising protocols to allow them to do so. This may provide the opportunity to revise the future requirement for Commanders positions. The number of roles at that level is further confused by the fact that one third of them appear to be non-operational. It is unclear why that should be the case and why the Service would maintain such costly arrangements. In any case, any operational officer who requires command support can request it at any time.

One of the "missing pieces" which seems highly relevant is the fact that there does not appear to be in existence a formal method of organisational performance management. The adoption of formal system of performance management would offer several advantages:

1. It might assist with the development of a Performance Management Culture in which all staff understood their contribution to the corporate objectives.
2. The Directorate could state the corporate objectives to give steerage.
3. All plans and strategies devised could visibly support the corporate objectives and align most expenditure with stated priorities.
4. Personal appraisals (also proposed herein) could be based upon the accomplishment of corporate aims and objectives.

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Typically, such a process would begin with setting a vision which was simple, ambitious for the Service and aspirational for staff at all levels.

Assessment of Risks for ACT and planning to mitigate them

The document entitled "Territory Wide Risk Assessment" is a comprehensive piece of work. It does seem to labour in the areas of historic events and states the possibility of them recurring and what outcomes might result. Accepting that Governments and emergency planners have little control over natural events, it might have been anticipated that the main focus of such a review might have been what mitigation measures were to be applied and the sharing of comprehensive and regularly exercised emergency plans with all stakeholders. They seem to be listed but no account is given of how much the risk being treated is mitigated by the cures planned. A good example is bush and grass fires - how will resources be allocated between fuel reduction strategies and other strategies without some assessment of which are the most suitable and therefore worth expenditure? In any case, and the emergencies detailed notwithstanding, the majority of effort and risk for the ACTF&R remains protecting the communities in their homes and the urban environment because that is where statistically most emergencies are occurring.

There is a need to properly assess risks, make plans to manage them and to inform community attitudes so as to create realistic expectations of emergency service provision. Essentially, Fire Agencies and those who have oversight of them must not be "scarred" by large scale events. Fire and public safety policy development is best enacted rationally and on an evidential basis rather than by seeking to "bolt stable doors". The absence of a formal database of learning from incidents is also significant in these considerations. To re-emphasise, no planners should be overly influenced by singular large events which happen very infrequently - the key focus must be in the predictable, normal and manageable events which are anticipated.

Having studied the operational data available, it seems that large fires are the exception and are not therefore statistically reliable factors for assessing risk within the ACT's area. In any case, risk assessments consist of two, multiplying, factors - Likelihood of occurrence and Severity of outcome. To overstate or understate either is fatal to the accuracy of the final assessment of risk. Most fire agencies place more emphasis on the "severity" criterion in the risk assessment and the likelihood multiplier is rarely properly factored. This situation can be magnified by the fact that government agencies tend to call for retrospective commissions or Coronial enquiries which, whilst legalistic and "matter of fact" in their process, are emotive and "after the fact" in their reporting. This approach is unlikely to be conducive to a true assessment of whether the arrangements which were extant were effective and might lead to a burgeoning growth in managerial positions despite the fact that it might not have been the prevalence of managers that was causative to any failures.

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Once risk assessments have been properly completed and plans prepared to mitigate the risks, it is vital that a visible media and communications strategy follows which makes key stakeholders and the public aware of the details.

Effecting Changes in Emergency Services

Senior Managerial positions exist in most organisations for the purposes of overseeing the effective use of resources towards the organisation's most important aims and missions. In most public organisations, many senior staff got to where they are by not seeking to change much and being defenders of the existing arrangements. Going back to the Machiavelli quote at the outset, often, there is no incentive for them to embrace change and little reward for dealing with the challenges associated. Their consequent passiveness can often be construed as resistance but rarely turns out to be so.

In considering change within the ACT Fire and Rescue, certain *home truths* must be faced by Legislators, Emergency Managers and Public Servants (and for argument's sake the media and the public too):

- It doesn't matter what your spend profile is, history has taught us that bad things will happen, and
- It doesn't matter how much resource we have installed, those resources will occasionally be overwhelmed.
- On those occasions, government agencies (in developed countries) always get blamed.
- Each providing agency needs to be clear on what risks their provisions are mitigating against,
- But, some proactive and "live time" communication with the public on what they can and can't expect can do wonders

Globally, in developed countries, Fire Services have not generally undergone radical changes over many years. Even those who claim to have done so are often only advertising some new initiative or technology rather than having undertaken a self-driven *root and branch* reform of service delivery. Risk intolerance is a powerful resistor to change and, globally, despite claims to the contrary, reform is often challenging and poorly received and implemented.

Arguments offered by those who seek to resist changes in Fire and Rescue Provisions are often emotive and designed to get something stopped. "People will die" is a great sound-bite but could fairly be termed somewhat *shroud waving* as an argument. As the analysis work recently undertaken demonstrated, such approaches are not particularly compelling statistically. For change and significant reform within an organisation to be successful and the outcomes maintained, it is vital that senior staff in the organisation understand why it is being enacted, what the aims of the change are and what their role, both within the process and afterwards, will be. Given the seniority of the top staff in the ACTF&R, their qualifications and the respect afforded to them by the workforce, it is proposed that they will be vital to the success of any change programme. It therefore seems logical to engage them at the planning stage to ensure buy-in and leadership because their engagement will be vital to success of change programmes. The fire officers encountered during the review were

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intelligent and seemingly competent. There may be opportunities to achieve the required savings by detailing the outcomes required to them with parameters and allowing them to devise strategies and manage the change.

Certain, often unspoken, truths are key to any debate about Fire Service reform:

- There is little correlation between speed of response and citizens safety levels.
- The proximity of the nearest fire station doesn't correlate to your safety either (although there may be arguments for both in terms of mitigation of property losses).

Management of stakeholder expectations is also likely to be fraught. There were views expressed for example that "we haven't opened a new fire station for years" (clearly with the suggestion that the Service should be). This urge seemed entirely oblivious to falling demand and risk levels and was not really moved or adjusted by my direct challenge.

Organisational Performance and Data Management

A "gap" which seems to be evident in the ACTF&R system is the use of "internal information loops" to inform plans and strategies. The review could find little evidence of true reform or system changes being executed as an outcome from the operational incident debrief system. Furthermore, the Service does not maintain a database of these events from which patterns and trends might be analysed. The adoption of a more formalised approach to utilising "feedback loops" would allow the Service to demonstrably become more of a *learning organisation* which routinely considered how it used its resources and whether it could become more cost effective. Other potential learning opportunities include: feedback from accident investigations, legal case outcomes and precedents and exercise and incident debriefs and lessons learned elsewhere.

Such an approach would also be complemented by the use of the previously recommended **organisational performance management approach** which used key performance indicators for more than merely onward or upward reporting and benchmarking. The most powerful properties of such systems are that they drive the delivery of managerial objectives and, in doing so, allow all spectators and stakeholders to observe good delivery of plans.

Funding and Financial Management

In a period of societal growth and fiscal inflation, public services trend towards unquestioning growth. This is somewhat understandable, whilst everything else is booming, Why not those services which support a safer society? Inevitably, this approach will always lead to a "Boom/Bust" cycle and the public's best interests are unlikely to be well-served by it. The review was informed that, for some years, an incremental approach to budgeting was adopted with an inflationary adjustment being applied. Although the unwieldy nature of zero-based budgeting is recognised, the traditional methodology will not allow budget reduction to occur in future years without some form of zero-based comparisons being made. Whatever methodology is applied, it seems vital that future budgets

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are linked to planned outcomes for taxpayers rather than the maintenance of the status quo. Furthermore, the true impacts must be analysed so that decision makers can be assured.

One of the directions taken in the review was to try and establish the extent to which senior ACTF&R managers were involved in establishing the operating budgets and controlling their expenditure. It is readily identifiable that many staffing budgets routinely overshoot planned expenditure despite a steady reduction in emergencies and the fact that none of the managers claimed to have responsibility for budget management (and, consequently, cost control) partly explains that outcome.

It is tempting to state that financial management and cost control should be placed in the appraisals of senior staff but the requirement is likely to be more sophisticated than that simple adjustment.

Unless senior staff in an organisation are clear on:

1. The strategic objectives, and
2. Their own role in delivering them, and
3. The measures that will be utilised to note the progress, and
4. The cost parameters associated

Success is unlikely and accidental if it occurs. **All of these components are missing within the managerial arrangements of the ACTF&R.** This is significant and should be addressed.

The fact that neither budget development and construction or budget management is devolved to any extent is problematic. Unless managers are involved in some detail with these processes, any managerial expectations on their control of expenditure are optimistic at best. The endemic absence of financial planning and forecasting by Service managers is a fundamental business weakness.

It was pleasing to learn that Workforce Planning exists within the Service and is utilised to ensure an appropriate distribution of skills and experiences across the Service's area. Its efficacy could be greatly enhanced by linkage to the known financial resources over future years. This would simultaneously ensure that expenditure on staffing remains within foreseen cost envelopes. Matters such as recruitment and retirements would therefore be factored in for financial consideration by such a process. For this to be feasible however, a different approach would need to be taken during establishing future enterprise bargains.

This should be addressed at ESA level because budgets should, at the development stage, be linked to plans and strategic aims which have been set by the strategists. In Buckinghamshire, we developed a 5 year (rolling) financial plan which models all known and anticipated future likely spending commitments and savings intentions. This enabled all business plans to underpin the known revenue resources and also identify where borrowing or use of reserves might be required. One of the most successful strategies we conceived was to use elected board members to challenge the large budget plans at the inception stage. The resultant comprehension by both elected members and Officers of the Service

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allowed mutual understanding of perspectives to develop and this in turn informed future budget setting processes. This could be done with the staff from the ESA, ACTF&R and the JACSD in the local context.

Enterprise Bargaining

The fact that the national arrangement is to use collective bargaining such as the enterprise bargaining system is noted and the review makes no comments upon the chosen methodology. The content of the ACTF&R Enterprise Agreement presents significant limitations to any future improvements that may be required.

It seems perfectly normal for a collective deal between trade unions and employees with their employers to encompass matters such as pay, conditions and entitlements but the version agreed within the ACTF&R seems to go considerably past that, mentioning (and tying in) matters which are legislated for elsewhere. For example, it is not clear why the ACTF&R agreement would have a "Managing under-Performance" section which differs considerably from the Fair Work guidance and this section could be simplified by simply referring to the national arrangements.

The section which empowers staff members to instigate (what seem to be administratively onerous) internal reviews is similarly odd as an inclusion in such a document given the raft of legislation quoted. Its incorporation suggests insecurity about the management of an organisation and seemingly assumes that such challenges might be frequent. This comment is made as an observation and with no data on the frequency of use of these processes.

The schedule relating to operational matters seems to detail a range of decisions which would normally fall to management. As the Service moves forward into times of austerity, the inclusion of "rostering and establishment" in such agreements will be challenging and should be challenged. One example of why this comment is made is that managers are effectively prevented from utilising generally accepted techniques which are quite normal elsewhere such as "managed vacancies".

A fair amount in the enterprise agreement about managing (individual) performance was noted but no mention of a systematic approach to doing so was observed. This is a major gap that will take time to fill. This too was true in Buckinghamshire back in 2010 but we started installing appraisals with the top team in 2010 and cascaded down so that all staff would have properly populated and targeted appraisals in place by 2015. This offered several advantages:

- The strategic aims of the Authority could be directly placed into the performance assessment of the Service's senior officers,
- They could be directly held to account for the outcomes,
- Job descriptions are translated into "live status" by tasking individuals, and, most importantly,
- The Services' strategic objectives are "owned"

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One would imagine that the managerial intent of such bargains would be to allow reliable cost assessments and projections to be made whilst guaranteeing certain crewing levels. One definition found during the review was: "The process of making agreements about pay, working conditions etc. between employees and managers of a single company". The "Fair Work Ombudsman" provides good advice on the typical construction of such bargains, and defines, in detail, what is legitimate and illegitimate for inclusion but offers no advice as to the actual extent of inclusions. The designed intent is seemingly not met by the existing agreement which seems to detail with some precision the rights of staff and how they will be managed and rewarded but, due to its highly prescriptive nature on matters such as crewing levels, offers little managerial "wriggle room" or possibility of improvements for the territory's negotiators.

There seems to be considerable scope for refinement and simplification in future agreements and it is recognised that, due to the nature and content of the existing agreement, almost all changes considered will have to be incorporated into the next round of bargaining.

This will be key to controlling expenditure in future - the true extra, or hidden, costs of shift systems is the burden the employer bears for the periods when workers are not productive or not employed doing the main activity for which they are employed. Globally, due the nature of the shift systems employed, Fire Agencies are often criticised for the inefficiencies associated. In the UK, professional firefighters typically spend less than 5 per cent of their working time attending emergency incidents. Analysis for ACTF&R indicates an average utilisation of 7 per cent, noting this includes Automatic Fire Alarms, which in turn accounts for 98 per cent of all attendances.

Simply attempting to make efficiencies without identifying where the main corporate costs are incurred currently would be ill-advised. As Peter Drucker once said: "There is nothing so useless as doing more efficiently that which should not be done at all". One of the areas in which organisational performance might be improved for example is staff attendance levels but the fact that most such cases are not the responsibility of line managers and some are placed within the "Workers Compensation" arrangements makes management of them almost impossible without some system reform. This theme is repeated on several areas that would normally be considered line managerial responsibilities but which are managed elsewhere once certain "triggers" are activated. The disjointed and disparate nature of the "people management" arrangements of the ACTF&R make accountability for line management difficult to identify.

The fact that ACTF&R managers seem to manage neither the finances nor the people performance elements of the Service is significant.

ORH ESAR Draft Report

The ORH work gives much attention to attendance times but the correlation between them and the safety of citizens is not established. I therefore tend to resist their calls for attendance time measures for second responding vehicles. In any case, the comparators between ACT and other Australian Fire Services

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(as reported by the Commonwealth) make very favourable reading in terms of attendance times. This seems to offer some freedom to explore alternative provision in the knowledge that the ACTF&R will remain in a favourable position in comparison.

That is not to say that seeking to improve response times is a bad thing – it seems appropriate to get the best value out of whatever arrangement exists and any quality added in the call handling times, speed of mobilisation and speed of response can only be positive. The point made generally herein however is that, due to the lack of data to the contrary; an increase in response times on its own should not negate potential changes in the FRS arrangements or configuration.

Another related item is the fact that the Service sets and refers to its "Standards of Fire Cover". This is an antiquated concept, unsupportable by evidence based practices, and is now generally identified in contemporary fire services as: "Target Attendance Times". Realigning ACTF&R with the more contemporary approach would allow a shift in mindset away from these being considered as public safety standards towards them being envisaged as more of an organisational set of Performance Indicators. In the absence of any qualitative analysis which defines their value (and none was apparent), they should not be considered as sacrosanct and consequently not possible to adjust. Against a backdrop in which Fire calls are consistently falling and the public are getting safer – It seems entirely appropriate to consider adjustments so as to try and to gain efficiencies. One might argue that the whole reason that investment is made in Fire Safety initiatives is to allow such latitude going forward.

The idea of a small and special vehicle for AFA response seems sound in concept but why would the Service take (what might potentially be) a huge amount of calls/demand away from its fleet and not utilise the opportunity to rationalise that fleet? (Sect 5.7.9). Essentially, the idea of the response vehicle is sound but not as a supplement which adds more cost with no added efficiency.

Timing of fiscal reduction programmes

Within Bucks FRS, we had recognised that the central Government in England was going to cut everyone's grants at the end of 2010. We decided that we did not want to be seen as victims of that process and did not want to have to inform our taxpayers and staff that reductions were being made due to cuts in spending. Changes to our Service structure and provision were consequently (and deliberately with intent) announced several months before grant cuts were announced because it could be packaged as delivering better taxpayer value rather than a change imposed by fiscal restriction. Although political in intent, this strategy managed to placate our staff, their representatives, the media and our political leaders because it took much of the contention away from the debate and allowed the discussion to focus on risk levels set against expenditure.

Although this strategy was ridiculed by some (Fire Officer) commentators in 2010, (seemingly with the mindset - why would you preside over cuts in budget that you didn't have to?) by 2012, no one was laughing and most seemed keen to learn how we did it. Another driver for commencing in 2010 was that we

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maintain a keen eye on our retirement profile (always the least contentious way to shrink a workforce). We could see a pretty regular pattern from 2010-14 but then a slowdown (at least in anticipated retirements). By coupling this focus to a firefighter recruitment freeze, a healthy reducing trend in staffing numbers commenced which allowed a steady reduction in spending to prevail. We carefully monitored public safety levels and the outcomes of incidents and could find no deterioration during the change period.

One of the interesting aspects of trade union resistance to the changes is their attempts to stand as the defenders of public safety when campaigning for crewing levels. We reminded all stakeholders that the board of elected members who oversee the Fire Service are empowered as defenders of public safety thus minimising the impacts of the Trade Union resistance to change on that theme.

It hasn't stopped critics from being very vocally critical on social media but the outcomes speak for themselves. It is also highly relevant that no industrial action was threatened or enacted because of the programme of change within the Service. Furthermore, 4 years into the programme, we now have a continuing trend of high levels of public safety and firefighter safety to report which gives further reassurance to the Service's political leaders and somewhat vindicates the decisions taken back in 2010.

This approach is readily replicable in almost any Fire provision regime but it has to be recognised that there are key differences in the ACT arrangement than those of a Combined Fire Authority in England.

Sequencing activities to take risks out of the changes chosen

If the ESA was minded to make efficiency adjustments to the ACTF&R arrangements, there are very clear "stepping stones" that would allow delivery and show transparency. A very useful precursor to any alteration to emergency response regimes is an investment in (or at least a clear focus upon) public safety levels. In the case of fire, this means Community Fire Safety. The current Fire Safety (Community resilience) Framework noted is good and clearly integrates the oversight of planning activities and the built environment. It was also understood that this area of the Service's work brings in significant income through the AFA charging regime, Building application reports and alarm monitoring.

The approach taken by ACTF&R to Automatic Fire Alarms is starkly contrasting to that adopted by Bucks FRS. Whilst some of England's FRS's moved to reduced or no turnout to such calls and others started charging for dealing with them, we took a strategic decision to do neither. We treat all calls from automatic systems as genuine calls for assistance and send a single fire truck in response. This position is adopted for a number of reasons:

1. The importance of the business community and the commercial sector in our area,
2. It is preferred to work with premises owners and managers to reduce the nuisance value of these unwanted fire calls. We have had remarkable success in doing so by employing an engineer to work with those premises.

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The ACTF&R might assess the value of the charging regime by asking how successful that method has been in lowering demand. There is also a possibility of creating a "perverse incentive" by the FRS becoming somewhat reliant upon the income stream. Such a situation would inevitably create a form of organisational schizophrenia and may leave the ESA open to criticism. Another "acid test" as the proportion of total calls being made up by AFA's is for the ACT to assess its own willingness to fund professional fire crews to turn out to what are statistically almost always not emergencies? Another complicating factor is that most of the potential income that is (apparently) generated is derived from other taxpayer funded services at either Territory or Federal level. The administration of collection is consequently and effectively expensive and value or true income above the line is not clearly established.

There appear to be greater opportunities for operational stations to be engaged in Community Fire Safety Initiatives. They are not overly busy with emergency calls and some of that capacity could be directed to ensuring that people are safer in their homes and businesses. In 2013, the firefighters of Buckinghamshire were challenged to fit 10,000 smoke alarms in people's homes (these are bought by the Service). They achieved the target well ahead of schedule and fit thousands each year on an ongoing basis. Whilst this initiative is not, in itself, a fire prevention measure, this approach represents an investment in public safety that will ensure a continuation of the positive public safety trend for many years.

Of equal value is the co-operation between agencies to produce the "at risk" database which enables accurate targeting of this and other preventative strategies. Further – the database of the preventive activities of our station based personnel allow the Service to show how "latent capacity" can be mobilised to assist with the achievement of corporate aims. The database observed is a good start and seems to show a good improvement in terms of activity on previous years but there is no evidence of a planned or risk based approach to targeting. The methods used in Buck FRS are directly replicable in the ACTF&R and a broader and mandated role for firefighters in delivering proactive safer communities would be a very positive step. The response to the question: "What proactive community safety activities are the Fire Service engaged in?" was vague and not consistent and this indicates a need for greater emphasis.

The importance of proactive safety work cannot be over-emphasised. Once the trends in public safety are tied to these actions, an informed debate is possible on the future of response provisions. There is good work ongoing in the field of fire safety which generates income but to ask officers to generate income targets with no knowledge of their spending limitations seems odd at best. The use of operational crews for hazard identification is good practice and this could be extended to an organised set of home safety visits which are informed by partner agencies to ensure those most at need receive the best attention. Having noted the good work being undertaken in liaison with planners and designers, it was surprising to learn that the Fire Service has no direct intervention or enforcement powers.

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Another very positive contribution the Service could make is to influence a wider application and prescription of Sprinklers in certain buildings. This is a huge opportunity for the ACT Government – there are few fire jurisdictions which directly correlate with planning jurisdictions and the co-terminosity in the ACT could allow for a wider prescription of sprinklers in certain types (and, feasibly, locations) of properties.

Enacting the changes

In most reform endeavours, the barriers to successful change management are clear and simply appealing to a workforce to embrace and accept change carries no guarantee of successful implementation. Even when acting altruistically, the human condition is to resist change.

There will be a need to gain support from senior staff and the “spiritual leaders” of the ACTF&R organisation. The current suite of reviews will naturally create a degree of “flux” and the associated instability is useful for starting the momentum needed to create the momentum for change. Very fixed sets of opinions can be difficult to shift unless they are collectively energised in some way but there will be a finite window before the previous mindsets prevail and “set”.

As implied in the previous section, any amendment to fire cover arrangements would be best presented as being enacted due to being possible on the grounds of falling risk levels on efficiency grounds rather than recession driven cuts. Whilst the change and its impacts are identical, one is more societally palatable than the other. Coupled with strong initiatives on prevention, safety initiatives and regular reporting of how safe (and safer) the area had become, what might appear to be politically risky could actually become politically alluring.

In most fire management regimes, future risk would be determined in part by extrapolations of data trends from the Services’ own databases. It was unclear to the review whether this has been practiced in any sophisticated manner (other than the limited ORH work) and whether future plans have been informed by such a process.

Meeting with the Minister

On Thursday 13th November, the reviewer met with Mr. Simon Corbell, the Minister from the state government with responsibility for Police and Emergency Services (among a wide range of other Ministerial responsibilities).

It was clear that, because the Minister had held the portfolio for some time and was very well briefed and aware of his responsibilities, an in depth knowledge of the challenges facing state and territory emergency services had developed. Due to the in-depth knowledge of the policy area that exists both within the Directorates and the ESA, any planned changes which are chosen will be well

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understood in terms of their intent, implementation and impacts. This profound comprehension will greatly enhance their chances of successful delivery.

Delivering changes in Emergency Provision

This is a notoriously challenging area of public policy but the ACT has many good trends and improvements in public safety to which to point during any reductions in expenditure. Essentially, there is no reason why public safety levels or the current excellent outcomes achieved should be in any way reduced by reducing the costs of service delivery. Other than in technical equipment and procedures, Fire Officers have not managed significant change or had to focus on cost control in their planning or operational activities.

Consulting the public and involving the media in a positive and proactive manner is a reliable method of gaining support for the cost reduction initiatives and the close proximity of those stakeholders in the ACT offer a good opportunity.

One key focus must be to continually remind everyone interested that no fire agency or government department would willingly do anything that it knew would raise risk levels to our communities. To suggest otherwise is simply denying the facts.

Ancillary areas which arose not directly within the scope of the review

1. The **Firefighters Trade Union representatives** (United Firefighters Union) encountered seemed informed and passionate about the pay and conditions of their members. They showed themselves to be responsible and cognisant of the pressure upon public finances whilst steadfast in representing their Members interests to the review. Essentially, it appears that there is scope for them to be integral to future improvements.
2. One element of the workers compensation arrangements that might require consideration is **the reported automatic right for individuals to be returned to their original post upon return from long term sickness absence**. This position limits the ability of the managers of the Service to best utilise the human resources at their disposal and indirectly contributes to overtime requirements to cover their absence. There may be merit in maintaining a "pool" for staff who are absent for over a month to be transferred into, and out of, to minimise the impacts, notably upon stations where crewing is given critical status.
3. The **senior staffing arrangements within the ESA seemed top-heavy**. Having a leader responsible for each of the 4 areas is obvious but why they would require a singular report of a Deputy is less clear and seems likely to lead to duplication of effort or division of loyalties.
4. The firefighters and officers spoken with showed a genuine willingness to get involved in other activities to further contribute to public safety and offered **emergency medical assistance** as one area that they once undertook. In that they sit under the same commission, it seems obvious

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that some efficiency could be attained both with the Ambulance Service and Fire Service, by sharing certain emergency medical assistance aspects of the demand. Such a move would also assist with defending the "latent capacity" **arguments which often abound** for professional fire crews spending only a small proportion of their working time doing the emergency response aspect of their role.

5. The ESA Headquarters is arranged with a co-location with ACTF&R, ACTAS, ACTSES and ACTRFS leaderships. Whilst the co-location is seemingly good business, it presents significant opportunities for efficiencies from shared support functions and these possibilities should be assessed and factored into future plans.
6. Health and Safety Management is a key managerial responsibility and the current arrangements in which **some aspects of accident reporting and processing are dealt with outside the line of management** are worthy of review.
7. The staffing system for the **Command Centre (ComCen)** is another area in which **future better value might be delivered from not utilising Firefighter qualified staff**. It is not clear what advantages are derived from having firefighter staff as control operators, noting the need for a subject matter expert to be available as required much like the ACTAS specialist clinician role already established.
8. Officers reported that **Press Releases** on certain mundane matters require JACSD approval and felt that this requirement tends to dilute and slow down the messages. Adjustment to these arrangements to allow more direct releases by Service managers would be a real opportunity to build trust between the Fire Service and the Directorate and potentially enhance the reputation of both. Of course standards must be set and enforced and this might be achieved by giving media training to ensure that all interviews and Press Releases were "on message".
9. The **Delegations of responsibilities arrangement** which was shared does pass on some responsibilities to key post holders such as the Chief Fire Officer. It seemed contradictory to note that a range of expenditure responsibilities are delegated to roles which have no financial control responsibilities or knowledge of the budget hypothecated. This situation is exacerbated by the delegation of certain people management responsibilities which do not seem to be the responsibility of Service officers in the observed method of operation.
10. The specialist equipment for coping with the outcomes of **CBRNE events** represents a significant investment by the Territory Government and it is clear that the fact that the Service covers the national capital and the specialist infrastructure associated with the machinery of federal government is why this provision exists. **The magnitude of the risk encompassed by the ACTF&R would not normally warrant such**

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provisions but the requirements of the federal government have clearly taken priority in this circumstance.

11. Whilst the advancement requirements from Senior Firefighter to Station Officer and onwards are listed in documentation studied, the recommended implementation of an **formal appraisal system would be complemented by the transparency of assessment and selection methodology with a sharp focus on competence** and potential rather than processes incorporating seniority and length of service.

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Documents studied included:

A wide range of internal documents from ACTF&R and JACDS

Draft ORH Emergency Services Activity and Resourcing review (ESAR), Courtesy of JACSD

Territory Wide Risk Assessment Report July 2014, ACT Government

"Blue Card" Command Certification programme

Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System AFAC

ACT Public Sector and ACT Fire and Rescue Enterprise Agreement 2013-17

"Facing the Future" – Sir Ken Knight, UK Government Report, 2012

"Report on Government Services, Volume D: Emergency Management", Commonwealth of Australia, 2014

Public Safety Plan 2015-2020, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, 2014