

'Fire Matters – What's New/Changed?'

Jonathan Herrick Head of Fire Safety for the West Midlands

Jonathan has a 20 year Fire Service history, working in a variety of roles. With an Honours Degree in Fire Engineering and a Masters Degree in Fire Safety Engineering, Jonathan is now working towards Chartered Engineer status. Jonathan is a supporter of the Chief Fire Officers Association, and was instrumental in the introduction of the formal partnership scheme.

Jonathan asked the audience if anyone had been audited by the Fire Service within the Fire Partnership Scheme? A couple of Members quietly nodded. One Member, from a University environment, described his very positive

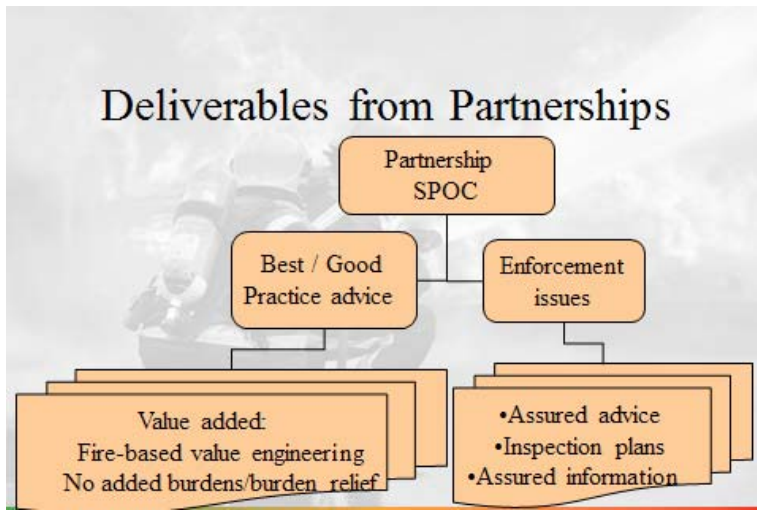


experience of a Fire Partnership. He commented that Fire Officer's vary in their approach and some are more flexible than others. Another member mentioned that in his view, the emphasis seemed to be on the management system and people management. The auditing regime and the new Fire Partnerships are issues that Jonathan will cover in his presentation.

Background to Fire Partnerships:

The Lead Fire Authority Partnership Schemes (LFAP's) have been around since the mid 90's, and the partnership is established between the Fire Service and the organisation, one example is Marks and Spencer. The aim of the Scheme is to provide a point of contact between the Fire Service and the organisation. One drawback with the Scheme has been the variation in attitudes between Fire Services across the country. Some Services are more active with partnerships than others. Some see themselves as enforcers rather than advisers. Moreover, even the Fire Officers themselves vary in terms of attitude and their individual perception of their role. **Chris Hopkins, BHSEA Member and Barrister, Pinsent Masons LLP** probed further on the issue of consistency, particularly in a case where there is more than one Fire Officer as the 'point of contact', but only one employer. Jonathan said that if 'Assured Information' is given to the employer, it will take precedent if conflicting advice is being given by another authority.

Jonathan described the deliverables that can be agreed as part of a Partnership Agreement of which there are two types:



1. Non-Statutory Partnerships:

The Fire Authority Partnership Scheme has been developed by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), in partnership with the Local Government Association, to support businesses in the economic growth agenda. The Scheme provides advice and support to enable a business to invest confidently in its own

growth across the UK. The partnerships will seek to develop a range of assured advice and inspection plans to be followed by all participating Fire Authorities.

Jonathan gave an example of a workplace where there are too many fire extinguishers. The local fire fighting equipment salesman is obviously doing a good job however, Jonathan would say that it is unnecessary to have so many extinguishers. The employer makes the final decision and Jonathan believes that it is right and proper that the employer makes that decision, based upon the advice of the partner authority. It is giving the organisation/business the responsibility **not** the Fire Authority.

The principle behind the advice is that there should be 'no added burden' to the employer and Jonathan added that he would take this one stage further by working with the organisation to reduce that burden. However, within the Partnership, the Fire Authority would *never* erode statutory compliance. The Partner needs to decide whether they want a 'Gold' standard or whether they are satisfied to achieve compliance with requirements.

2. Statutory Fire Partnerships:

The Primary Authority Scheme was introduced to address business concerns about consistency of advice and enforcement of environmental health, licensing and trading standards legislation by Local Authorities. It provides a statutory basis for business to be confident that the advice it receives will be applied on a national basis, in England and Wales. The partnerships will seek to develop a range of assured advice and inspection plans to be followed by all participating Fire Authorities.

Two pilots, including both statutory and non-statutory partnerships will run side by side from 1 January - 30 June 2013.

Continued.....

Members' Questions

George Allcock, BHSEA Committee Member, admitted to being confused at this point. George said that he had always believed that the primary concern of the Fire Authority is to protect life and to do all that is necessary to achieve that. Jonathan (in George's mind) seems, with the Partnership Schemes, to be focusing on protecting the business, which may or may not be synonymous with the protection of life. Jonathan assured us that fire safety principles haven't changed. Indeed, the way that the Fire Authority protects the individual remains the same and is in fact the bedrock of the Service. Partnerships should preserve the principle of the protection of the individual as paramount.

Roger Caleb, H.S. & E. Officer of National Grid Metering, queried the '**call challenge**' system and the value of calls going through a call centre before referring to the Fire Authority (which accounts for 70% plus of all Fire Authority calls). Jonathan explained that the introduction of 'call challenge' arose from the number and frequency of false alarms. If a fire can be confirmed, then it will be dealt with.

Roger went on to query whether the Fire Authority are taking account of current well **insulated premises** in which flash over occurs very readily. Fire fighters could enter such premises and be burnt alive with nothing but a puff of smoke visible from outside. Jonathan pointed out that just such an issue was the cause of the fire fighter deaths in Atherstone-on-Stour and that Fire Services are constantly working to deal with such important matters.

Jonathan mentioned that the Partnerships trial will be completed by the end of June. A report of findings will be produced and subsequent legislation is due by the end of October 2013.

Chris Hopkins asked if there were **sufficient resources** allocated to support the **Partnership Schemes**? Jonathan answered saying that the Statutory Scheme operates on a cost recovery basis. Marks and Spencer (M&S), for example, sponsor two sniffer dogs, a van and a dog handler. So M&S help the Fire Authority to reduce risk in the West Midlands County and M&S get the benefit of their advice and support across their whole estate. Jonathan went on to describe an example of a current partner who is reviewing the way in which they evacuate buildings. Jonathan's view was that the Partner was doing too much and there was potential to reduce associated costs. The Fire Authority was able to make recommendation which would, once implemented, ensure compliance and at the same time, reduce the employer's costs.

Following a question from **Chris Hopkins**, Jonathan reported that there are currently 8 statutory and 8 non-statutory Partnerships involved in a trial which is simultaneously testing the statutory version and a non-statutory (but mandatory) equivalent that Jonathan supports. West Midlands Fire Service have formalised two partnerships and another 4 are under discussion.

George Allcock, BHSEA Council Member, asked whether the Fire Authority have **targets** in terms of the number of employers/employees involved with a **Partnership**, which might be different according to the size/hazards? Jonathan confirmed that there are no targets.

Roger Caleb asked what assistance WMFS provides for **small and medium sized enterprises (SME's)**? Jonathan reported that the Fire Service regularly attends the Chamber of Commerce and gets involved in small business forums. SME's are open to the Partnerships' Scheme as are the Trades Unions and

insurance companies. Roger added that a 'trade off' as far as insurance companies are concerned, could be reduction in premiums.

George Allcock asked whether Jonathan had any thoughts on **Fee For Intervention (FFI)** and the Fire Authority? Jonathan commented that FFI seemed to be an approach favoured by the Government. If there is income to be had, it may be a temptation to go down the FFI route, but that he was not personally in favour.

Jonathan ran through the bulleted points on the slides and a BHSEA Member asked about **timber framed buildings** and a request he had made for advice and a visit from WMFS. Jonathan said that there will be a problem where cavity barriers are not installed properly or not fitted at all. Jonathan expressed his concern that the fire fighters may not always recognise the cavity barrier when they chop their way through! Following a query from another Member, Jonathan replied that there are two options in terms of fire fighting approaches:

1. Stand outside the building and pour water on the fire ('defensive' fire fighting) or
2. Fight the fire from the inside ('offensive' fire fighting).

Steve Parton from AXA Insurance and BHSEA Committee Member set a scene for us to consider in relation to the '**call challenge**' issue.....an employer with different premises across the country. It's 2 a.m. and the fire starts....what response can the employer expect? Jonathan noted that there are 46 autonomous Fire Brigades with 46 independent Chiefs in the country, and there could be a different response from each one. Jonathan added that this discrepancy has been recognised and that nationally, the Chief Fire Officers' Association (the professional voice of the Fire and Rescue Service) is considering how to achieve **consistency**.

Steve Parton raised the issue of fire **stations closing**. What would Jonathan's view on this be? Jonathan said that each Fire Authority knows where and what its risks are, and it is their duty to make sure that sufficient fire fighting resources are available to deal with those risks. Risk analysis and strategic plans sometimes suggest that it may be appropriate to close a Fire Station. (West Midlands Fire Service has recently merged two stations and replaced them with a new one equidistant to the old stations). The current Fire Authority has given assurance that all other stations will remain open.