



House of Commons  
Public Accounts Committee

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**New Dimension—  
Enhancing the Fire and  
Rescue Services'  
capacity to respond to  
terrorist and other  
large-scale incidents**

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**Tenth Report of Session 2008–09**

*Report, together with formal minutes, oral and  
written evidence*

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## The Public Accounts Committee

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Powers of the Committee of Public Accounts are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 148. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/pac>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Session is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee is Mark Etherton (Clerk), Lorna Horton (Senior Committee Assistant), Pam Morris (Committee Assistant), Jane Lauder (Committee Assistant) and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

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## Summary

The New Dimension programme (“the programme”) was established by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Department for Communities and Local Government—“the Department”) following the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. Its aim was to enable Fire and Rescue Services to respond effectively to terrorist and other large-scale incidents such as flooding. The programme has procured specialist vehicles and equipment, funded training for firefighters and provided other support. It has cost around £330 million, with the procurement of vehicles and equipment now almost complete. The programme has enhanced the Fire Service’s capacity to respond to terrorist and other large scale emergency events, as demonstrated by its use in major incidents such as the Buncefield oil depot fire in December 2005 and the flooding in the summer of 2007.

Up to 2005 the procurement of the equipment was conducted poorly with inadequate programme, project and financial management. There was no overall implementation plan or clarity of scope or objectives. In 2004, weak financial controls allowed a fraud of £867,200 to remain undetected for nine months. Improvements in the programme’s management were made by bringing in consultants and training finance staff. The consultants cost more than envisaged, however, and programme and project decision making would have been enhanced if supported by more reliable financial information.

The programme funded the training of around 10,000 firefighters in all new equipment types, mostly at the Fire Service College. The adequacy of current and future skills will be affected, however, by the extent to which trained firefighters have been moved to alternative duties, and whether training quality is benchmarked rigorously. Maintaining skills may be expensive and more demanding if potential large-scale incident threats increase. The Department intends to rely on individual Fire Services to maintain firefighters’ skills, with occasional monitoring from the National Operational Assurance team and the Audit Commission’s oversight of operational performance.

New Dimension equipment has been used successfully at three large-scale incidents, but has yet to be tested to its limits. Clarification of command and control arrangements over equipment deployment is required for local Fire and Rescue Services. Information on non-New Dimension equipment held by the National Co ordination Centre is incomplete and gaps exist in agreed common operational procedures. Well co-ordinated major emergency planning at local and regional level will be essential if effective use is to be made of the equipment in the future. Retaining a strategic response oversight role will be essential if Fire Service capability is to remain relevant and adequate to changing threats and risks.

On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,<sup>1</sup> we examined the Department, including the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, on the programme’s delivery, the adequacy of firefighter skills and the use of the equipment in practice.

<sup>1</sup> C&AG’s Report, *New Dimension—Enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services’ capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents*, HC (2007-08) 1050



## Conclusions and recommendations

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- 1. The New Dimension Programme has enhanced national capacity within the Fire Service to respond to major incidents.** The equipment has already been deployed effectively in large scale incidents such as the Buncefield oil depot fire in December 2005, the floods of 2007, and the warehouse collapse in Warwickshire in November 2007, although it has yet to be tested to its expected limit in real or practice exercises. The Department should re-evaluate periodically the assumptions behind the roll-out of the New Dimension equipment in the light of changing risks for national incidents and threats, and determine how any gaps in capability emerging can best be addressed.
- 2. Poor programme and project management led to delays, avoidable costs and weaknesses in contracting.** Future large-scale procurements undertaken by the Department should embed from the outset sound programme management techniques such as clear objectives and a detailed implementation plan containing project sequencing and critical path analysis. Project managers should be trained in the principles of contract tendering and negotiation, quality assurance and monitoring, and apply such techniques to individual projects within the programme.
- 3. Weak financial controls enabled a £867,200 fraud to be perpetrated in the early years of the programme, and even after control was tightened, financial information available to inform and support programme managers was not adequate.** The Department should support future major procurement programmes with staff who have appropriate experience in financial control, accurate financial reporting and the use of timely and relevant financial analysis in programme and project decision-making. Detailed whole life cost budgets should be prepared at the outset to enable value for money to be achieved in individual projects.
- 4. Consultants brought in by the Department at a cost of around £12 million helped turn the project round, but weak oversight led to costs in excess of those contracted for and the expected skills transfer to Departmental staff took longer than expected.** When purchasing such services in the future, the Department's contracts should include mechanisms such as performance indicators and key milestones to enable regular objective monitoring of performance. Contract terms should be enforced or renegotiated if circumstances change.
- 5. Capacity to respond effectively to major incidents is dependent on maintaining adequate numbers of firefighters trained to deploy the New Dimension equipment, but the Department has no robust basis of obtaining assurance at a national level on the skills available.** Alongside actions taken at a local level to assess firefighters' skills and Fire and Rescue Services' operational performance, the Department's National Operational Assurance team, made up of experienced firefighters, should conduct periodically an audit of skill levels for all equipment types across all Fire and Rescue Services.

- 6. Confusion exists within Fire and Rescue Services about where authority to deploy New Dimension equipment locally and nationally rests.** The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and his team have recently issued new guidance on roles and responsibilities and the National Operational Assurance team should test understanding of the new guidance within Fire and Rescue Services. The team should also evaluate operation of the guidance in practice at large scale command and control exercises. The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser should be advised of any further changes or clarification which might be necessary.
- 7. Mobilisation of New Dimension and other equipment nationally is dependent on the completeness and accuracy of equipment availability data held at the national Co-ordination Centre, but currently such data is not comprehensive.** The National Co-ordination Centre should hold complete and accurate data on all New Dimension and other equipment, as well as on its availability for deployment across the country. Data checks should be undertaken periodically to make sure such information remains up-to-date, accurate and complete.
- 8. Fire and Rescue Services have a statutory responsibility to plan for their response to catastrophic incidents. However, many plans are inadequate, especially for regional and national scale incidents, and there are too few large-scale practice exercises to test response and inform plan-making.** Lessons learned from equipment deployment at real events and practice exercises are not disseminated systematically across all Fire and Rescue Services. The Department should put in place a strategy for national and regional scale multi-agency exercises. It should disseminate regional capability information to local fora through the Government Office network, and facilitate the sharing of best practice in incident planning and the lessons learned from actual events and exercises by individual Fire and Rescue Services through mechanisms such as an online portal.

# 1 Procuring the equipment

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1. In 2001, the Department embarked on the New Dimension programme which was designed to enhance the capacity of Fire and Rescue Services in England to respond rapidly, effectively and flexibly to terrorism and other large scale incidents. The programme is expected to cost some £330 million in total. The Department had little prior experience of, or capacity for, major procurement for Fire and Rescue Services as prior to 2001 Fire and Rescue Services had procured equipment directly.<sup>2</sup>

2. Until 2005, the procurement was managed poorly, with inadequate programme, project and financial management. There was no overarching implementation plan or clarity of scope and objectives for the programme as a whole. Funding was uncertain and a number of project teams were set up to work on specific capabilities, each team comprising a mix of civil servants and seconded firefighters with little or no experience of procurement or project management practice. Each team worked separately without clear delivery targets. Essential support functions, such as logistics, command and control, and training facilities, were either delayed or overlooked. Fire stations were not altered to be ready for equipment roll-out. No budgets were set in the first two years of the programme, and formal financial information was not provided to the Programme Board until September 2005. In 2004, weakness in financial control enabled a £867,200 fraud within the programme to remain undetected for nine months.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Department recognised these shortcomings and brought in outside consultants to enhance programme and project support, together with trained finance staff. These actions created an appropriate management structure, a coherent implementation plan and improved financial control. The consultants' daily costs were not expected to exceed £500, and skills transfer to civil servants was expected to take place. In practice, consultants were in place for over four years at a cost of over £1,000 a day, a total cost of £12 million. The Department failed to undertake a formal evaluation of the consultants' overall performance to determine whether value for money was being secured compared to recruiting suitably skilled staff directly. In July 2005, the terrorist bombings in London created additional urgency for the programme. The enhanced management skills available enabled most of the equipment to be rolled out and firefighters trained within two years of the bombings.<sup>4</sup>

4. Firefighters have generally welcomed the new equipment and its capacity to assist in tackling major incidents. **Figure 1** shows the change in capacity that the programme brought to major incident response, by type.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Qq 6, 19, 99; C&AG's Report, para 5

3 Qq 21–24; C&AG's Report, paras 7, 28–29, 70–74, 2.3, 2.6, 2.9, 2.21–2.22; Box 1

4 Qq 6, 9–11, 25–27, 59–63; C&AG's Report, paras 9, 2.7, 2.10–2.11, 2.23

5 Qq 56–57; C&AG's Report, paras 2.18–2.19

**Figure 1: Fire and Rescue Services' capacity before and after the programme**

Capability	Before New Dimension programme	After New Dimension programme
<p><b>Mass Decontamination:</b></p> <p>(Mobile laboratories test contaminant, and soft-sided trucks unload decontamination showers. Temporary clothing provided)</p>	<p>No specialist equipment - some Fire and Rescue Services had dedicated Hazardous Material officers to manage emergencies involving hazardous substances.</p>	<p>17 Detection, Identification and Monitoring vehicles—'mobile labs' to test contaminant.</p> <p>73 incident response units carrying erectable decontamination showers for decontaminating up to 400 people per hour.</p> <p>47 clothing (Dis-robe and Re-robe) modules each containing 300 packs.</p> <p>Over 7,000 trained fire-fighters.</p> <p>206 specialist transport vehicles (Prime Movers).</p>
<p><b>Urban Search and Rescue</b></p> <p>(Advanced equipment to detect, search and rescue people from collapsed buildings)</p>	<p>12 Fire and Rescue Services offering limited search and rescue capability. Usually deployed to overseas disasters on behalf of UK government on an ad hoc basis.</p> <p>Teams consist of voluntary full time firefighters undertaking work outside of normal work hours.</p>	<p>20 fully trained Urban Search and Rescue teams of 30 firefighters each. Each team has 5 standardised modules of high specification equipment, containing many hundreds of state of the art items.</p> <p>New local and national training facilities.</p>
<p><b>High Volume Pumps</b></p> <p>(Pumps able to move 7,000 litres of water per minute and transport it over many kilometres if necessary)</p>	<p>1 larger capacity pump based in Shropshire.</p> <p>14 other Fire and Rescue Services have larger diameter hoses able to transport high volume of water.</p> <p>'Green Goddesses' have some pumping capacity, otherwise fire engines used.</p>	<p>46 larger capacity pumps capable of pumping 7 times more water than normal fire engines.</p> <p>46 hose boxes with larger diameter hoses and many kilometres of extra hose length.</p> <p>Over 2,000 trained firefighters.</p>
<p><b>Command and Control</b></p> <p>(Communication vehicles and equipment, purpose-built Centre and new arrangements)</p>	<p>Local control rooms.</p> <p>Some Fire and Rescue Services have low-tech mobile command units.</p>	<p>Local control rooms feeding into National Co-ordination Centre dedicated to New Dimension response based at West Yorks Fire and Rescue Service.</p> <p>9 Enhanced Command Support vehicles with high-tech capacity to be rolled out in late 2008.</p>

Source: C&AG's Report

5. Problems with individual procurements and financial management continued after 2005. The contract for Detection, Identification and Monitoring vehicles, for example, which was awarded in July 2006, contained inaccurate specifications, leading to excess costs of £300,000 (20% of the contract value). The Business Case had not been completed until after the contract had been signed, and the equipment roll out was five months late. At the time of the National Audit Office report, overall New Dimension programme costs had been accounted for wrongly through errors, omissions and double-counting by about £30 million. The Department is continuing to work with the Office of Government Commerce to improve its procurement management.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 Maintaining firefighter skills

6. The Department has funded training for around 10,000 firefighters in one or more New Dimension equipment types (**Figure 2**). Most training has taken place at the Fire Service College, although half of the Urban Search and Rescue technicians were funded to train at Disaster City, Texas as the training rig at the College was not ready until September 2005. Other firefighters have been trained within Fire and Rescue Services.<sup>7</sup>

7. Operating mass Decontamination and High Volume Pumps requires less technically demanding skills than Urban Search and Rescue, and Detection, Identification and Monitoring operations. These operations require the dedicated training of firefighters for many weeks each year to reach and maintain the necessary standard. The Department reimburses Fire and Rescue Services for the training costs of Urban Search and Rescue technicians, but not the training costs for any other equipment type.<sup>8</sup>

8. The Department set out within a training strategy the expected minimum trained crewing levels for each equipment type. At the time of the National Audit Office's report, sufficient firefighters had been trained in all New Dimension equipment types with the exception of Detection, Identification and Monitoring advisers (**Figure 2**). The Department's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser confirmed that this shortfall had now been addressed.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 2: Numbers of firefighters trained to operate New Dimension**

Equipment	Numbers	Minimum number per team required for deployment (A)	Number of teams (B)	Model numbers required to be fully trained (A multiplied by B)	Extrapolated numbers of trained staff from NAO census of Fire and Rescue Services	Difference
Mass Decontamination		22	195**	4,290	7,653	3,363
Detection, Identification and Monitoring teams		4	51**	204	158	(46)
Urban Search and Rescue		10	57.5**	585	767	182
High Volume Pumps		14	46	630	2,145	1,515
<b>Total</b>				<b>5,709</b>	<b>10,723</b>	<b>5,014</b>

Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 4

Notes: \*\* This number assumes three shifts in a day, with each shift requiring a separate team.

9. Maintaining the adequacy of current and future skills is critical. New Dimension-trained firefighters have moved on to other activities, and further expenditure on training has to compete with other funding priorities. Firefighters' skills are subject to review through self assessment and by line managers, but no objective assessment or testing is required formally, and large-scale exercises to test the application of skills under pressure are

7 C&AG's Report, para 3.7–3.8

8 Qq 65–68; C&AG's Report, paras 3.2, 3.6–3.7

9 Q 94; C&AG's Report, paras 3.5, 3.11

infrequent. The changing nature of potential large-scale incident threats may require regular review of the assumptions underpinning the deployment of New Dimension equipment such as minimum trained crewing levels.<sup>10</sup>

10. The Department considers that assessing the adequacy of firefighters' skills is an operational issue for individual Fire and Rescue Services. It intends to rely on regular monitoring by the recently established National Operational Assurance Team, made up of around 20 experienced seconded firefighters, and also on the work of the Audit Commission, which has an overview of the performance of all Fire and Rescue Services. The Fire Service College's attractiveness as a training venue could be enhanced by improving the value for money of course costs, maximising course scheduling flexibility and improving accommodation facilities.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Q 12; C&AG's Report, Recommendation 2; paras 3.11–3.12, 4.8

11 Q 83; C&AG's Report, paras 3.11, 3.12

## 3 Making the most of the equipment

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11. New Dimension equipment has been deployed to three major emergencies: Buncefield oil depot (December 2005); the floods in the West of England and Yorkshire (summer 2007); and the Warwickshire warehouse collapse (November 2007). On each occasion, independent reviewers have commended its usefulness in reducing stress, physical damage and freeing resources to undertake other tasks. High Volume Pumps enabled the Buncefield fire to be put out in days rather than weeks, limiting environmental damage to local communities. The equipment has also been deployed effectively in smaller incidents, such as the identification of suspect substances and extinguishing large fires.<sup>12</sup>

12. None of the equipment has been tested through real events, practice exercises or detailed modelling against the expected performance limits set by Government as part of wider resilience infrastructure-building work. Gaps could therefore exist in required response capability. New Dimension is relied upon by other emergency services and agencies to respond at the right time and in the right way to incidents. Identifying whether gaps in capability exist is essential, for example, by considering the likelihood of multiple events occurring at the same time, creating demand for equipment in excess of availability. In the summer of 2007, if Yorkshire and the West of England had flooded at the same time, 76 High Volume Pumps might have been required, 26 more than are available currently in England and Wales. New Dimension equipment was procured and rolled out against risk assumptions prevalent in 2005, some of which have since changed, requiring regular updating of potential capabilities required.<sup>13</sup>

13. The New Dimension programme has delivered step change improvements in the command and control capability at large-scale emergencies. The National Audit Office found that there was scope for further clarification of responsibilities, for example:

- Deployment co-ordination: Some Fire and Rescue Services are unclear about who authorises and co-ordinates deployment of New Dimension equipment during incidents. Many Fire and Rescue Services consider that the equipment they host is theirs to deploy as they like, rather than automatically being at the disposal of central co-ordinators.<sup>14</sup>
- Accurate information: Information held on emergency response equipment availability by the National Co-ordination Centre in West Yorkshire may be incomplete and inaccurate. The Centre is responsible for national mobilisation of equipment and requires up to date information on New Dimension and non-New Dimension emergency equipment to be fully effective. Currently information on non-New Dimension equipment, such as rescue boats and other equipment procured locally is limited. The Centre also relies on Fire and Rescue Services to

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12 Qq 78–81, 84; C&AG's Report, paras 4.5, 4.6

13 Qq 44, 102; C&AG's Report, paras 4.7, 4.8

14 Qq 38–39, 45, 47; C&AG's Report, para 4.10

alert it each time New Dimension equipment becomes unavailable with the risk that no alert is given or an alert is not recorded properly.<sup>15</sup>

- Common approaches: Agreed standard procedures are required for the operation of New Dimension equipment alongside standard equipment, and for the operation of New Dimension equipment by different Fire and Rescue Service teams at the same incident. This is so that equipment and teams across all emergency services complement each other in responding to challenging circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

14. Tackling these issues will minimise the risk of delay in responding to major incidents. Action is already being taken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and his team, together with the National Operational Assurance team. Regional Control Centres and the new communication system, FireLink, should also contribute to effective co ordination of response in the future.<sup>17</sup>

15. Major emergency response capacity in Fire and Rescue Services varies across the country. Prior to the New Dimension programme, neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services had over-the-border arrangements for mutual aid. Providing every Fire and Rescue Service with the full range of New Dimension and other equipment is unnecessary as there is now a national capacity to respond wherever incidents occur. The boundary between ‘national’ and ‘local’ incidents was not, however, always clear.<sup>18</sup>

16. Testing of, and exercises with, the equipment take place within local fire stations and at a regional level engaging other emergency agencies which are part of the Regional Resilience Forum. A large national exercise takes place annually. Disseminating lessons from such exercises is important but no systematic approach exists currently. Instead, some lessons learned are available through the Fire Service College’s online portal and teams on the ground feedback information. More work is needed to make sure best practice in deploying the new equipment is disseminated more widely to those engaged in emergency response.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Qq 40, 50–52; C&AG’s Report, para 4.11

16 Q 42; C&AG’s Report, para 4.12

17 C&AG’s Report, para 4.13

18 Qq 41, 88–93; C&AG’s Report, paras 4.15–4.16

19 Qq 53–55; C&AG’s Report, paras 3.12, 4.20–4.24

# Formal Minutes

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**Monday 9 February 2009**

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Bacon  
Angela Browning  
Rt Hon David Curry  
Mr Nigel Griffiths

Rt Hon Keith Hill  
Mr Austin Mitchell  
Rt Hon Alan Williams

Draft Report (*New Dimension—Enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services’ capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 16 read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 11 February at 3.30 pm]

## Witnesses

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**Monday 10 November 2008**

*Page*

**Mr Peter Housden**, Permanent Secretary, **Sir Ken Knight**, Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, and **Mr Mike Reed**, Deputy Director, Department for Communities and Local Government

Ev 1

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Department for Communities and Local Government

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# Oral evidence

## Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Monday 10 November 2008

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Paul Burstow  
Nigel Griffiths  
Mr Austin Mitchell

Mr Don Touhig  
Mr Alan Williams

**Mr Tim Burr**, CB, Comptroller & Auditor General, **Ms Wendy Kenway-Smith**, Assistant Auditor General, and **Mr David Corner**, Director, National Audit Office, were in attendance.

**Ms Paula Diggle**, First Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, was in attendance.

### REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

#### NEW DIMENSION—ENHANCING THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES' CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO TERRORIST AND OTHER LARGE-SCALE INCIDENTS (HC 1050)

*Witnesses:* **Mr Peter Housden**, Permanent Secretary, **Sir Ken Knight**, Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, and **Mr Mike Reed**, Deputy Director of the Fire and Resilience Department, Department for Communities and Local Government, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chairman:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today our hearing is on the Comptroller & Auditor General's Report on *New Dimension—enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services' capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents*. We welcome back Peter Housden, who is the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government, Sir Ken Knight, who is the department's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, and you have also another witness, Mr Housden.

**Mr Housden:** Yes. This is Mike Reed, who is the Deputy Director of the Fire and Resilience Department.

**Q2 Chairman:** First of all I would like to thank Sir Ken. Nigel Griffiths and myself had a very good visit on Wednesday. We were shown around by the London Fire Brigade and saw all the superb kit that you are acquiring. They obviously went to a lot of trouble putting all this kit out for us and both Mr Griffiths and myself are very grateful, and of course we start by paying tribute to the enormous courage and commitment of your men, Sir Ken, and we know they have a very difficult job. Having said all that and given them a tribute, this is not a very good report, is it, Mr Housden? We will go through it now and I am happy to refer my questions to you but if Sir Ken wants to come in on anything that is fine. The first thing I could not understand is why did it take four years to build this training rig? This is mentioned at paragraph 3.9. We had to send 414 firefighters and their equipment to Texas at vast cost to train them. What were we doing taking four years to build a training rig so that we had to send all those people to Texas? Why did we not train them here?

**Mr Housden:** Chairman, first of all thank you very much to you and your Committee for the opportunity to come and discuss the Report today. The key thing around the immediate circumstances post-2001 was about making an immediate response. I think your Committee will sense across a range of the things that the department was doing at that time and that immediacy and urgency drove a number of issues, but it did include the question about urban search and rescue training. There were no facilities in the UK at that time; there were in the USA and, given the importance of having some firefighters on the ground who were appropriately trained—

**Q3 Chairman:** I am sure that is right, but four years?

**Mr Housden:** I think it is important that we were able to—

**Q4 Chairman:** This is collapsed buildings. It is not building a rocket, is it? It is pretty basic stuff.

**Mr Housden:** Again, I think you will find that the equipment that was appropriate to install within the UK needed to be specified and ordered and the facilities planned and developed, and it was important to make an immediate response.

**Q5 Chairman:** You see, this rather raises wider considerations. This is best brought out by the timeline that we see at figure 2 on page 8. Obviously, we start on 11 September 2001 and agree this was a national crisis. Some actions are taken within weeks but we go all the way through these years and still this programme is not fully implemented. We even read in the executive summary at paragraph 14, "The procurement of Enhanced Command Support vehicles is running late and the vehicles are yet to be deployed". Here we have a national crisis. As you

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 Department for Communities and Local Government
 

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say, some action is got on the go within weeks, but we are still waiting for it to be fully implemented. It is not good enough, is it? Can you imagine this happening in America where they set up immediately a Department of Homeland Security and put a governor in charge of it? It just does not seem to be good enough.

**Mr Housden:** I think what you see, Chairman, is a picture of that immediacy and urgency meaning that a number of interim steps were put in place to provide capability on the ground as early as possible and thereafter a programme to make sure that that capacity was installed and procured appropriately as we went through. I do not think there is any sense in which the nation has been unprotected over this period. It is complex, novel equipment with many challenges associated with it, and the final stages of the programme, yes, are ongoing.

**Q6 Chairman:** You are giving the impression that this is all terribly complicated. The first thing you do is get a proper management structure, but at paragraph 2.7 it says, “After a tendering process, Serco were appointed from May 2004”, a full three years nearly after these events. Why did it take you three years to establish proper management of the programme?

**Mr Housden:** This is important, Chairman. I would like to say that clearly in the early stages of post-2001 and the development of this programme there were a number of shortcomings that the Report fairly draws out in my view. What I would like to say, however, is that I do not think the context in which ministers in the department were working over this period is properly appreciated. Quite apart from the unparalleled threat posed by the 2001 events, there were a number of contingent circumstances. For example, responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service had only transferred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2001. There was no precedent for the national procurement of equipment of this type. The equipment itself was novel and innovative and it was being procured and developed and deployed against an emergent set of national contingency planning scenarios. Not only in each of the blue light services did you have a contingency plan being drawn up to deal with this type of issue but also the question of inter-service collaboration was being developed under the leadership of the Cabinet Office at the same time.

**Q7 Chairman:** But this is a national crisis. You are talking about, first, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, now you, but it goes on and on. Look at Box 1, which you find on page 16. Here was a massive fraud. You were defrauded to the extent of £867,000 by a member of your staff, which, by the way, went unnoticed for quite a long time. You have only recovered £160,000. These weaknesses of financial management have still not been fully addressed.

**Mr Housden:** Chairman, I am very happy to talk about the fraud and financial management.

**Q8 Chairman:** I do not want to know about the fraud in detail. It is contained in Box 1. There are clearly weaknesses in financial management which you have taken years to put right.

**Mr Housden:** I think, Chairman, the exceptional circumstances that obtained during 2001, 2002 and 2003 were such that, as I have described, the department was seeking to respond to new needs in an effective way. I do think there were some shortcomings in the way that the team of Fire Service inspectors and secondees from the Fire Service were supported. It was clearly right that that expertise was brought in to help procure and develop the overall programme, but I think the way that was wrapped around and supported by civil servant expertise in things like financial management and procurement was inadequate and the Report pays proper tribute to that.

**Q9 Chairman:** Let us look at some of these consultants, some of them earning £1,000 a day. You took them on. I do not think you evaluated them well enough, and I think that some of them just went on drawing their money—our money—without providing any useful work for us.

**Mr Housden:** I draw a distinction—

**Q10 Chairman:** First of all you did not get help quickly enough from outside and, having got it, you let them fall asleep on the job.

**Mr Housden:** I draw a distinction, Chairman, between two sorts of consultants here. There were particular consultants paid these higher rates who were offering very senior and specialist expertise for things which the department would have had no reasonable expectation of providing in-house, for example, on logistics and the warehousing of things like mass decontamination.

**Q11 Chairman:** Why is it that we read in footnote 6 on page 15, “Across government, average cost of consultants as a proportion of spending on administration is 11%”, but in paragraph 2.11 we see, “The total cost of £12 million is about 25% of the cost of administering the programme . . .”. Have you any grip on this at all?

**Mr Housden:** Yes, indeed. I think the averages may be misleading here because it will depend upon the proportion of specialist expertise, which is something like 3.6% of the overall cost of the contract. There is some confusion about what the averages in the £500 a day figure refer to. Those were for programme and project management, so the much more day-to-day, bread-and-butter support. That was the sort of figure that would have been paid in those days for that type of work, but the senior and specialist expertise that was brought into the programme at that early stage, and in my view would have been essential, was paid those better rates. They were employed under proper contracts, there were appropriate contractual safeguards and there were individual deliverables. The point I do concede, though, Chairman, is that, if you look at the standards that we and other departments would now use to procure and manage the performance of

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consultants, these were not applied at the time and there were certainly some weaknesses in these arrangements and others to which the Report properly draws attention.

**Q12 Chairman:** I will now pass on and other colleagues will deal with the history of this. Let us look at the future. Clearly, we have these very motivated men doing a very dangerous job and we are full of admiration for them. Why do we read on page 20 at paragraph 3.12, at the bottom of that first bullet point, "There is no independent assessment of ongoing competency. Some Fire and Rescue Services have no structured monitoring of competency, and those that do use either self-assessment or assessment by the supervisor on the spot".

**Mr Housden:** Sir Ken, I think, can help with this.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Chairman, good afternoon. Your opening remarks I am grateful for but I will pass on your thanks to the London Fire Commissioner. I retired as London Fire Commissioner last year and I took on this role then, so your visit was entirely in his gift and I will pass on your thanks to him. Moving on to the point you raised, I was surprised to see this remark in the report because the integrated personal development system has been employed now throughout the whole of the Fire and Rescue Services as competency based training that is assessed on the job, exactly where it should be assessed, by the line managers, by the commanders, and it is scored accordingly, so I would expect them to be competently assessed at different stages at an incident and in training rather than with set pieces that apply to all. I think the point is well made in the Report. What I would say, Chairman, is that the question raised here is whether that is carried out throughout the service. I can follow that up because we do have an Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD), toolkit which is applied to all fire brigades and it is flexible enough to put just this question into next year's assessment and is something I intend to look at very carefully.

**Q13 Chairman:** My last question is for you, Sir Ken. Paragraph 4.10 says, "It is unclear how long it would take the National Coordination Centre to support requests for additional New Dimension resources at a major incident". There seems to be some confusion, Sir Ken, about where the buck stops. Is it the local fire brigade? Is it Mr Housden? Is it the Home Secretary? Who is it and what actually happens? Give us an insight into how you nationally have got a grip on this.

**Sir Ken Knight:** First of all, it does not require the National Co-ordination Centre to mobilise New Dimension equipment. In fact, the fire brigade which is involved is able itself to mobilise immediately. I will give you a real example. In Ottery St Mary two weeks ago in Devon there was flooding locally and the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service mobilised high volume pumps and the urban search and rescue, because they thought there were trees down, as a local incident. What they then did, and this is absolutely in accordance with the

requirement, was to notify the National Coordination Centre that some of that New Dimension equipment was now involved. That is an alert to the centre that it may be an escalating situation and they may want more; it could be a catastrophic incident that was emerging, and they in turn would alert my team the CLG emergency room that we may have an emerging and escalating situation. In that case it was not, and we were able to stand that (the emergency room) down and they did very well on the ground, but we could have moved in additional resources and additional equipment, as we did in the floods in 2007 and the east coast surge, of course, only a year later. The command and control is very clearly with the Fire and Rescue Services, both at the local command and at gold command, and my job in catastrophic events is to stand between the Cabinet Office briefing room and the gold command in offering support and interoperability to that work. Chairman, can I just add something to your question about context on what it felt like in the Fire and Rescue Services because that is where I was as a Chief Fire Officer. First of all, not only had we had 9/11 but you may recall that very shortly afterwards, in 2002, we had a national firefighters' strike which in itself was incredibly debilitating in both maintaining cover and standards and people on the ground, but in addition to that we had a national review undertaken by Sir George Bain and modernisation. This period was a very high area of change and activity and expectation and I think you have seen the results. The results are first-class, but I think the context is incredibly important.

**Chairman:** I will not ask you my last question, Mr Housden, because time is getting on. I will go to Don Touhig.

**Q14 Mr Touhig:** Mr Housden, what is the department responsible for legislation on the emptying of refuse bins doing trying to cope with preparing the UK for a potential 9/11 terrorist attack?

**Mr Housden:** I think that the machinery of government changes that gave the responsibility to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which we carried on from there, would have emphasis on the local nature of the Fire and Resilience Service and it being part of local services and local government. That is the synergy, if you like.

**Q15 Mr Touhig:** Sir Ken mentioned a moment ago about the Cabinet Office having a role in responsibility for this. Why is this programme not in the Cabinet office or the Home Office or Number 10 itself?

**Mr Housden:** I think the Cabinet Office here, as is often the case, is looking to co-ordinate the work of government departments rather than take it on themselves, so contingency planning I think fits well with them.

**Q16 Mr Touhig:** They do the planning and you get the blame?

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**Mr Housden:** I could not say that. The important thing though I think is that the Fire and Resilience Service is a local service and we do that mission, but I think you will see from Sir Ken's appointment and indeed the inspectorate that the department hitherto employed and the range of specialist staff we have on secondment from the Fire and Rescue Services and the whole network of contacts that we look to discharge our responsibilities effectively.

**Q17 Mr Touhig:** This programme, Mr Housden, was established to fill a gap in the capacity of our Fire and Rescue Services to respond to terrorism and other incidents and the programme is a mess, is it not? The Report makes that clear.

**Mr Housden:** No, I do not think it is a mess, Mr Touhig. I think what it shows is that in the early parts of the putting in place of this programme and the exceptional circumstances, as we have attested to this afternoon, there were some weaknesses in supporting the professional Fire Service staff who were properly involved in that. I am satisfied that those weaknesses have been resolved.

**Q18 Mr Touhig:** It tells us on page 15, paragraph 2.12 under "Equipment and vehicle procurement", "At the programme start the Department had little experience of large scale procurement. FireBuy—the Department's own national procurement body—was not established until November 2005, and the Department has relied on the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions and its own procurement division". Were they any use to you?

**Mr Housden:** They clearly were but the Report properly shows, I think, some of the weaknesses in the early period of procurement and you are right to say that this was the first national procurement that had been undertaken for the Fire and Rescue Service, and you are right also to say that the procurement function within the ODPM was not as strong as it should have been.

**Q19 Mr Touhig:** Clearly it was not. The original procurement completion date was early 2003 when it would have cost £318 million. It is now almost 2009 and it is going to cost £330 million. That is what I call a good old-fashioned mess.

**Mr Housden:** I think that we have made sure that the latest stages of the procurement, and in this we have been helped by the Procurement Capability Review, have taken a good independent look at our capacity and made sure—

**Q20 Mr Touhig:** Not more consultants? God help us.

**Mr Housden:** No. It was done by the Office of Government Commerce, part of the Treasury. We have tightened up our arrangements but the Report, you are right to say, shows that some of the procurement practice was well intentioned, but—

**Q21 Mr Touhig:** The programme had an uncertain funding future for the first 18 months and, add to that, a weak programme of project management. Why was there an uncertain funding stream in the first 18 months?

**Mr Housden:** This was a question of scoping the equipment that needed to be provided and costing it and securing the money as part of government public expenditure.

**Q22 Mr Touhig:** But fighting terrorism was a priority of our country.

**Mr Housden:** Yes, exactly, and it was important that we had in place therefore interim arrangements that would enable the country to be protected whilst this equipment was being procured but we were dealing with the Treasury in the normal processes of public expenditure.

**Q23 Mr Touhig:** So the Treasury were dragging their feet again, were they?

**Mr Housden:** I think it is their responsibility to make sure that every department is procuring equipment that is value for money and fit for purpose. I go back again to the fact that this was very novel stuff. Nobody had procured this before and a lot of it had to be specified and designed.

**Q24 Mr Touhig:** I fully understand that. I am sorry I could not come on the visit that the Chairman made the other day.

**Mr Housden:** The point would be that until such time as there was a degree of certainty about what was to be bought and how much therefore it might cost the public expenditure consequences and the Treasury's actions could not really be completed, so I suspect that those sorts of factors were involved.

**Q25 Mr Touhig:** You had some problems early on, you say, and you then went to the usual Whitehall panacea of bringing in consultants. They were engaged for a short-term period, I understand, to strengthen the programme and they stayed for four years. Was it comfortable? Good coffee, was it? Did they like what you had on offer and did not want to go?

**Mr Housden:** There are two things here. In common, I suspect, with many other departments at the time, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister did not have in house sufficient experienced programme and project managers for a programme of this nature. Bear in mind it had only just taken on responsibility for the Fire Service, so why should it have? There had been no national procurement before, again, so the early period of consultancy included both specialist staff in things like logistics and warehousing mass decontamination and generic programme and project management.

**Q26 Mr Touhig:** But you carried out no systematic evaluation of the consultants' performance. What were they doing?

**Mr Housden:** I think we had the normal contractual guarantees and arrangements to manage performance and each individual consultant had appropriate deliverables, but, as I said in answer to the Chairman's question, I think that the standard of engagement with consultants that we would now

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have, which is in conformity with Treasury guidance, would give a much higher level of assurance, so in that sense I agree with you.

**Q27 Mr Touhig:** You paid them £12 million. The C&AG's Report says that it is not clear whether they were value for money at all. Who was managing them? Who were they reporting to? You had just come into the department in 2005. Was it your predecessors they were reporting to on a regular basis?

**Mr Housden:** On a day-to-day, month-by-month basis they would have been working in the Fire and Resilience Directorate and been responsible to civil servants in that way. I think what the Comptroller & Auditor General is saying in the Report is that the absence of those sorts of procedures and in some cases paperwork makes it hard to know exactly that each of these represented value for money in those terms. I am saying again that I think some of those procedures were deficient and the Report deals with that question fairly, but there are now four consultants only involved in the programme so we climbed a hill in terms of expertise and have now wound them down and out.

**Q28 Mr Touhig:** In the meantime, of course, as the Chairman pointed out, one of your officials managed to set up a fictitious acquiring body and stole £867,000. Why did it take nine months to find this out?

**Mr Housden:** This is a very interesting case and a worrying one from our point of view. This individual in the department worked first in our accountancy arrangements and so therefore came to know our accountancy software well, its codes, its reporting structures and so forth, and then secured a transfer into this project and set up a fictitious creditor, a housing association, and made a series of payments for sums of about £867,000 over six or seven months. He was able to be undetected because his knowledge of the accountancy system enabled him to suppress the reports which would normally have alerted his superiors and the finance teams within the department to the fact that this would be an incredible payment to make from a Fire Service project. He is prosecuted, he is incarcerated, and he is due out in 2010. We have already recovered £160,000 or so.

**Q29 Mr Touhig:** It is a long way to go, is it not? Apart from that particular incident it seems to me, Mr Housden, that this report is a catalogue of disasters and, apart from the guy who is now, you say, incarcerated for what he got up to, has anybody taken responsibility, has anybody been sacked for the fact that this project is in a mess?

**Mr Housden:** I do not think the Report says it is in a mess.

**Q30 Mr Touhig:** The Report actually says that overall the New Equipment vehicles have enhanced the capacity of Fire and Rescue Services to tackle large-scale incidents but the department has not done enough to quantify the extent of any gaps in

response that still exist and that the procurement exercise itself is not good value for money. It could not be more damning than that short of sending you to the Tower.

**Mr Housden:** It also says in paragraph 4, "The Department has procured and rolled out high specification equipment which has proved useful and popular with firefighters", and so again I think this is a whole value programme which has delivered real benefits and which in many situations—

**Q31 Mr Touhig:** I do not have any doubt about that. The Chairman and my colleague when they visited have accepted that there are clearly benefits, but what I am asking is, has anybody taken responsibility for this debacle? Has anybody been sacked? Surely it is a yes or a no.

**Mr Housden:** The answer to the first question is yes. I take responsibility for this project just as my predecessor did. Has anybody been sacked in relation to this—

**Q32 Mr Touhig:** You are still in post; you have been in post since 2005. So no-one has been sacked over this?

**Mr Housden:** Not to my knowledge.

**Q33 Mr Touhig:** The one bit of good news comes on page 21 at 4.5 in Box 2 in which it tells us about how the new equipment has performed satisfactorily. Really, Sir Ken, this is down to the professionalism of your people.

**Sir Ken Knight:** It is very high, state-of-the-art equipment. This sort of equipment just did not exist and, when we talk about high volume pumps, we have seen them in use at Buncefield and we have seen them in use in flooding. They just trip off the tongue; it is remarkable. The very first use, Chairman, of the urban search and rescue equipment in a multi-agency, multi-fire brigade way, was actually at the Maryhill factory collapse in Glasgow, where here there were 17 brigades within 24 hours saving lives. The New Dimension decontamination equipment was used at a factory fire in Kirton in Lincolnshire in 2004 when there was asbestos in the atmosphere. This sort of equipment has really been put to practical use.

**Q34 Mr Touhig:** Yes, but your people really responded very well, very professionally.

**Sir Ken Knight:** I think the Fire and Rescue Service continues to do so.

**Q35 Mr Touhig:** And has been let down by those who are managing the project?

**Sir Ken Knight:** No, I do not think it has been let down.

**Q36 Mr Touhig:** You would not say that, would you?

**Sir Ken Knight:** No, I would not say that, Chairman, because I think the Fire and Rescue Service has taken a very key part in the planning and the type of equipment that was needed to protect the community and I think they have delivered it.

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**Q37 Chairman:** Just summing up Mr Touhig's questions, you now have been there for three years, Permanent Secretary. Are you satisfied with the delivery capability of your department? We have had quite a critical report for you on Thames Gateway. Only last week in our hearing there were some questions about building regulations and whether you had a grip on that. Is your department a strong enough department to deliver a top national priority like this?

**Mr Housden:** Yes, Chairman. I think your question is well founded and is a good one to ask because our capability review you might remember in 2006 made your point. We currently have the capability review team with us—this afternoon is a welcome relief from that process—and shortly they will report and you can hear their judgment. My own view is that we have made significant strides and the answer is yes, of course, we are looking to continue to improve but we have some good delivery capability and if you look at a range of the things that we are doing in Whitehall and beyond I think there is some good evidence of that and our report to our own select committee this time brought that to the fore.

**Q38 Keith Hill:** I want to concentrate on issues of deployment. Can I pick up Sir Ken on the answer you gave to the Chairman's last question, in which you cited the Ottery St Mary case quite recently? Do I therefore deduce from your answer that the authority to deploy New Dimension equipment always rests with individual Fire and Rescue Services?

**Sir Ken Knight:** It rests with the Fire and Rescue Services in the first instance, Mr Hill, where the Fire and Rescue Services have that equipment at their disposal. You will see that all of this equipment is strategically located, so, with the exception of the Isles of Scilly, every Fire and Rescue Service in England has a piece of this kind of equipment, but not everyone has all the equipment except for London. Where they have the equipment, I gave the example of Devon and Somerset because they happen to have both the urban search and rescue, used because they thought there were trees fallen, as well as high volume pumping. Where they do not have that equipment their first port of call is the National Co-ordination Centre (NCC) which has the overall picture, if you like, as a control centre for this national response. They contact that centre and require the nearest to be sent. The co-ordination after that is very much co-operative work of coordination between the National Co-ordination Centre and the CLG emergency room which is where I have staff responsible to ensure that those cover moves are made, and they ebb and flow across the country as large incidents occur, and that the holes are filled in behind them. A much larger incident would have been the east coast surge last year where we had the danger of the winds and tides all coming together and causing widespread flooding on the east coast. A whole range of that equipment was moved in but not necessarily right into the area to give cover which was co-ordinated through the

emergency room and the National Co-ordination Centre. It is a co-ordinating role, not a command and control role, that I operate, as does the NCC.

**Q39 Keith Hill:** But you are satisfied that the NAO is wrong when it says that there is a sense of confusion about where authority lies?

**Sir Ken Knight:** I have not seen the confusion with the people that matter, that is, the commanders, the Gold commanders, the chief fire officers and the control operators, but for avoidance of any doubt we did issue new guidance in May this year so that every Fire and Rescue Service was clear in exactly the way I have just outlined about what their respective roles are, in terms of from minor incidents involving local deployment to catastrophic incidents. Can I just come back to the point when I answered the Chairman because the link is, importantly, from the Cabinet Office briefing room ultimately in a very large incident through to the emergency centre, of which I am part in the CLG, through to the command at a local level, because in the event of multiple incidents across the country of a catastrophic nature there will be some key decisions to be made as to how those vehicles and equipment are deployed.

**Q40 Keith Hill:** Moving on, let me draw your attention to paragraph 4.11 of the Report where the NAO says, "The Centre does not hold information on non-New Dimension emergency response equipment, which some Fire and Rescue Services believe could help coordination of emergency response to incidents". At times of flooding how is the department enabling Fire and Rescue Services to know what rescue boats are available and where they can be found?

**Sir Ken Knight:** I undertook a review of widespread flooding in 2007 at the request of the Secretary of State and that fed into Sir Michael Pitt's report on the role of the Fire and Rescue Services. One of my recommendations was that we should consider adding boats, for example, to the portfolio of the National Co-ordination Centre for national mobilisation. That went into the Pitt Review recommendations and the Government is due to make its determinations on the outcome of Pitt, including that matter, between now and the end of the year. In that respect I thought that the National Co-ordination Centre could have a role in just that co-ordination and I am on record as saying so.

**Q41 Keith Hill:** On the definitions of national and local incidents let me quote again from the Report, paragraph 4.15, "... the London Fire Brigade did not need outside Fire and Rescue Service help to respond to the 7 July 2005 terrorist bombings, it was treated as a local incident by Fire and Rescue Services. Yet since many Departments of State and other national bodies were involved in the Government's broader response, it was treated as a national incident by Government". The question is, should not the department clearly define what is a national incident and what is a local incident so that

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Fire and Rescue Services know what they are responsible for and what they can expect the Government to provide?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Mr Hill, I was London Fire Commissioner at the time of the 7 July bombings so I am incredibly well aware of those incidents of four simultaneous events, three on the Underground and one on a bus, involving some 200 firefighters. The London Fire Brigade is a significantly large fire brigade, one of the largest in the world, and it was able to cope with all of those events. First, in New Dimension terms, of course, it was not a New Dimension incident. It did not involve any of the scenarios that we have seen this New Dimension equipment supplied for. It could have been in different circumstances in a different way. There was no chemical, biological, radiological aspect to it, but nevertheless the NCC was alerted and people put on alert in case we needed New Dimension equipment. There was no widespread flooding, for example, in the London Underground but there could have been. In that circumstance it was four very large, very testing incidents for the London Fire Brigade but it did not require a response wider than the London Fire Brigade. However, had it needed one it would have got it and it would have been there.

**Q42 Keith Hill:** Let me quote paragraph 4.12, "Standard operating procedures for New Dimension equipment have been developed, but until summer 2008 not for its operation in conjunction with standard equipment or with other emergency teams which put effective Command and Control at risk". How is the department ensuring that New Dimension equipment will work smoothly with other Fire Service equipment or with other emergency services equipment at large-scale incidents?

**Sir Ken Knight:** We have a resilience assurance team on the ground consisting of 20 seconded officers that not only monitor the effectiveness of operational incidents where they are used to learn those lessons such as was the equipment right or could it have been used differently, but we also learn lessons from exercising and testing and that has produced interoperational assurance manuals and documents. In addition to that, in the last year the department has asked me to take the lead in operational guidance for the Fire and Rescue Services to ensure that we have interoperable guidance for the mutual aid that takes place from fire brigade to fire brigade, avoiding the replication of effort for every Fire and Rescue Service creating its own operational guidance but, importantly, ensuring interoperable and safe working practices for firefighters.

**Q43 Keith Hill:** Let us go back to the flooding of last year. Are you confident that these new high volume pumps are currently deployed in the right locations?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes, I am, Mr Hill. They were used to great effect, as is outlined in the Report, in two specific areas. There was also additional equipment available should we have needed it. My report did not focus on the high volume pumps; it focused more on boats and the rescue aspects of flooding, but

nevertheless I was entirely satisfied that not only were pumps put to good use for widespread flooded areas but also to protect infrastructure. We saw it protecting a dam that was in danger of collapse, we saw it in infrastructure such as power stations and substations saving many hundreds of thousands in the community from severe distress.

**Keith Hill:** Chairman, that is all I need to ask. That was a succession of really rather persuasive replies.

**Q44 Chairman:** It is always good to have the man who actually runs things. Mr Housden, I am not criticising you, but often the best witnesses are people like Sir Ken who have spent their whole lifetime on the job. That is why it is very important to have him here.

**Mr Housden:** Reflected glory is all right with me, Chairman.

**Q45 Mr Burstow:** Can I drill down into some of those answers because I think this issue of the command and control of New Dimension is a key part of the Report? I wanted to pick up on what you were saying just now about the National Co-ordination Centre's role being, as you say, co-ordination, not command and control. What I am therefore not entirely clear about, which certainly in paragraph 4.10 the authors of the Report make clear, and I assume the Report will have been agreed with yourselves, is that there is confusion here about where ultimately command and control do sit in situations particularly where deployment decisions have to be made about equipment that is finite and where there may be more than one call on that equipment. Where does the buck stop on command and control decisions around deployment in a situation where there are multiple calls on the same pieces of equipment?

**Sir Ken Knight:** In any catastrophic incident on a range of incidents the overall strategic command rests with the police. The police have Gold command level primary in a whole range of incidents, including flooding. Neither myself in my report nor, I think, importantly, Sir Michael Pitt in his report, wished to see that change because the Police have an overall co-ordinating role for a whole range of other things, not just deployment of equipment. At the scene of an incident, for example, a fire, there is clearly a fire officer that is in charge of that part of the operations and the police have a wider role of evacuation and next-of-kin and all of those things that need to be done. In the case of mobilising individual pieces of New Dimensions equipment, that very much is up to the fire commander that is part of that Gold command group, so there will be a senior police officer, a senior ambulance officer and a senior fire officer, all the blue light services, in charge of their parts and the logistics of their deployment.

**Q46 Mr Burstow:** I assume that was the case in July 2007.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes, it was indeed. There was a strategic command for London at Hendon.

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**Q47 Mr Burstow:** When we are told in paragraph 4.10 that the operational readiness audit in July 2007 found that “there is a lack of clarification on the responsibility and the process that the Fire and Rescue Service National Coordination Centre follows to mobilise equipment . . .”, that does suggest that within the organisation at different levels there was a confusion at that time. Despite the fact that nothing has changed since then what has been done to remove that confusion?

**Sir Ken Knight:** The National Co-ordination Centre, of course, was new with New Dimension. There were not [previously] national assets in that way. The National Co-ordination Centre is not something that has lived with us for ever, unlike command and control and mobilising centres locally. It was clearly there to mobilise and co-ordinate national assets and therefore I think those emerging confusions that are reported we have addressed by clarifying that in the guidance this year. I picked up some of those inferences in my flooding report and again issued guidance at that time. I am confident that everyone that needs to know is clear where that command co-ordination best rests.

**Q48 Mr Burstow:** When is the next departmental operational readiness audit due to take place?

**Mr Housden:** I do not have that information but I could let you know.

**Q49 Mr Burstow:** Presumably that would tell us definitely whether or not the confusion has been removed. Can you let us have a note as to when?<sup>1</sup>

**Mr Housden:** Of course, and I do think you are on an important point because one of the key things here is that the New Dimension equipment stands alongside equipment that individual Fire and Resilience Services already have at that level so that mesh is important. One of the things that we have been developing, and again this is on value for money as well as operational efficiency, is how those things are used properly together, and as we are learning we are pumping out that guidance and support.

**Q50 Mr Burstow:** That is very helpful and moves me on to my next question, which again picks up on some of what Sir Ken was saying just now, which is an indication that you have given, Sir Ken, that you do believe that the National Co-ordination Centre has a role perhaps in holding information that would be useful for the Fire and Rescue Services about non-New Dimension equipment. What sort of timescale might we be talking about before the National Co-ordination Centre might pick up that role?

**Sir Ken Knight:** In the case of the 2007 flooding we improvised. The Fire and Rescue Services have an ad hoc arrangement inherited from Hereford and Worcester with a flooding centre and my point was that that could be subsumed into the National Co-ordination Centre to hold all that information. There is absolutely no reason why that cannot be

undertaken very quickly indeed but it is not in the absence of having arrangements in place already, we know where that equipment is, we have an audit of boats and equipment, and, in exactly the same way as with the success of the response in 2007, that could be brought to bear this year or next year.

**Q51 Mr Burstow:** I understand that it is possible to do it and that there are ad hoc arrangements that have been used in the past that will probably be used in the future, but I am not absolutely clear about whether or not it definitely will happen.

**Sir Ken Knight:** I do not think there is a complexity but there certainly would need to be a consideration that such co-ordination did not, in the case of the scenario you talk about, just include about boats from the Fire and Rescue Services because they were not the only responders. There was tremendous response from non-governmental organisations such as the RNLI, and we want to have a fully co-ordinated response of the equipment, not just the Fire and Rescue Services, so it is rather more complex than just bringing the New Dimension equipment together but it is not beyond the wit of man to be able to do it fairly quickly.

**Q52 Mr Burstow:** And there is a desire and a commitment to do that?

**Mr Housden:** I do think you are on an important point here because almost by definition the specifics of local incidents will be very particular and so too will the range of resources that are available at local level. You would want to avoid over-prescribing and attributing too much responsibility to the National Co-ordination Centre, which will be many miles distant, but on the other hand you would want to maximise the availability of the equipment and that is where we look to Sir Ken to give, with his colleagues, his advice.

**Q53 Mr Burstow:** Moving on to paragraph 4.12 and the resilience assurance teams that you have on the ground and the learning of lessons that takes place, can you tell us a bit more about just how much work is done in terms of exercising and testing, how many exercises and tests are undertaken each year?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Testing and exercises take place at all levels, of course, from the very fire stations that have the equipment on a regular and daily basis, and members of the Committee, Chairman, saw some of that in the places they visited in the London Fire Brigade, right through to regional testing where it is important that this equipment is part of multi-agency testing and so it forms part of the Regional Resilience Forum under the Civil Contingencies Act where there are regional exercises testing a range of activities. At a national level they are also important and take place. A large national exercise takes place annually. There was a very large exercise run in July this year by the Health Protection Agency involving some 600 people, including the assumption of contamination and hospital admission, so there are models and it is important that this equipment is used in a multi-agency exercise and not in isolation.

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**Q54 Mr Burstow:** That is a point that is picked up in paragraph 3.12, in the reference there to lack of exercising, where it goes on to say, “. . . there are few multi-agency exercises on a scale to fully test New Dimension capability and enhance key skills”, and then it goes on to say, “Lessons learnt from such exercises are not disseminated systematically”. Since this Report was written and published has that changed?

**Sir Ken Knight:** I think it is changing. I think it is a fair point as to how those lessons are learned. We have an online portal at the Fire Service College where there are lessons, for example, on hazardous material training and learning and, as I have said, those teams on the ground feed back information, and there are lessons from real incidents as well. The lessons learned from incidents such as Buncefield feed back into how equipment is used and should be used in the future. I think the NAO have posed a helpful question for us, that there is systematic exercising going on, and certainly as part of the assurance of the equipment on the ground and as part, as I mentioned earlier, of the Audit Commission process in the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery, I think we have some very flexible ways to put that into the programme next year to reassure us that is taking place.

**Q55 Mr Burstow:** But having the reassurance team on the ground, if it does not share best practice with others, is not very reassuring.

**Sir Ken Knight:** You are absolutely right, Mr Burstow, and that is why I want to ensure that that best practice is feeding back into best practice and also new equipment and guidance. I am sure we have got the processes in place. What the National Audit Office has asked is are we sure it is happening. It is a question that I would like to address as part of the Audit Commission review.

**Q56 Mr Mitchell:** I read in the Report that this framework was set up after 9/11 in one of these rushes of, “Must do something about this”, which periodically overtakes the British Government, and indeed all governments, but it plodded along in a desultory kind of fashion, aiming to be operative by 2003, which it was not, over-ordering and over-paying, and then in 2005 we get the terrorist attack in London on the tube and suddenly everything gets pulled together and it begins to emerge in better order. Would that be an unfair picture?

**Mr Housden:** I think the cause and effect is different than you suggest. The “everything will be in place by 2003” estimate was clearly hugely over-ambitious. For a programme at the back end of 2001, given the nature of the equipment, clearly it was going to take longer than that. That is why there was a huge premium on taking short-term temporary measures.

**Q57 Mr Mitchell:** But you coasted along on that assumption until suddenly things got pulled together in 2005.

**Mr Housden:** I think that the people who were dealing with it at the time, principally the Fire Service secondees to the inspectorate, would not

regard themselves as coasting along. I think they were working massively hard and Sir Ken indicates—

**Q58 Mr Mitchell:** Okay, that is a bit unfair.

**Mr Housden:**— the quite intense other work going on within the Fire and Resilience Service at the time. I think those people were working well by their lights. I think they could have been better supported by the civil servants in the department and some of the procedures, but they got things in place, they got procurements going, and the OGC, who give independent assurance to the quality of work of this type in departments, provided the department with a good report that said that there was some individual work going on in 14 strands here which may or may not be okay but it was not pulled together into a programme. Value for money was a risk; we should do something about it. You see from 2003 onwards the department progressively putting those arrangements in place and the OGC coming back.

**Q59 Mr Mitchell:** You are implicitly critical of the civil servants there. Are you happy with Serco as consultants?

**Mr Housden:** I think that their performance in terms of the range of consultants they procured for this programme has been good. I just wish that the arrangements that had been put in place to procure and monitor their performance were stronger. There is, of course, always hindsight operative here because the service continues to develop.

**Q60 Mr Mitchell:** Why did you employ them in the first place? Why does the department or the Fire Service not have the capability of doing this? After all, consultants just scratch together a motley crew of so-called experts for particular projects. You could have done that rather than pay the inflated fees. I see in 2.11 that some consultants “charged over £1,000 per day against the average cost that the contract stated should not exceed £500 per day . . .”, and the total cost of the consultants is £12 million. That is about 25% of the cost of administering the programme as a whole. You cannot be happy with that, but let me start with the question of why the department could not do that without employing consultants.

**Mr Housden:** There are two basic reasons, Mr Mitchell. First of all, the department had never done a national procurement of this type, so it did not have in the body of the department as civil servants enough skilled programme and project managers, so to start with those people had to be brought in through a consultancy firm. That is one set. The second set is very specialist expertise that the department would only ever use in this context [the new dimension programme] For example, the question of where all this kit was going to be put in the long term and how it was going to be moved around drew on, needed, expertise in warehousing and logistics.

**Q61 Mr Mitchell:** But it also needed the expertise in the Fire Service, which had it.

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**Mr Housden:** That we had, but they did not have national equipment that needed to be moved around, and so this was a new issue and we brought in consultants' expertise to do it.

**Q62 Mr Mitchell:** But these consultants were supposed to be training up people and passing on their knowledge to them. They do not appear to have done so. They appear to have hung on in there to make the maximum money for themselves.

**Mr Housden:** I think there was an element of skills transfer, in the jargon, which has enabled the department progressively to pick up that role, particularly in the programme and project management area, and we are now essentially through the period of consultant input to this programme.

**Q63 Mr Mitchell:** But you are still happy with Serco?

**Mr Housden:** I have no cause for complaint with the contractors.

**Q64 Mr Mitchell:** The department is responsible for the Fire Service College. Why does it not pull it together? It did not have enough confidence to send people there, as well as it being cheaper, to be trained rather than sending them to Disaster City in Texas, which I thought was a description of Hull. That is certainly how we see it on the south bank. Why did they not have the confidence and why at the end of the day are we still getting complaints, 3.10, that, "The Fire and Rescue Services have three main concerns with the College: high cost of courses, poor accommodation facilities, and inflexible course scheduling"? Why did you not pull it together?

**Mr Housden:** It was not a question of confidence, Mr Mitchell. The Fire Service College simply did not have the facilities on the ground at the time to enable people to be trained in urban search and rescue. In Texas they did and, given the immediate needs of the country, a decision was taken, and it sounds to me like a good one, to make use of those facilities in Texas. The Report does include a price comparison. I do not know the basis on which that comparison was made in terms of subsidy, sponsorship or other things that might have reduced the charges that were made, but ministers have shown great confidence in the Fire Service College here by investing £8 million to enable that rig to be developed. It gets very good reviews from firefighters who use it and who have been trained on it, and the general point that you make about the Fire Service College's responsiveness and so forth of course is always work-in-progress and they are very keen to learn from their customers, in this case the Fire and Rescue Services.

**Q65 Mr Mitchell:** Let me just be a bit parochial because I see in the Report that planning and certainly delivery is deemed to be patchy. The Chairman and I represent jewels of English constituencies which are on the south bank of the Humber. It is the most profitable port in the country, it has enormous inflows of oil and bulk cargo, it has got chemical industries, it had Flixborough before it

blew itself up. In other words, it is an area of potential disasters. Let me ask you, since I saw this fascinating list of equipment on page 12, how much equipment have we got access to in South Humberside? You might not be able to tell us now, I appreciate that, but perhaps you could give us a note for the Committee.<sup>2</sup> First of all, there are prime movers. I thought that was God but evidently not. What do we have in South Humberside and how quickly can we get access to it? Further down there are detection, identification and monitoring vehicles and high volume pumping. I would be grateful because I have always been concerned, and we have got a very good fire authority but we do keep trying to cut down the number of engaged firemen, about what access we have got to equipment in what could be a very dangerous area. Let me ask Sir Ken—I see 10,000 out of 50,000 engaged firemen have been trained but you are having difficulties in attracting people for training on detection, identification and monitoring vehicles. Why is this? Are they paid extra for training and, if they are not, why are they not? This is a financial problem.

**Sir Ken Knight:** It is not a financial problem, Mr Mitchell. There was a shortage at the time of the Report. I am pleased to advise the Committee now that we are fully trained on all of those vehicles. It is a very technical area. We are requiring people to be able to deal with the technical equipment on those vehicles, identify what the spillage is, identify what the chemical is and therefore the action to be taken, but I am pleased to report that they are now fully crewed and fully trained.

**Q66 Mr Mitchell:** That is in all the vehicles?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes, in all the vehicles.

**Q67 Mr Mitchell:** Are they paid extra?

**Sir Ken Knight:** They are not paid extra.

**Q68 Mr Mitchell:** Why not?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Because it is fundamentally the role of the firefighter and it is in their job description and role map to do this work, and actually there is not a shortage of volunteers to do this work. They really enjoy doing this work on the specialist equipment. I would prefer to let you have a note on where the equipment is. I just wanted to make the point that, of course, all the equipment is available to Humberside because it is a national response, so it all comes together when it needs to, as it did in Buncefield, so that it can be brought together for a major incident.

**Q69 Mr Mitchell:** As it did to a degree in the Yorkshire floods.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Indeed.

**Q70 Mr Mitchell:** The fraud intrigues me because it was basically not a very clever fraud; it was quite simple stuff. Why should the department be paying large sums of money to a housing association to supply equipment to fight a major disaster? Why was that not detected earlier?

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**Mr Housden:** The basic thing, Mr Mitchell, was that normally, of course, it would have been detected.

**Q71 Mr Mitchell:** Do you get a lot of stuff from housing associations?

**Mr Housden:** It would have shown up on a standard report as being a payment to be checked. The individual concerned had an understanding of our financial software which enabled him to suppress the report, so a further check a bit down the line identified these payments and led to a police investigation. It was not that the department was defenceless but, of course, we have learned from that process and now have a much more systematic set of arrangements.

**Q72 Mr Mitchell:** How long did the guy get?

**Mr Housden:** Four years, I am advised.

**Mr Mitchell:** And then he retires to the South of France.

**Q73 Chairman:** It took you nine months to detect the fraud, though.

**Mr Housden:** It was a considerable period.

**Q74 Chairman:** It was a long time.

**Mr Housden:** Yes, it was the best part of that.

**Q75 Nigel Griffiths:** Mr Housden, are you a fan of *Strictly Come Dancing*?

**Mr Housden:** Only at one remove.

**Q76 Nigel Griffiths:** In respect of this Report I am Len Goodman, and in the face of the Craig Revel Horwoods and what I think are some carping criticisms, I have to say that, having been to see the London Fire and Rescue Service, I was very impressed. If everyone who went and saw that was not impressed I will go home and pickle my walnuts. This Report itself I think deserves a better mark than six or seven. Yes, there are some criticisms but the Chairman stressed the timetable slippage and I would like to know if it resulted in any failure to protect the public from actual terrorist incidents or suspected incidents or catastrophic environmental events.

**Mr Housden:** It is difficult always to answer those questions unequivocally, but I think that the action the Department took in the early period whilst the equipment was being procured, manufactured and delivered seemed to me to be prudent and sensible. As soon as equipment has become available it has been integrated with local responses, so generally I think you can be confident about that.

**Q77 Nigel Griffiths:** If you had completed the project by early 2003, what are the chances that the money would have been spent on inferior equipment than was later available and which you actually bought?

**Mr Housden:** On the basis that there are, as the Report indicates, indications where poor procurement and specification threatened value for money, had the Department attempted to do it still more quickly than logically I think the risks of those would have gone up. I have not seen the basis of the

estimate for 2003 as to whether a delivery date was doable or realistic. Looking at it from this distance, the type of equipment, the novelty and so forth, would naturally have suggested a longer time period.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Can I just add to this, if I may. It was not in the absence in the Fire and Rescue Service planning for catastrophic disasters. We have talked about the 7 July incident, which I said was not an unforeseen event. There was a huge amount of planning having watched the four simultaneous Madrid bombings take place, which mirrored what happened in London. There was a huge exercise in Bank Underground in the City, Osiris, which absolutely mirrored 200 firefighters being used on exercise and then deployed on 7 July. There was not a vacuum of planning for catastrophic events going on while this was happening.

**Q78 Nigel Griffiths:** Thank you, Sir Ken. Page 5 mentions the 2005 Buncefield oil depot fire and Box 2 on page 22 highlights the flooding in the summer of 2007, particularly in Yorkshire and the West of England. Could you have effectively tackled those disasters with pre-New Dimension equipment?

**Sir Ken Knight:** We could, but not as well I would argue. The New Dimension's high volume pumping came into use very well indeed. The National Audit Office raised a question, "What would have happened if all those events over all those days had happened together, would we have run out of equipment?" The truth is that an area of activity that the Fire and Rescue Service does particularly well is pump water, and there are 2,000 pumps on fire stations in this country, admittedly a 3:1 ratio of pumping capacity compared with High Volume Pumps and more logistics as well as Environment Agency pumps, and they would have been deployed differently at different times in different places, but I am confident we could have fulfilled that expectation and that need.

**Q79 Nigel Griffiths:** Box 1 on page 5, the third point on High Volume Pumps, says that before the New Dimension programme there was one larger capacity pump based in Shropshire and now there are 46 larger capacity pumps. That must be a step change in capacity.

**Sir Ken Knight:** And a huge value that we have seen in reality.

**Q80 Nigel Griffiths:** In terms of the terrorist threat, and again I was very impressed by the demonstration that I saw of the capacity to decontaminate up to 400 people an hour, I see from the NAO Report that there was no specialist equipment and only some Fire and Rescue Services had a dedicated hazardous material officer but now there are 73 Incident Response Units and 17 Detection, Identification and Monitoring Vehicles, mobile labs, to help cope with this.

**Sir Ken Knight:** In fact, there was no public decontamination. The decontamination referred to there was the decontamination of firefighters, so it

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was a fairly primitive decontamination of firefighters. This was quite different to large numbers of the general public.

**Q81 Nigel Griffiths:** Another of the NAO's key findings, as this page is headed, is that in urban search and rescue the teams consisted of voluntary full-time firefighters undertaking work outside normal office hours, as against now 20 fully trained search and rescue teams of 30 firefighters each and the equipment that goes with that. The same with command and control rooms, some have low-tech units but now there are nine enhanced command support vehicles. You must have seen, Sir Ken, in the long, distinguished career you have had in the Fire Service a revolution in the availability of equipment and the training that goes with it, whether in Texas or not, as a result of the New Dimension Programme.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes, I have indeed. I am very proud of what firefighters do and I am very proud that we have been able to provide them with this high level of equipment and they are protecting the community in this way. Can I just return to Texas because I was responsible for sending some 300 firefighters to Texas from London and I have to say, Chairman, I do not apologise because we needed to get them trained, ready and prepared. They do not go there now. I am sure they would prefer to go to Texas than they do to Moreton-in-Marsh. They do not go there now, they go to the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh. That was where the training was of very high quality. Since then the Federal Emergency and Management Agency in the States has been to our College and said, "We now recognise you have got the best in the world".

**Q82 Nigel Griffiths:** Do you think the Committee would be wrong to conclude that going to Texas was a mistake and such training is available anywhere else?

**Sir Ken Knight:** I think it was exactly the right decision to make at that time in the absence of the training facility in this country.

**Q83 Nigel Griffiths:** On page 8 one of the conclusions is: "The Fire and Rescue Service is facing increasing costs and competing demands for funding priorities, firefighters' New Dimension skills may not be maintained to adequate standards." Can you give the Committee an assurance, Mr Housden, that will not, in fact, happen?

**Mr Housden:** I can. We are very concerned that each individual Fire and Rescue Service has appropriate standards across all of its work and training, as you rightly point out, is probably the most important. We have a process of both feeding the lessons in through the assurance team that Sir Ken mentioned, but also through the Audit Commission of having an overview of performance of each of those 46 authorities. Where we feel one is at risk or falling short then we point that out and we are able to offer them specialist advice and support to improve their performance.

**Q84 Nigel Griffiths:** My final points are on the conclusions on value for money, 17 and 18 on page 7. The NAO stresses that this programme has enhanced your capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale emergency events and has contributed significantly to the handling of a number of major incidents, and I think Buncefield and the flooding are two of those. What are the other incidents that you have been able to tackle?

**Sir Ken Knight:** A range of incidents. In London the detection and monitoring equipment is used about 300 times a year, white powder incidents, spillages, actually stopping disruption to the community, allowing firefighters to get back on with the job very quickly. If they did not have that equipment it would perhaps stop infrastructure for many hours and now that no longer happens. We have seen it used in local flooding. I have mentioned the decontamination equipment that was used at a tyre factory in Lincolnshire in Kirton where they were people decontaminated. I have mentioned Merryhill in Scotland. The important aspect is that it is used for day-to-day emergency incidents. That is the best test and best exercise, not keeping it in mothballs awaiting catastrophic incidents. It is used regularly by firefighters at major incidents. I can cite real examples of the High Volume Pumps not being used to pump out flooded places, but used for pumps for fires. I know in Manchester the High Volume Pumps as a matter of course are put into areas where they know there is low water pressure, so there is pressure for firefighting. I think it is really important that it is used in day-to-day activities, not in splendid isolation for a catastrophic incident.

**Q85 Nigel Griffiths:** My last question is on conclusion 18: "The Department did address many of its management weaknesses by bringing in consultants and other trained staff, although at greater cost than originally planned, and some weaknesses have remained." Is there anything since this Report was drawn up that has been done that would reassure this Committee and the public that those weaknesses have been tackled or are being tackled?

**Mr Housden:** Yes. On financial management we have been taking action over the last several years. I think Mary Keegan would probably be known to your Committee and she did a review of our financial procedures and we have implemented the recommendations. Those have been re-examined and we have carried on with that. Similarly, on consultants there has been a Government-wide drive, which I know your Committee has been an important shaping force for. The thing most recently that is relevant here is on procurement because the Report talks about some of the weakness in that. We have had an independent review, we have been implementing it and they are now with us to see the progress that we have made. No accounting officer would take these criticisms lightly, my predecessor did not and I have not in terms of building up our capability.

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**Q86 Nigel Griffiths:** If I might just crave your indulgence, Chairman. Is it possible for the Committee to have a note on what they are now saying?

**Mr Housden:** On procurement?

**Q87 Nigel Griffiths:** On procurement.

**Mr Housden:** By all means. It will be a little while until they have finished their work, a month or so, but by all means.<sup>3</sup>

**Q88 Mr Williams:** A follow-up on a point you made in answer to the opening questions. We are told by the NAO that it is not clear where national level incidents stop and local level incidents begin and the result is significant variety in major emergency response capacity in Fire and Rescue Services across the country. Have you identified any deliberate reluctance? Are they dragging their feet or is it lack of awareness of the importance? What are the key factors?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Incidents will naturally escalate from small to large obviously, so those local incidents may be dealt with locally without needing to escalate them but are readily escalated. I hope I am answering the question, Mr Williams, and if I am not please stop me. Beyond all this equipment that has been produced out of this programme, the one thing that has emerged is national mutual aid between Fire and Rescue Services. Prior to this programme there were neighbours going across different authorities providing support under what was called an over-the-border arrangement but there was never a national response in my career where you could call for equipment in Humberside that actually came from the Midlands or the West Country, and it does now by mutual agreement. Escalation of those events is very natural and very easy and I never saw that in the early part of my career.

**Q89 Mr Williams:** The important point, as the NAO said, is that there is a significant variety in the level of provision.

**Sir Ken Knight:** I am sorry, I apologise.

**Q90 Mr Williams:** No, that is all right, I was interested in what you had to say. How far is this local reluctance a local failure to recognise urgency and the scale of response that is needed?

**Sir Ken Knight:** It is, of course, quite deliberately strategically located in the whole of the country. The lack of local provision is quite deliberate in the sense that it is a regional and wider response. I do not think there is a reluctance to require equipment on—

**Q91 Mr Williams:** Using the term “lack” suggests that there is a problem. You are saying there is a lack of local provision.

**Sir Ken Knight:** It was never the intention to replicate all of this equipment in every fire brigade.

**Q92 Mr Williams:** No, I understand that.

**Sir Ken Knight:** Therefore, the suggestion that there is a flaw by not having all the equipment in every Fire and Rescue Service is not the assumption of how this equipment is located.

**Q93 Mr Williams:** So you do not see individual authorities that are actually deliberately dragging their feet?

**Mr Housden:** If I could help here. I think there is an important question. They are very different animals managing very different risks. A brigade serving a large urban area, such as London or Manchester, or the example Mr Mitchell gave of brigades who have got very significant industrial and chemical complexes, are very different from a fundamentally rural area. Yes, they will have differences in what local people have decided they should invest their money in. The advantage of this system is that it gives you a national capacity to respond to wherever incidents can occur. The cost to the public purse of equipping every Fire and Rescue Service with this equipment would be prohibitive.

**Q94 Mr Williams:** In addition to having the equipment, there is the capability to make best use of it, and another point that is made by the NAO is that there appears to be sufficient numbers trained in all equipments except in operating the Detection, Identification and Monitoring Vehicles where there is a shortfall of between 15 and 25%. How do you account for that and how important is it?

**Sir Ken Knight:** It is very important. There was not a shortage of availability, that was purely capacity to train. That deficiency has now been overcome and we have full capacity and full training. At the time of the report that was absolutely accurate, but we now have all of the vehicles with fully trained crews.

**Q95 Mr Williams:** This is something that is outside the report and I apologise for putting it to you, but it intrigued me yesterday in the newspaper. I saw a report that there has been a significant increase in the number of deaths of people in the Fire Service and it makes the point that between February 1996 and October 2002 there were no recorded firefighter deaths at fires whereas between 2003 and 2007, which is the period we are now looking at, there have been at least 13 killed at fires. Is it just a statistical accident? What change has taken place that has made it more hazardous?

**Sir Ken Knight:** One firefighter death is a death too many, of course, the statistical blip that appears to have occurred does not sufficiently respond to the question. In actual fact, the firefighter deaths in this country have been incredibly low and personally I am very proud of that because it is a high hazard occupation. Unfortunately, you may recall that just over a year ago four firefighters tragically died at one fire in Warwickshire when a warehouse collapsed and, in fact, urban search and rescue was brought into play there as teams were deployed to rescue those four firefighters. It is true to say that in the last few years we have seen that increase and that may be due to a single incident. I am equally pleased to say,

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Chairman, there have been no firefighter fatalities in the country since that time, which is over a year ago. That does not mean that I am complacent, and the report you talk about refers to a Fire Brigades Union report that was published today. I have said today, and I have said to the Fire Brigades Union, that we need to study their report carefully and work with them to look at the matters they have raised to ensure that we are satisfied that training and competence are in place.

**Q96 Mr Williams:** I notice that they claim: “There is no comprehensive consistent UK-wide system for recording firefighter deaths”. That seems to be a strange gap. Why is that so?

**Sir Ken Knight:** They draw from their conclusions that there is a different definition of a death at work in Scotland, England, Wales or Northern Ireland. I do not know there is that difference, they have highlighted that. I am not disputing that is the case if they say it is. It was only published today, Mr Williams, and I am intending to work with them on it. I do work closely with the devolved administrations because there is a Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for Scotland and also I am in Northern Ireland next week talking to the Northern Ireland Chief Fire Officer there where there is a single fire brigade. We do work closely. If there is a difference we would want to at least have a common understanding of what we define as a firefighter death in service.

**Q97 Mr Williams:** Do you see a possibly comprehensive system being introduced relatively quickly?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes. I am sure we have the recording of the information. I will give you an example. Some may say that someone dying of cardiac arrest 12 hours afterwards would be a death in service due to the service and some may not. It is a matter of definition rather than recording. I am sure the recording is there, it is the comparable definitions, which I do not think are difficult to get to.

**Q98 Mr Williams:** Thank you. I am sorry to have bounced on you a question that was outside the report but it seemed relevant. Thank you very much.

**Sir Ken Knight:** It is very important.

**Q99 Mr Mitchell:** I was a bit taken aback by Appendix 4, “Procurement Case Studies” which gives an indication really of panic-buying and a “must do something about this” rush. I just want to refer particularly to the High Volume Pumps because the contract to supply was with a Dutch firm, “and the Department has been unable to provide evidence that the resulting single tender was approved in line with established departmental authorities”. That is curious. Then we go on to the maintenance contract, which was a bit of a mess, because not only were you unable to provide evidence that this single tender was approved in line with established departmental authorities, but it only covered the pumps and not the hose boxes, so you had to buy in coverage on a more expensive

basis presumably for the hose boxes on an ad hoc basis. That is not the only deficiency. What attracted my attention was the word “euro” and the contract was negotiated in euros at a time when it was fairly predictable that the euro was going to rise. Most people predicted—I predicted—that the euro was going to rise pretty astronomically. You were tying yourselves, therefore, to a rising price which must have increased the costs considerably. Why did you do that?

**Mr Housden:** Appendix 4 lays out very graphically the weaknesses in the procurement arrangements. The contract, in fairness, should not have been signed and made in euros at all. Individual departments are not in the currency hedging business, perish the thought! The difficulty here was the decision was taken that this Dutch company was the only credible supplier of this equipment—

**Q100 Mr Mitchell:** Was that true?

**Mr Housden:** I am sure it was within the reasonable time period available and, therefore, a decision was taken to go with them. They insisted on being paid, I am told, in euros and the contract was signed.

**Q101 Mr Mitchell:** They are not daft, the Dutch, are they?

**Mr Housden:** I just think this is an indication of the type of weaknesses of procedures. What was my reading of the situation, Mr Mitchell, was that you had dedicated firefighting expertise on the job liaising with their colleagues to determine what was needed, but what was lacking was sufficient in-depth on-the-job procurement expertise to say, “If that’s what you want, this is how we can get it on genuine value for money terms”. There are other examples of those types of shortcomings. We have worried about them and, through the process I was discussing with Mr Griffiths, have sought to put in place much more robust procedures. If, in the future, we get involved in a complex novel procurement we will make sure we get some people who know what they are doing in those sorts of areas. I do think that the Government is now much better geared up to provide that sort of support for departments.

**Mr Touhig:** You were very lucky, the Dutch are canny. They managed to sell the Welsh Ambulance Service a communications system which did not work and, in fact, Holland is flat and Wales is not.

**Q102 Chairman:** A very last question to fill the final gap in our questioning. Paragraph 4.7 on page 21 says: “The Department has not undertaken a systematic and comprehensive modelling exercise to determine whether equipment numbers and locations are appropriate to meet Concept of Operations’ response”. As I understand this, in NAO-speak you have got a lot of new kit, Sir Ken, but are you satisfied you know where the gaps are, things you cannot do as well as things you can do?

**Sir Ken Knight:** Yes, I am satisfied, Chairman. The proof of the pudding has been in the use and we have seen that. I do not think we should be complacent, so we need to monitor risk changes, and that is happening through assurance, because if risk

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changes we may need to look at different equipment. As the equipment gets older in any future refreshing we might need to refresh the equipment in a different way. It is a dynamic process rather than a complete stop of the programme and start a new one with some of the issues that you have raised today, helpfully, about how we get best feedback out of exercise and training and changes in individual pieces of equipment. What is important is that this remains an interoperable response so, for example, all the equipment on those types of vehicles remains identical. I am satisfied that the modelling that was done has stood the test of time. More recently, a Home Office modelling has been undertaken and certainly it has proved fit for purpose for the scenarios that we see. In the longer term we will see

risks change and equipment change and maybe equipment develop that will be different, but we should not just lurch at new equipment for the sake of it, we ought to do it on a risk assessed basis.

**Q103 Chairman:** Thank you, Sir Ken, Mr Housden, it has been a very useful inquiry and in our report we will want to comment on the procurement process but also look at the future to try and ensure that we maintain our firefighter skills and there is a clear line of authority, which Sir Ken has dealt with very well.

**Mr Housden:** Thank you, Chairman. Can I thank the Committee on behalf of my team, and particularly those who were able to make the visit. It is hugely appreciated by staff on the ground.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much.

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 Memorandum from the Department for Communities and Local Government

Questions 48–49 (Mr Burstow) *on operational readiness review*

NEW DIMENSION OPERATIONAL READINESS REVIEW 2007

The New Dimension programme conducted an Operational Readiness Review in the first half of 2007. The purpose of this review and ensuing report, was to identify gaps in the organisational capability and structure, prior to completion of the programme and transition into steady state within the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). The Operational Readiness Report also identified areas of current best practice in relation to New Dimension implementation and provided recommendations on how to improve any areas highlighted as requiring further attention or guidance.

Most of the recommendations arising from the Operational Readiness Report have been completed, (for example confirmation of long-term funding has been issued through a Fire Service Circular and clarity over future maintenance arrangements has been provided through procurement of a 16-year maintenance contract), although several are on-going actions which are kept under review.

The Department is now considering how it will transition responsibility for all the New Dimension capability to the FRS through the Long-Term Capability Management (LTCM) project. One of the key areas of LTCM relates to the long-term governance arrangements for New Dimension given that Government and the FRS needs to have a degree of assurance that the capability remains fit for purpose, does not degrade over time, and continues to be interoperable between FRSs. CLG has, during 2008, liaised with the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and the Local Government Association (LGA) as to how this assurance can best be delivered. This has led to the establishment of an Assurance Body chaired by CFOA.

The aim is to transfer strategic management for New Dimension capability over to the Assurance Body in the next few months. The transitional arrangements already in place have allowed the handover of responsibility to begin. This work is being led by the New Dimension Transition Board, chaired by Chief Fire Officer Terry Standing, Gloucestershire FRS which reports up to the LGA Fire Services Management Board. As part of its resilience policy role, CLG will continue to liaise with CFOA on any changes affecting the resilience capability of the FRS, such as the national risk profile on which the New Dimension programme was based.

CLG has committed £6.8 million over the next three years to ensure that CFOA can undertake this national resilience role. Part of its terms of reference includes carrying out audits and reviews of equipment, procedures and protocols across the capabilities and assisting the development of regional and national arrangements for maximising the benefits of New Dimension capability. Additionally, the Assurance Body will provide an annual report to CLG on the national readiness of the New Dimension capabilities. These arrangements are being formalised through a memorandum of understanding which is currently being discussed by CLG officials and CFOA officers. We expect these new permanent governance arrangements will begin in early 2009.

## FRS OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

The Operational Assessment of FRS Service Delivery was carried out in 2006 in order to provide Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and other stakeholders with assurance concerning the delivery of fire and rescue services. FRAs completed a self assessment utilising a toolkit in order to reach a judgement on their operational assessment of service delivery. This was followed up by field teams of FRS professionals seconded to CLG that visited each FRS to review the self assessment and confirm the basis on which the FRA made its judgement. The scores from this process remain in place for a period of three years. The process was utilised to assist FRAs with improvement planning to enhance service provision.

The Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser is currently producing a new toolkit in partnership with CFOA and the LGA. This will form the basis of a sector lead approach to Operational Assessment of Service Delivery which will be undertaken from April 2009. This process will again involve self assessment and will be underpinned by a follow up by an accredited professional peer review team and improvement planning. This work will be taken into account by the Audit Commission during Organisational Assessment.

Question 65 (Mr Mitchell): *On availability of New Dimension Equipment in South Humberside*

In response to the request from Austin Mitchell MP, for information relating to New Dimension capability in South Humberside, we are able to confirm that it has an Incident Response Unit (IRU), for mass decontamination of the public.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service more generally has the following New Dimension capability:

- A Mass Decontamination Dis-Robe Module—to support the IRU through the provision of additional dis-robe packs.
- A Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) vehicle to detect and identify possible chemical, biological and radiological substances.
- A High Volume Pump (HVP) for the movement of large volumes of water (such as flooding).

Additionally, capability provided in other Fire and Rescue Services immediately surrounding the South Humberside area includes:

*Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service*

- An IRU.
- A HVP.
- An Urban Search and Rescue Team for response to collapsed structures or transport incidents.

*South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service*

- An IRU.
- A Mass Decontamination Dis-robe Module.
- A DIM vehicle.
- A HVP.

New Dimension provides national level capability to deal with the largest disasters, and equipment is located across the country on a regional basis, with Fire and Rescue Services using mutual aid arrangements to augment the response available in their immediate area as required. From an FRS perspective, where a regional or national disaster occurs within their area, it will call on resources from neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services or further a field.

All Fire and Rescue Authorities in England have agreed to participate in a national mutual aid protocol for serious incidents. This protocol takes account of the new fire and rescue service national coordination centre (FRSNCC—which coordinates deployment of New Dimension equipment) and sets out the terms under which Fire and Rescue Authorities can support each other during major incidents such as a terrorist attack.

Questions 86–87 (Nigel Griffiths) *on procurement capability review*

The initial Procurement Capability Review (PCR) for the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) took place in May/June 2007.

The initial review highlighted leadership gaps requiring greater aggregation of spend and influence across the family, skills enhancements focussed on category management and supplier relationship management and systems development to gain greater visibility around spend management and efficient transactional processing.

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The Department's PCR Improvement Plan was agreed in late Autumn 2007 when CLG committed itself to a detailed programme of actions to address the issues identified in its PCR. In November 2008 OGC undertook the 12 month milestone ("Stocktake") assessment focusing primarily on the progress of CLG compared with its PCR Improvement Plan, lasting over three days and covering interviews with 16 commercial staff and internal stakeholders and a selection of people from the department's largest Agencies and Non-Departmental Bodies.

CLG has invested in procurement resources, has five category work streams (IT, Estates, General Services, Consulting / HR and Professional Services) linked across the CLG family to aggregate demand and leverage market opportunities. Significant information on spend has been assembled to identify savings, process and supplier relationship management opportunities. Specific to Consulting requirements in policy and delivery functions, greater focus pre bid and during the life of the contract on agreeing commercial and operational terms and conditions, managing performance, benchmarking and negotiating market rates and managing demand. Continued and selective investment in system and changes to procurement delegations has led to progress in transactional efficiency at times far exceeding our planned improvement.

In their draft report this week (which has yet to be released) the OGC have fed back that it is clear within and across CLG, procurement capability work has progressed significantly over the last 12 months.

Highlighted improvements were stated as:

CLG's Board has led and supported for procurement by raising its profile and investing in high quality procurement staff.

CLG's commercial strategy has Board endorsement and its commercial activities are well understood and better integrated into business operations.

A new Head of Procurement (HoP), recruited Summer 2008, has made a big impact by setting engaging successfully with senior stakeholders across the CLG family. He provided direction and led the drive to increase value from CLG's commercial activities, and has positioned CPD as a key corporate resource.

HoP has developed for sign-off by CLG's Board a vision and outcome statement which aligns with the aims of the Corporate Services Change Programme.

Collaboration and category management activities are progressing well. CLG's approach is systematic approach and spend data is being used to identify opportunities for delivering savings and better VFM.

CPD has greater levels of visibility and engagement with major programmes and has also led a successful intervention with a key supplier.

Whilst our procurement activities are on an improvement journey and that there are the obvious challenges OGC has stated they have a high level of confidence that CLG will deliver its improvements and benefits.

*10 December 2008*

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