The whole framework for fire and rescue services and associated fire laws came under review and scrutiny in the early 2000’s. Strikes by the Fire Brigades Union brought the services to the attention of the Government and following a fairly swift review a new Act for Fire and Rescue Services (Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004) swept away pre- subscribed standards of fire cover, centralised decision bodies, restrictions on selection and promotion processes and introduced a requirement for an „integrated risk management plan“ to be created for each fire authority area, in consultation with the public and key stakeholders. This plan, the IRMP, is required to address all the actions of the service, including, specifically, fire prevention, protection and response. It should also be noted
that „Fire and Rescue Service“ (FRS) roles also include duties to deal with fires and other emergencies, that were not specific in the preceding 1947 Act. Another central control mechanism was removed at the same time – Her Majesty’s Inspector of Fire Services was replaced by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor. This effectively broke a historic link between Government and the services, with the intention, it was said, to allow innovation and local solutions to local issues. Pay and conditions remained to be set nationally, with facility for local negotiation to support local risk plans.

The „Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order” 2005 cemented the changes started by the implementation of the EU Directive via the Workplace Regulations, and went a great deal further. Well over 100 pieces of fire law were either repealed or amended, creating a simple single piece of law, with its base tenet being that those identified as responsible persons (the employers usually) are required to ensure that fire risks are identified and addressed. The now familiar health and safety language of „suitable and sufficient” and „as low as reasonably practicable” can be seen in the tone and style of the law. Enforcement remained almost entirely with the fire and rescue authority, with minor exceptions for certain special risks, buildings under construction and those occupied by the Crown. The scope of the Act is almost total. Replacing a patchwork of historic laws with a simple list of exclusions, the most notable being private dwellings, the requirement to manage the risk of fire falls upon the management of all occupied buildings. The requirement to take actions to prevent a fire occurring is a major departure from all of the previous regimes, they had started with the assumption that a fire might occur and steps should be taken to protect people from it. Fire prevention is now a legal requirement. Fire and Rescue Services now publicise their plans to check compliance with the law, with complete local freedom to determine priorities and degree of effort.

2014 has seen a further step change in the shift of Governmental or central control of fire safety issues. Following extensive pilot testing, supported by the UK Chief Fire Officers Association, the door has been opened for businesses to enter into a relationship with a fire and rescue service, on what has become to be known as a „Primary Authority Scheme” basis. A business with premises across England and Wales can form an agreement with any fire and rescue service, with intent to gain „assured advice”, effectively stepping in to replace the local service enforcement role. By testing strategic and operational compliance the partner business, developing greater understanding of the risks and controls, it is intended to support further innovation and remove inconsistency, seen to be an unnecessary cost on businesses struggling to recover from the recession.

The statistics for fire in England and Wales portray a remarkable story, over the period referred to in this paper. For reasons that include all of the above, and more, the headlines are (taken from Sir Ken Knights review „Facing the Future” May 2103) – in the last decade:

![Number of fatalities](image1)

![Breakdown of types of work done by Fire and Rescue Services 2001/2 – 2011/12](image2)

![Change in incidents between 2001/2 and 2011/12 (England)](image3)