



MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

Fire Service

‘Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014’



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Joint message from the Cathaoirleach and County Manager of Meath County Council

(To be provided)

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Foreword

Since the commissioning this Strategic Plan for the Meath County Council Fire Service the national economic climate has changed considerably. The country entered recession towards to the end of 2008 and is only now showing signs of recovery. This has had major implications on the public service as it has been targeted as a major area for financial savings in terms of national expenditure. This in turn has had implications for the Fire Service in that a new reality in terms of resources and staffing now faces the public sector. Essentially this new reality means top quality services must be maintained, and where possible further service improvements and efficiencies achieved, with less resources than may have been available heretofore.

The legal imperatives for the local authority have not changed however and consequently the focus of this Strategic Plan, particularly in the initial phase, will be very much on obligatory legislative requirements of the Fire Service. In this context Meath County Council Fire Service is a well equipped, accommodated, staffed and trained service which delivers on all its mandatory functions as set out in the Fire Services Act 1981.

In addition to the imperatives imposed by the Fire Service legislation recent tragic events elsewhere in the Fire Service have brought into sharp focus imperatives on Fire Authorities in terms of Safety Health and Welfare at Work legislation. The discharge of Health & Safety responsibilities places an onus on Fire Authorities to develop the appropriate process and procedures. Although assistance is available to the Fire Authority by way of generic documents and templates it in no way substitutes for the need to provide and regularly review site and location specific documentation to discharge its responsibilities under the act.

Meath in Context

The growth in the Irish economy and the variable spatial distribution of this growth has been accompanied by a changing demographic structure across the state. Between 1991 and 2006 the overall population of the state increased by 20.3% to 4.23 million.

The Mid-East region incorporating counties Meath, Kildare and Wicklow experienced a rate of 46.1% between 1991-2006 to reach its current population of 475,360. The population in Co. Meath increased by 54.5% in this period to 162,831. The population of the state increased by 8.2% between 2002-2006, whereas Co. Meath increased at a staggering 21.5%. This growth rate is only surpassed by Fingal with a percentage change of 22.2%.

The geographical position of the Co. Meath is important in any assessment of recent development trends and future prospects. The county is, on the one hand, part of the Greater Dublin Area and, on the other hand, much of its boundary is shared with counties which are part of the Objective One Border Midland West (BMW) region. Development in the south, east and northeast of the county is very much influenced by the opportunities and pressures emanating from the Dublin metropolitan area and to a lesser extent from Drogheda and Dundalk, while much of the west and northwest is more rural and essentially constitutes an inner periphery.

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Co. Meath has a diverse low-lying topography that includes extensive rich pastures throughout the Boyne and Black-water river valleys, drumlin hills in the north, tracts of peatland and raised bog in the southwest and a coastline of 12 kilometres in the east. There are five Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within the county, one Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) – the Boyne Estuary - as well as 22 Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). The landscape contains a rich heritage of national monuments, including the internationally renowned passage tombs at Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth all located in the valley of the river Boyne, and Loughcrew near Oldcastle in the northwest, as well as a number of significant historical sites including Kells, Trim and Slane.

Recent patterns of development within the county are considerably influenced by the location of key items of infrastructure as well as the settlement pattern that has evolved over centuries. Three National Primary Roads, the M1/N1, N2 and M3/N3 extend northwards from Dublin through the county to Dundalk and Belfast (M1), through Slane to Monaghan (N2) and via Navan to Cavan (M3/N3) while the M4/N4 extends across the south of the county to the Northwest and West. Two National Secondary roads (N51 and N52) extend across the county in a South-west to North-east direction through Navan and Kells respectively.

The Dublin-Belfast rail line extends along the east coast (serving Laytown & Gormanston) and the Dublin-Sligo line extends through the south of the county (serves Enfield). Navan is currently served by a spur railway line from the Dublin-Belfast main line, for freight traffic only (zinc and lead concentrates from Tara Mines in Navan to Dublin Port) connecting at Drogheda. The direct rail line to Dublin remains closed, though plans are drawn up to reopen it in line with current government transport policy.

Navan, the county town, is the principal urban centre with 24,842 inhabitants. Ashbourne, Trim, Laytown-Bettystown, Kells, and Dunboyne are towns with populations in excess of 5,000. Most of the other settlements are small, apart from those in the south and east of the county, which have experienced rapid growth over recent years associated with the influx of commuters from Dublin. The small size and dormitory nature of some of these settlements is a limitation that affects the volume of commercial and retail activity in the county. In this respect Co. Meath is very different from Co. Kildare. Many of the smaller centres, especially in the more rural parts of the county experienced some decline in the early 1990s. However, this trend was reversed in almost all centres in the inter-censal period 1996-2006

In terms of workforce some 37.6% (approx 28,000) are both living and employed within the county (mainly in agriculture, retail, manufacturing & tourism). 19.6% of the workforce is classed as 'mobile workers' (no fixed place of work). The remaining 42.7% of the workforce are classed as commuters and work outside Co. Meath. The primary destinations are Dublin City, Fingal, Louth, South Dublin and Kildare. The three Dublin counties of Fingal (48.2%), DLR (47.5%) and South Dublin (46%) have the highest levels of out-commuting among Irish counties. Co. Meath has the fourth highest level at 42.7%. Counties Kildare and Wicklow have much lower levels of out-commuters at 36% and 37% respectively. As expected the highest proportions of out-commuters are on the periphery of the county, in particular in the south and south-east (18 Co. Meath electoral divisions have in excess of 60% of their workforce commuting out of the county). Over 12,000 people commute to Dublin City every day

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to employment destinations. The highest proportions that do so are again in the south and east of the county. There is also evidence of high proportions of Dublin City commuters along the M3/N3 corridor towards Navan.

Meath County Council: An Overview

Meath County Council is the primary unit of Local Government in Co. Meath. There are 29 members of Meath County Council. 3 Town Councils are located in Navan, Trim and Kells, which have responsibility for the provision of particular services associated with these urban areas. Meath County Council (including the 3 Town Councils) is one of the county's major employers, currently employing over 700 staff.

Set out below is a number of broad organisation-wide objectives to guide and shape the direction of the functions of the Council.

- Promote a positive image of Co. Meath as a place to live, an ideal tourist destination and a business location of choice for investors.
- Deliver efficient and effective services for our citizens.
- Plan and develop the social and physical infrastructure of Co. Meath to strengthen our communities.
- Facilitate and stimulate sustainable economic growth and employment opportunities.
- Support and enhance community participation and local democracy.
- Develop our Towns as living, viable, community and commercial centres.

The achievement of these Corporate Objectives is by means of strategic functional objectives and supporting strategies in the areas of Housing & Building, Water & Waste-water, Roads & Transportation, Environmental Protection & Awareness, Planning & Development, Community, Recreation & Amenity and Economic Development. They set out the aims of the local authority over the lifetime of this plan and prioritise the supporting strategies to achieve these aims.

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Executive Summary

The following Executive Summary sets out the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications of the main report. It must be noted that this plan involved a thorough review of the Meath County Council Fire Service including the section's interaction with other sections of the local authority. It also involved substantial consultation with the various stakeholders.

With widespread input and consultations it is notable that there is a wide diversity of views on the role of the Fire Service into the future, its organization and its integration with the core activities of the local authority. Throughout the consultation process it emerged that there was consensus that:

- The Meath County Council Fire Service is well accommodated, well equipped and well trained to discharge its day to day operational duties. It was noted that morale is high amongst the Fire-fighters.
- The Fire Service Change Programme has made a positive contribution to the development of the Fire Service - specifically:
 - The Community Fire Safety project is viewed as a new, necessary and rewarding element of the Fire Service work
 - The Incident Command Strategy with particular emphasis on the concept of defensive fire-fighting as opposed to the traditional out and out offensive fire-fighting is perceived as extremely beneficial for the safety of the fire personnel
- Operationally it is considered that the service delivered on the ground would stand up to scrutiny with any other Fire Authority in the country.

Part One is an Introduction which sets out the background to the plan, the methodology employed, those consulted and the consultation process.

- Section 1: Existing organizational arrangements sets out the existing structures in the Meath County Council Fire Service.
- Section 2: Corporate legislative responsibilities governing the provision of Fire Services in Ireland.
- Section 3: Standards currently employed in the provision of the Fire Service.
- Section 4: Details of each of the Fire Stations, the service members and the fire ground served.
- Section 5: Details of the discharge of the Fire Prevention function in Co. Meath.
- Section 6: Details of the provision for responding to a Major Emergency.
- Section 7: Arrangements for the provision of Building Control.
- Section 8: The Fire Service role in Planning Development and Control.
- Section 9: Details of the organization of Civil Defence in Co. Meath.
- Section 10: Information in relation to Human Resources and Finances.
- Section 11: Current interfaces and reporting relationships.
- Section 12: Safety Health and Welfare at Work issues.

Part Two of the document sets out the recommendations which constitute the 'Strategic Plan'. There are thirty nine recommendations with a brief explanation of the reason the particular recommendation is proposed.

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A summary of the recommendations is as follows:

Section 1: Organisation

1. Restructure the Fire Service as a Business Centre with three Business Units in the long term.
2. Carry out modest restructuring in the short to medium term as an interim step to developing the final structure.

Section 2: Corporate/Legislative Responsibilities

3. Prepare a detailed Section 26 Fire and Emergency Services Operations Plan as per Fire Services Act 1981.
4. Enter into a Section 85/86 agreement under the Local Government Act 2001 with Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority.

Section 3: Standards Employed

5. Formally adopt specific written Standards of Fire Cover.
6. Set-up an inventory of all accredited Training Instructors in each section of the Council.
7. Reorganize the provision of Fire Service Instruction with a view to reducing the level of Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer participation.
8. Train a number of retained Junior Officers as Fire Service Instructors.
9. Plan the timely provision of refresher training to comply with accepted norms.
10. The number of trained First Responders per brigade to average about half the membership.
11. Seek the implementation of the '3 question' protocol for determining the need to call out fire brigades to Road Traffic Accidents.

Section 4: Station Areas

12. Acquire a suitable site in or close to Navan with a view to constructing a new headquarters for the revamped Meath County Council Fire & Building Control Services Section.
13. Acquire a suitable site with a view to constructing a new Fire Station in or near to Dunshaughlin.
14. Extend and improve the existing Fire Station at Oldcastle.
15. Provide a training yard at Nobber Fire Station in line with national guidelines.
16. Interim callout arrangements to deal with congestion issues in the vicinity of Navan Fire Station when they occur.
17. Review the complement in each brigade in accordance with current national guidance.
18. Promote in the community the non core emergency response capabilities of the fire Service e.g. First Responder and Defibrillation.
19. Carry out a complete review of the Pre-determined Attendances (PDA's) throughout the county.

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Section 5: Fire Prevention

20. Develop a comprehensive policy statement in relation to Fire Prevention on the discharge of its statutory duties under the Fire Services Acts and the various Licensing Acts.
21. Develop a proactive policy in relation to structures regulated by the Dangerous Substances Acts and associated regulations.
22. Develop a written policy as to the role of the Fire Service in relation to Dangerous Structures legislation.

Section 6: Major Emergency Planning

23. Setup a working group of Senior Fire Officers and the Civil Defence Officer in order to agree specific roles for both Fire and Civil Defence Services at a Major Incident or Major Emergency.
24. Major Emergency exercises involving all emergency response should be held every three years on average with regular desktop and communications exercises in the intervening years.

Section 7: Building Control

25. Create an integrated Fire & Building Control Services Section.
26. Develop an inspectorial capacity in relation to Building Control with a capacity to provide assistance on an agency basis to other sections of the Council such as the Planning and Environment Sections.
27. Develop an administrative capacity for the administration of all aspects of the Fire & Building Control Service functions.

Section 8: Planning Development Control Reports

28. Planning files that the case planner would be disposed to recommending a grant of planning permission only to be referred to the Fire Service for comment.
29. In addition to processing Commencement Notices the I-Plan system also to be populated by Building Control

Section 9: Civil Defence

30. Consolidate Civil Defence and Fire Service resources in Navan on one unitary campus.
31. Make arrangements for Civil Defence to provide training for the Fire Service e.g. First Responder Training and Refresher Training.
32. Training in fire-fighting to be provided to Civil Defence by Fire Service

Section 10: HR and Financial Issues

33. Review the funding of the Fire Service in order to a level closer to the National Average (commensurate with available resources).
34. Target the increased funding on those areas identified as less well-resourced in this report.
35. Proactively engage with Fire-fighters in relation to the self development and anti-discriminatory initiatives organized by the Human Resources Section.

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36. The supervision of Training Drills should be formally set down.

Section 11: Safety Health & Welfare at Work

37. Reorganize the processes and procedures in the Fire Service in order to ensure the Safety Health and Welfare of all Fire-fighters.

38. Arrange for an audit of all aspects of the Safety Health & Welfare arrangements in the Fire Service by the Health & Safety Officer to the Council.

39. Actively involve the Council's Health and Safety Officer a program for Health and Safety in the Fire Service.

Part Three sets out a recommended schedule for implementing the plan.

Part Four is a separate document which includes the appendices that went into informing the plan.

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PART ONE

Background

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Introduction

Meath County Council commissioned the *Murty Hanly & Associates* to develop a **‘Meath County Council Fire Services – Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014’**. The purpose of the exercise is to determine whether the current Fire Service arrangements are adequate to allow Meath County Council to discharge its statutory functions under the Fire Services Act 1981 & 2003 and to bring forward an integrated plan for the effective and efficient delivery of the Fire Services Act 1981 & 2003 and associated statutory responsibilities which could be strategically operated within the Fire Service functional area.

The following report sets out the basis of appraisal of the existing arrangements. The appraisal is based on an understanding of existing statutory requirements, the requirements of Meath County Councils Corporate Plan 2004 – 2009 & draft Corporate Plan 2009 - 2014, recent reports on the Fire Services (Review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland 2002, by Farrell Grant Sparks and the consultant Mr. Murty Hanly in his experience as a Chief Fire Officer and Director of Service with responsibility for Fire Services.

The Farrell Grant Sparks report, which was commissioned by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, is the most up to-date comprehensive review of the Irish Fire Service and involved inputs from all the relevant stakeholders throughout the country. As this report was accepted and approved by government and endorsed by all the main players in the Irish Fire Service, its relevant findings will be drawn on to support the writer’s appraisal of the current fire cover arrangements in Co. Meath.

In preparing the Strategic Plan it is necessary to have regard to:

1. Establishing the current arrangements for the provision of a Fire Service in Co. Meath;
2. Establishing the appropriate standards that the Council’s Fire Service should aspire to;
3. Preparing a detailed Strategic Plan setting out in a structured way by which the Council can move from the current position to that advocated in the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan will be mindful of resources available both locally and nationally as well as the Fire Service’s own ability to generate resources internally and to leverage such resources which currently exist in order to improve the overall resource base of the Fire Service.

The review process necessitated a series of meetings with key senior stakeholders in order to set out the need for the Strategic Plan, the methodology to be employed and to elicit the information necessary to inform this plan.

Those consulted include:

- Cllr. William Carey MCC, Chairman of Meath County Council (2009 – 2010)
- Mr. Brendan McGrath, Director of Services, Environment/Water, Human Resources & Emergency Services / Dunshaughlin Area Manager
- Mr. Michael Stack, Chief Fire Officer
- Mr. Padraig O’Longaigh, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer

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- Mr. Barry Quinn, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer
- Mr. Alfie Kavanagh, Station Officer, Navan Fire Station
- Mr. Ger Murphy, A/Senior Executive Officer, Environment/Water & Emergency Services
- Ms. Catherine Kelly, Clerical Officer, Fire Service
- Mr. Larry McEntee, Administrative Officer, Infrastructure
- Mr. Michael Fitzsimons Civil Defence Officer & A/Major Emergency Planning Officer
- Mr. Michael Griffin, Senior Executive Officer, Planning
- Ms. Aine Bird, Administrative Officer, Dunshaughlin Area (formally Planning)
- Mr. John Sweeney, Building Control Officer, Planning
- Representatives of IMPACT and SIPTU trade unions
- Personnel from each of the Meath County Council Fire Stations
- Civil Defence personnel in Navan
- Chief Fire Officers and representatives of adjoining authorities
- Officials from the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management

A debt of gratitude is owed to all those who contributed to the consultative meetings and those who participated in the preparation of the information provided on the arrangements currently in place to deliver the Fire Service in Co. Meath.

A critical element in the preparation of the plan was the visiting of each Fire Station in the county in order to:

1. Assure the Fire Service personnel of the potential benefits of the analysis and associated Strategic Plan;
2. Establish the Fire Service personnel's assessment of the service as currently delivered and shortcomings they may have identified in resources either accommodation, plant, equipment, personnel, personal protective clothing and/or training etc.;
3. Establish the expectations and ambitions of the Fire Service personnel and discuss how realistic they may be and realisable in the current changed economic environment.

While it was not possible to relay verbatim all issues raised at the consultative meetings the report comments on the issues which arose in a number of Fire Stations and the issues that would properly form part of a Strategic Plan for the future.

The recommendations and the programme for implementation represent a reasonable, economical and feasible Strategic Plan for the development of the Meath County Council Fire Service.

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Section 1: Background

Existing Organisational Arrangements

Meath County Council is the Fire Authority for the County of Meath with an arrangement existing with Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority dating back to 1951 for the provision of certain operational services in East Meath. However, this arrangement does not appear to have been formalised as is required under the Fire Services Act 1981.

Personnel

The current senior personnel of Meath County Council Fire Service are as follows:

- Chief Fire Officer (1)
- Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer (2)

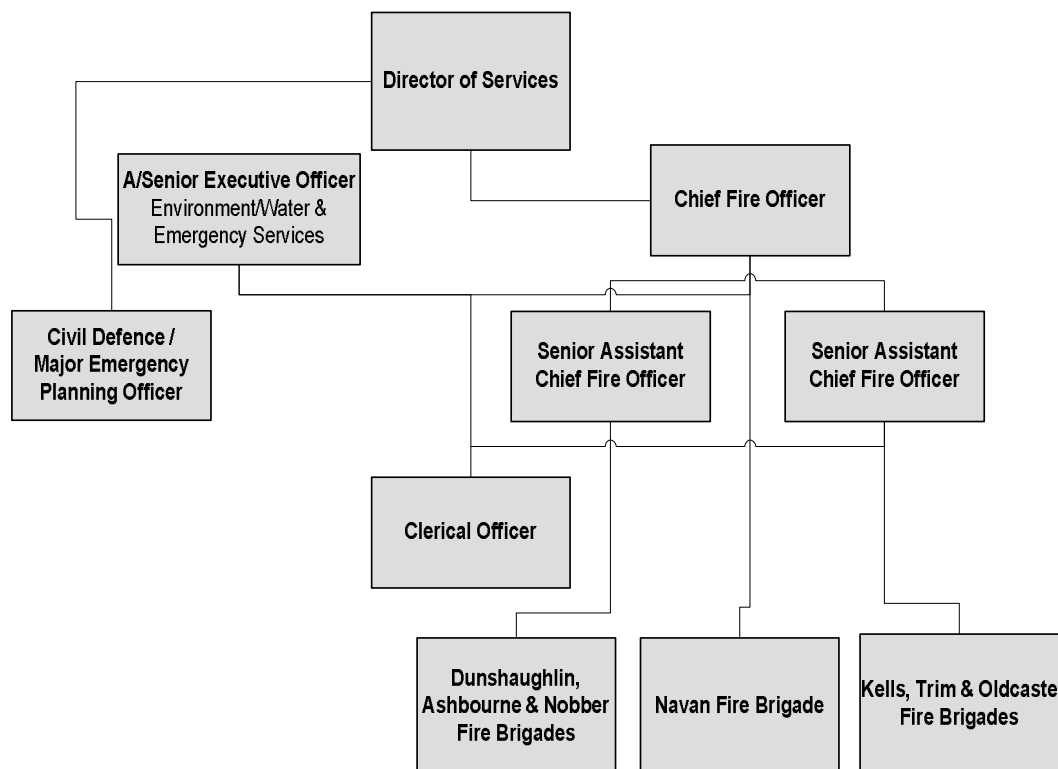
Clerical/administrative personnel are as follows:

- Clerical Officer (1 full-time, plus 2 part-time)

See Fig 1 below for current Fire & Emergency Service staff which excludes 2 vacant positions of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (1 vacant as of 2009 and the other – Emergency Planning, vacant as of 2008).

There is one full-time Station Officer, located at Navan Fire Station, while the remainder of the stations (Trim, Kells, Dunshaughlin, Oldcastle, Nobber and Ashbourne) consist entirely of retained (i.e. part-time) personnel.

Fig: 1 **Meath County Council Fire Service current staff (2010)**



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It should be noted that in comparison with other comparator counties the staffing structure of the Meath County Council Fire Service could be described as below average from a numbers perspective. In deciding comparator counties such factors as area, population, number of incidents and proximity to Dublin or other large centres of population suggested themselves as relevant comparators.

The Fire Authorities selected for comparison purposes are as follows:

Table 1: Staff comparison to other counties

Authority	Area	Population	Incidents	Full-time Staff	Population per Head of Staff	Incidents per Head of Population
Meath	2342km ²	162,831	1246	3	40708	130.5
Kildare	1693km ²	186,335	1773	7	26619	105.1
Wicklow	2024km ²	126,194	879	4	31549	143.6
Donegal	4841km ²	147,264	1259	6	24544	117
Kerry	4746km ²	139,835	1316	10	13984	106.3

It is worth noting that the average population nationally per Senior Fire Officer is 24,950 while the average in the comparator group above is 27,481. This would suggest that a complement of six or seven Senior Fire Officers (exclusive of Civil Defence) to discharge the duties carried out by the Fire Service currently would be an appropriate complement for Co. Meath. The current staffing of three Senior Fire Officers means that the service has the potential to be compromised or restricted by the need to over prioritize the workload of the Senior Officers.

From an administrative perspective the staffing of one Clerical Officer (plus 2 part-time Clerical Officers) is unique amongst the Fire Authorities. The administrative structure varies from authority to authority depending on the level of the clerical and administrative work carried out in the Fire Service. It would however seem appropriate considering the breadth of administrative work associated with the service that a clerical/administrative staff structure, with appropriate supervisory staff, be put in place.

Under the terms of '*Better Local Government – A Programme for Change*' the management of the technical, the clerical/administrative staff and the financial budget in the Fire Service is the responsibility of the Chief Fire Officer and his Senior Officers. However, at present it would appear that all financial matters have gravitated to the Finance Section including the setting of the budget and responsibility for billing and cash collection, although the Chief Fire Officer has exercised discretion within his budget allocation.

Currently the clerical/administrative duties are divided between the Environment and Planning Sections with the exception of one Clerical Officer (plus 2 part-time Clerical Officers primarily based in the Environment Section) in the Fire Service. Although each section has expressed satisfaction with the current arrangements it would appear that there is a lack of coherency which in turns diminishes the capacity of the Fire Service to discharge its duties. This particular area would benefit from re-structuring.

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Section 2: Corporate & Legislative Responsibilities

The Fire Services Act, 1981 & 2003 is the main legislative and statutory basis for Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland. This act provides for the establishment of Fire Authorities and makes provision for the organisation of the Fire Service, training of fire personnel, fire-fighting and fire-safety functions, and any other matters relating to the protection of people and property from fire.

In addition to the Fire Services Act, Fire Authorities are also obliged to carry out functions under a number of other Acts and EU Directives of which all of the following have some resonance with the Fire Service:

- Building Control Act. 1990 & 2007 and associated Building and Building Control Regulations
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- Dangerous Substances Act 1979 and associated regulations
- Local Government Planning and Development Acts 2000 & 2002
- Dance Halls Act 1935 and Registration of Clubs Act 1904
- Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964 in relation to Dangerous Structures.
- Explosives Act 1875
- Civil Defence Act 2002
- Various Licensing Acts 1883 to 2008
- EU Directives Transposed into Irish Law e.g. Seveso etc.

The activities performed by each Fire Service, in the discharge of these statutory functions, can generally be divided into two broad categories i.e. Responding to Emergencies (or Emergency Response services) and Fire Prevention / Safety Services.

Emergency Response Services

The present arrangement for the provision of Emergency Response services in each Fire Authority is governed by Section 10 (2) & (3) of the Fire Services Act.

Section 10

(2) *A Fire Authority shall:*

- (a) make provision for the prompt and efficient extinguishment of fires in buildings and other places of all kinds in its functional area and for the protection and rescue of persons and property from injury by fire, and*
- (b) establish and maintain a fire brigade, provide premises and make such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable for such purposes, and*
- (c) make adequate provision for the reception of and response to call for assistance of the fire brigade.*

(3) *A Fire Authority shall, on the exercise of its functions under subsection (2), have relevant considerations) to the nature of the fire hazards and the probable incidence and extent of fires in its functional area, the character of the area and the value of the property liable to be damaged by fires.*

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An interpretation of this section of the Act has been provided in the most recent review of the Irish Fire Service carried out by Farrell Grant Sparks on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

‘Each Local Authority/Fire Authority is therefore responsible for the provision of fire cover in their area and the setting of their own standards’.

‘Fire cover’ means the level of Emergency Response service provided by each Fire Authority.

Section 10 Sub-Section 5 – 8 allows for Fire Authorities to enter into agreements with one another.

(5) (a) *A fire authority may, by agreement, provide services for or avail of the services of any body or person other than a fire authority.*

(b) *An agreement under section 2 (3) (b) of the Fire Brigades Act, 1940, in force immediately before the commencement of this section and made by a sanitary authority which becomes a fire authority, shall continue in force and shall be deemed to be an agreement under this section.*

(6) (a) *Whenever it appears to the Minister that an agreement under section 59 of the Local Government Act, 1955 , ought to be made between fire authorities for the purpose of any of their functions he may, after affording an opportunity to the authorities concerned to make representations to him, require them to enter into an agreement.*

(b) *The Minister may direct that any such agreement shall contain such terms as he may specify and the authorities concerned shall comply with any direction given by the Minister.*

(7) *The making of agreements under this section shall be a reserved function.*

(8) *It shall be the duty of a fire authority which is a party to an agreement to which this section relates to furnish the Minister with a copy of the agreement.*

In addition to Section 10 each Fire Authority must prepare a plan pursuant to Section 26 of the Fire Services Act 1981.

Section 26 states:-

‘Each Fire Authority which maintains a Fire Brigade shall prepare (and, as the occasion requires, revise) plans for fire and emergency operations showing the provision made by it in respect of organisation, appliances, equipment, fire stations, water supplies and extinguishing agents, training, operational procedures and such matters as may be relevant and for dealing with operations of an emergency nature under Section 25’

Section 25 states:-

‘A Fire Authority may carry out or assist in any operations of an emergency nature, whether or not a risk of fire is involved, and a fire authority may accordingly make such provision for rescue or safeguarding of persons and

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protection of property as it considers necessary for the purposes of that function'

Section 26 of the Act is a reserved function i.e. it requires the Fire & Operations Plan to be approved and adopted by the elected members of each Fire Authority.

The Fire Service's Draft Section 26 Plan should be reviewed as a matter of urgency and implemented as soon as possible. The provision of a properly approved Section 26 Plan legitimises and benchmarks all activities of the Fire Service in a county. It is essential in order to maintain compliance with not only the statutory and corporate responsibility of the authority but to ensure proper standards of customer services.

Fire Prevention / Safety Services

The present arrangement for the provision of Fire Prevention / Safety Services in each Fire Authority is primarily governed by the following Sections of the Fire Services Act 1981 and 2003 (Sections 10, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 & 37) and the Building Control Act 1990 and 2007..

The role of a Fire Authority in the Provision of Fire Prevention / Safety services is to provide expert advice, promote and develop a fire safety culture in the community and to exercise the regulatory controls required by the Fire Services Act, Building Control Act and the other Acts listed above.

Following the introduction of the Fire Services Act in 1981 and arising out of the Report of the Stardust Tribunal Inquiry June 1982, Fire Authorities throughout the country have developed Fire Prevention / Safety Departments within their Fire Service structures. These departments have been staffed with Senior Fire Officers who are required to possess professional technical qualifications in the areas of Engineering, Architecture and/or Science.

The introduction of a Fire Certification System under the Building Control Act in 1990 provided additional control mechanisms with respect to fire safety in the built environment and these have been incorporated into the day to day operations of the Fire Prevention/Safety Sections. In addition to the Fire Certification System, a number of local authorities throughout the country assigned the full range of functions required under the Building Control Act including the inspectorial function to their Fire Service Section. This decision was made on the basis that their Fire Service personnel possessed the requisite knowledge, expertise and experience and had well developed inspectorial and enforcement procedures to meet the requirements of the Act.

While the arrangements in respect of Building Control vary from one local authority to another the current arrangements in Meath County Council should be reviewed with a view to primarily locating the Building Control function in either the Planning Section or Fire Service Section as deemed appropriate.

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Section Three: Standards Employed

Standards of Fire Cover

The current regime in Ireland for the determination of standards of fire cover is based very much on the application of generic categories of risk (UK Model) to the areas covered by Fire Stations and then setting Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) for each category (i.e. setting the length of time to reach the incident – speed of response, and the number/type of appliances and man-power necessary to deal with the incident-weight of response).

The speed of response is defined as ‘the length of time to reach an emergency incident’. This time period is made up two elements (‘turn-out time’ and ‘travel time’):

- The ‘turn-out time’ is the time it takes from the activation of the Fire-fighters alertors to fire appliance/s leaving the relevant station. It is governed by the type of staffing arrangements within the particular Fire Station. For full-time Fire-fighters this time period is approximately one minute and retained fire-fighters approximately five minutes.
- The ‘travel time’ is the time it takes for a fire appliance/s to reach the emergency incident. This time is governed by the number and location of Fire Stations located within and around a particular Fire Authority’s functional area.

The weight of response is defined as ‘the number, type of appliances and manpower to deal with the incident’. Depending on the type of risk the weight of response can vary from a single pump turn-out to a multiple pump (appliance) turn-out with the appropriate number of Fire-fighters to man the appliance/s.

The setting of the PDAs for a Fire Authority’s functional area will determine the number and location of Fire Stations, the number of fire appliances in each station, the number of Fire-fighters in each station and the type of Fire-fighter employed (full-time or retained) in each station.

The current position with respect standards of fire cover in the Irish Fire Service is detailed in the most up-to-date report by Farrell Grant Sparks ‘*The Review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland 2002*’.

The following extract from the Farrell Grant Sparks report outlines the current arrangements for the determination of standards of fire cover in Ireland. The extract also highlights the weaknesses in these arrangements and recommends the development and implementation of a national standard in line with the ‘risk-based approach’ currently accepted in most European and developed countries.

‘The current regime in Ireland for the determination of standards of fire cover is now out-moded by reference to international trends and best practice. The system used by fire authorities is based very much on applying generic categories of risk (crude A to E or 1 to 5 scales) and then setting Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) for each category (i.e. setting the length of time to reach the incident – speed of response- and the number/type of

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appliances and manpower to deal with the incident - weight of response). Most European and developed countries have now moved, or are now in the process of moving, to a risk-based approach to determining fire cover. The risk-based approach is a much more structured methodology for determining fire cover which examines in detail the risks in an area and takes into account a wide variety of variables such as population density, types and uses of buildings, in-built engineered fire safety solutions, access, topography, potential for spread of fire, other risks (factories, hazardous substances etc). It essentially seeks to develop a risk profile of the area and to determine fire and emergency cover based on the risk profile. With the massive changes which have taken place in Ireland in relation to demographics, location of industry, changing types of industry, general planning and development by region, changes in patterns of living, work and leisure etc., we need to upgrade our current approach and move to a risk-based approach for determining standards of fire cover. Such an approach needs to be led from the centre on a consistent national basis, to be applied locally and to be monitored centrally as regards compliance with minimum standards to ensure consistency of application.'

In the absence of a National Standard the requirement is on the Fire Authority to set its own standard. Farrell Grant Sparks found (extract below), that there is no uniform standard approach to fire cover throughout the country and that the approach adopted by most Fire Authorities is based to some extent on a UK model.

'The approach by Local Authorities to fire cover standards has primarily been based on having fire brigades in centres of population. While the approaches vary throughout the country, most Fire Authorities in reviewing fire cover have adopted, to a lesser or greater extent, the UK Class model A-D. Speed and weight of response as part of a PDA-based regime tend to be the main criteria used'.

It should be noted that there is an informal expectation that Fire Brigades will attend at incidents normally within twenty minutes. All exceedences of the twenty minute period are investigated by a Senior Fire Officer either on the foot of a complaint from the public or a report by the Station Officer in charge. It is recommended that existing informal arrangements in this regard should be reviewed and replaced with formal standards that reflect the standards elsewhere in the country.

It is noted that exceedences which occur are normally found to be as a result of:

1. Errors in activation by the Emergency Regional Callout Centre (ERCC) e.g. incorrect brigade activated for a specific location;
2. Errors in activation as a result of incompatibilities between (ERCC) and the independent call-out centres in Louth and Kildare;
3. Delayed activation by the HSE Emergency Ambulance Service;
4. Adverse road conditions;
5. Unexpected roadwork.

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Pre-Determined Attendances

The Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) for Co. Meath have been advised to CAMP East by the Chief Fire Officer. Each PDA is assigned a unique number, covers a specific geographical area, details the weight of the response and identifies the quickest response (station/s) to an emergency incident within the PDA geographical area. Once the number, geographical area and quickest response are assigned to a PDA, the maintenance of each PDA is primarily focused on the weight of response is maintained within each Fire Station. The reduction of manpower levels below a minimum level to crew the required fire appliances assigned by a particular PDA will result in the standard of fire cover not being maintained.

The circumstances which affect manpower levels (off-call, annual leave, sick leave, off station training etc.) are required to be factored into the overall assessment of manning levels for each Fire Station. Depending on the working arrangements within each Fire Authority the manning levels for one and two pump retained Fire Stations can vary. In fully retained Fire Stations manning levels should be greater in stations where rostering arrangements are in place than in unrostered stations. This is to accommodate in addition to the other types of absenteeism (outlined above) the number of rostered off-duty Fire-fighters. Meath County Council do not currently adopt rostering at a two pump Fire Station as provided for in the national agreement, the potential benefits of rostering should be reviewed.

In relation to manning levels the 'Composite Agreement' of 1999 recommended staff compliments of nine retained Fire-fighters in one pump station and fifteen Fire-fighters in two pump stations. Currently Navan, the only designated two pump station in the county, has a complement of fourteen while the assigned complement for the other stations is ten. In determining the complement a Fire Authority can look to other countries. In The Netherlands and Germany there has been a risk based approach adopted, and there currently are moves towards introducing a risk based approach in the UK. There should be a reluctance to import directly from other countries unless one is satisfied that all the circumstances are the same. With this in mind it is recommended to adhere to the national agreement.

Training

The requirement for Fire Authorities to provide training to their personnel is set out in the Fire Services Act 1981 Section 15:

- (1) It shall be the duty of a fire authority to make arrangements for the efficient training of the personnel of its fire services*
- (2) A fire authority may establish and maintain facilities for providing courses of instruction for the personnel of its own or other fire services and for training other persons in fire-fighting techniques, fire drill procedure, fire safety and analogous matters.*
- (3) The Minister may assist, as he thinks proper, fire authorities in relation to their functions under this section and may, in particular—*
 - (a) provide or arrange for the provision of instruction for the personnel of fire services and other persons and for the establishment and maintenance of training facilities (including a national training centre) and may make charges in respect of such instruction,*

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- (b) arrange for the conduct of examinations and tests, for the grant of certificates on the results thereof and for the recognition of certificates and other awards of other bodies.*
- (4) The Minister, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, may contribute towards the expenses of a fire authority in the provision of training facilities, subject to such conditions as he may impose concerning the availability and suitability of the facilities.*
- (5) The Minister, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, may contribute towards the expenses of a fire authority in sending members of the fire service on approved courses or in making persons available to provide training for members of other fire services or of other bodies.*

Fire-fighters are trained by qualified trainers in accordance with guidelines provided by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government Fire Directorate and the Fire Services Council. The training provided for a recruit Fire-fighter is as follows:

1. A two week Recruit Induction Course (Category A)
2. A two week Breathing Apparatus Initial Wearers Course (Category A)

The syllabus for both courses is set by the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government. Further training is provided by way of standard drills and procedures (as set out in the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government Drill Training Night Programme) in order to ensure proficiency.

Advanced training is provided in the following areas:

1. Incident Command System
2. Compartment Fire Behaviour Training
3. Cardiac and Emergency First Responder
4. CAFS Training
5. Eight Day Advanced Chainsaw training – 2 per station
6. Sub-Aqua Dive Unit – Navan Fire Brigade
7. RTA Training
8. Hazardous Materials Training
9. Environmental Response – Response to Marine Spills
10. Manual Handling

Meath County Council Fire Service operates a comprehensive and detailed regime of drills and training courses. A Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer attends most drills. The two Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers and the full-time Station Officer in Navan provide or participate in most training courses.

In relation to training a number of the Fire Station personnel expressed the following views:

1. More Fire Service personnel should receive First Responder Training.
2. Intervals between refreshers in First Responder Training in certain instances exceeded that approved by the qualifying body.
3. Intervals between refreshers in Manual Handling on occasion exceeded that recommended by the Health and Safety Authority.
4. Manual Handling training provided should be reviewed in accordance with current industry standards.

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It must be noted that the implementation of the new Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) will inform the Fire Service Training regime from 2010 going forward.

Equipment

Meath County Council Fire Services comply with '*Fire Service Manual Volume 1, Fire Service Technology Equipment and Media Inspection and Testing of Equipment*' and ensure that the following is adhered to:

- Equipment is suitable for its intended use and the environment in which it will be used;
- Equipment is adequately inspected and maintained;
- Equipment is risk assessed;
- Equipment is identifiable;
- Ensuring that users, supervisors, managers and maintainers of equipment are competent;
- Safe working practices are implemented.

The above is carried out in accordance with an in house booklet entitled '*Testing & Inspection of Equipment Instruction*' for inspection and test requirements for Fire Service equipment.

In relation to the testing and inspection of equipment, while the guide is comprehensive not all items have guidance on the frequency of tests and the guidance on the recording of the carrying out of tests only refers to 'in the event of failure'. It is recommended that it is important to record the date tested, by whom and the result of the tests. These test results should be then retained in a register and be available for inspection. All stations when surveyed did not indicate they had all the appropriate manuals and safe work practice sheets. This should be formally checked however.

Stations

It is noted that the only guidance provided in relation to Fire Stations is a draft guideline '*Planning and Financial Procedures for Fire Station Projects*' as issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in June 2002.

In addition to the above guideline there is also guidance provided in the Fire Service Ancillary Safety Statement in relation to Fixed Workplaces contained in Sections 3 and 4 and Appendices 5, 8, 9, 10, 12 & 13.

It is necessary to carry out a hazard analysis and risk assessment and to record the specific risk assessment for each Fire Station as required under Section 19 of the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

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Section Four: Station Areas

The following is a profile of each of the seven Fire Stations in Co. Meath including details of the following:

1. Staffing
2. Description of each station
3. Assessment of equipment at each station
4. Statistics on each station as provided by CAMP

Navan Fire Station

Staffing (14):

- Full-time Station Officer - 1
- Sub-Station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 2
- Fire Fighter - 10

Navan Fire Station is the County Fire Services Headquarters. The station was constructed in 1998. It is located adjacent to the Garda Headquarters and Navan Shopping Centre on Abbey Road, Navan. It is strategically located close to the existing ring road and by-pass. It is considered by the Chief Fire Officer and staff in general as being suitably located although it is noted that during 'race days' and busy shopping periods Fire-fighters can experience difficulty in responding in adequate numbers within the accepted set time-frame.

The station contains four single and three double bays and receives on average 440 call-outs per annum. The station is in good condition both structurally and in appearance externally, although internally it may be in need of small-scale refurbishment.

The station is assigned ten appliances. The first turn-out is a 2008 Class B appliance. The second turn-out is a 2002 Class B appliance. The balance of eight 'special appliances' vary in age from eight to eighteen years and consist of the following:

- Emergency Tenders
- Water Tanker
- 1 Hydraulic Platform
- 1 Control Unit
- 4-Wheel Drive Vehicles
- 1 Chemical/Environmental Incident Unit

Navan Fire Station as well as serving the town of Navan serves a large rural area surrounding the town. In addition to providing first response to its own fire-ground Navan provides support to the surrounding stations of Kells, Nobber, Trim, Dunshaughlin, Ashbourne and Oldcastle. In this regard the full-time Station Officer is a key support to the surrounding 'retained' stations.

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The average response times for Navan Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out as per below.

- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires: 4:40
- Number of incidents: 204
- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Special Services: 6:15
- Number of incidents: 59

% Breakdown of calls from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time in Attendance' for Fires
< 10 mins: 46.60% 10-20 mins: 48.17% >20 mins: 5.24%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 25.42% 10-20 mins: 45.76% >20 mins: 28.81%

It is recommended that as a result of Navan Fire Station's location in a strategically important commercial area it would not be considered suitable for expansion because of existing difficulties and the potential for further congestion issues.

The views of the Fire Station personnel on a variety of topics are noted. This includes their opposition to rostering and their aspiration to become a full-time Fire Station.

The average Time Mobile for fires at four minutes and forty seconds is within the accepted norm of five minutes. However the average Time Mobile for Special Services at six minutes and fifteen seconds is outside the norm. The number of Special Services with attendance times in excess of twenty minutes at 28.81% should be reviewed.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. Problems with CAMP in relation to incorrect addresses and incorrect reference points;
2. First Responder Refresher Training for some personnel needs to be updated;
3. The Council could use their own Junior Officer instructors more often;
4. The sub-aqua river rescue facility did not tend to be used until recently.

Trim Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Trim Fire Station was constructed in 1989 and is designated as a one pump station with three bays. It is located at Maidlins in Trim, on the Ring Road. The station is very accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and suitably located from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. However the station would be unsuitable for expansion if necessary. The station is in excellent condition structurally both externally and internally. It should be noted that Trim Fire Station as well as serving the town of Trim serves a large rural hinterland.

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The station is assigned three appliances. The first turn-out is a 2003 Class B appliance. The second turn-out is a 1989 Class B appliance. The third appliance is a 1995 IZUZU Trooper. Overall the station is very well equipped and the appropriate manual for all equipment is on station.

The response times for Trim Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out as per below.

• Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires:	4:50
• Number of incidents:	108
• Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile':	4:35
• Number of incidents:	33

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 26.53% 10-20 mins: 31.63% >20 mins: 41.84%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 17.24% 10-20 mins: 48.28% >20 mins: 34.48%

It is noted that the average time mobile to fires and special services is within the expected norm of five minutes. However the percentage of attendances in excess of twenty minutes for fires at 41.8% and special services at 34.48 is outside norms and should be investigated with a view to establishing what is causing this situation.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. Difficulties with Fire Stations in neighbouring counties in relation to station ground particularly Mullingar (Co. Westmeath) and Maynooth (Co. Kildare);
2. Existing PDAs need to be reviewed and modified as they may not be the nearest i.e. fastest responding brigades are on the existing PDA's;
3. Refresher training in manual handling for some personnel is overdue;
4. There is a need for a formal protocol to address incorrect directions and other errors by CAMP;
5. Provision of a separate driving licence for drivers of emergency vehicles in order to protect their private driving licences.

Kells Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Kells Fire Station was constructed in 1998 and is designated as a one pump station with two bays. It is located on the Oldcastle Road, Kells and receives approximately 140 call-outs per annum. The station is fairly accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. The site of the Fire Station would be capable of expansion if necessary. The overall condition and external structure of the station is excellent while the internal structure is very good. It is considered that some external and internal decoration is

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necessary. It should be noted that Kells Fire Station as well as serving the town of Kells serves a large rural hinterland.

The station is assigned three appliances. The first turn-out is a 2004 Class B appliance. The second turn-out is a 1992 Class B appliance. The third appliance is a 2001 Nissan Jeep. The station is generally very well equipped and the appropriate manual for all equipment is on station.

The response times for Kells Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out in the table below.

- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires: 4:52
- Number of incidents: 54
- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Special Services: 4:50
- Number of incidents: 24

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 39.62% 10-20 mins: 45.28% >20 mins: 15.09%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 33.33% 10-20 mins: 42.86% >20 mins: 23.81%

The average time mobile for the brigade is within the expected norm of five minutes. The percentage of attendance time in excess of twenty at 15.09% for fires and 23.81% should be monitored.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. CAMP – Confusion over townlands with the same name and large townlands with a number of different roads going through them;
2. Issue in relation to the issue of parking tickets by local authority Traffic Wardens while cars are left in town when on-call;
3. Gym facilities in the Fire Station and free access to the Council's Swimming Pool to facilitate maintenance of Fire-fighter fitness levels.

Dunshaughlin Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Dunshaughlin Fire Station was constructed in 1980 (approximately) and is designated as a one pump station with two bays. It is located on the Main Street, Dunshaughlin and receives approximately 200 call-outs per annum. It would appear that the station is fairly accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. The site of the Fire Station however has only a limited capacity for expansion if necessary. It should be noted that Dunshaughlin Fire Station as well as serving the town of Dunshaughlin serves a large rural hinterland.

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The external structure and the internal structure of the station are good. Some internal and external decoration may be necessary. The overall condition of the station is good but that the station is only fair from a suitability point of view.

The station is assigned four appliances. The first turn-out is a 2006 Class B appliance. The second turn-out is a 1996 Class B appliance. The third appliance is a 1995 Jeep. The fourth appliance is a 2007 mobile lighting unit.

The station is generally well equipped while a number of items are rated as fair /good/very good as distinct from the excellent rating given to the remainder of the equipment.

The response times for Dunshaughlin Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out as per below.

• Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires:	5:39
• Number of incidents:	74
• Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile':	4:42
• Number of incidents:	50

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 8.54% 10-20 mins: 73.17% >20 mins: 18.29%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 14.00% 10-20 mins: 62.00% >20 mins: 24%

The Time Mobile for fires at 5:39 is outside the expected norm of five minutes and should be monitored closely while the Time Mobile for Special Services at 4:42 is within the expected norm. The percentage of calls in excess of twenty minutes at 18.29 for fires and 24% for special services warrants examination and clarification. The Fire Station although thirty years old is in good condition. However it has a number of deficiencies and should be replaced. It may be necessary in the short-term to provide a temporary storage solution but relocation of the Fire Station would seem to be the medium to long-term solution.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. Problems with the station which was built circa 1980 and while the Fire Service personnel like the location they accept that it needs to be replaced at a more suitable location;
2. Gym facilities in order to help maintain fitness levels;
3. Lack of bottled water on appliances for use at incidents;
4. Opening of the new motorway bypassing Dunshaughlin will help solve traffic problems in the town but there are issues in relation to access which need to be resolved between the NRA and the Fire Service;
5. Payment slips do not always issue with pay cheques;
6. Need for increased First Responder and First Responder Refresher training.
7. Consideration to be given to an agreement with HSE to co-locate the Ambulance Service and Fire Service on the same site.

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Oldcastle Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Oldcastle Fire Station was constructed in 1980 and is designated as a one pump station with one bay. It is located at Millbrook Road, Oldcastle and receives approximately 50 call-outs per annum. It should be noted that Oldcastle Fire Station as well as serving the town of Oldcastle serves a large rural hinterland.

The station is fairly accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. The site of the Fire Station has excellent capacity for expansion if necessary. The overall condition of the station is good with some external and internal decoration necessary.

The station is assigned one appliance. This is a 1986 Class B appliance. The station is generally well equipped. The appropriate manual for all equipment is on station.

The response times for Oldcastle Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out in the table below.

- | | |
|---|------|
| • Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires: | 5:02 |
| • Number of incidents: | 29 |
| • Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Special Services: | 5:72 |
| • Number of incidents: | 9 |

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 46.67% 10-20 mins: 46.67% >20 mins: 6.67%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 54.55% 10-20 mins: 36.36% >20 mins: 9.09%

Note: There were thirteen calls in June but do not appear in the attendance at incident records from the CAMP printout.

The Time Mobile for fires at 5:02 is at the expected norm of five minutes and the Time Mobile for Special Services at 5.72 is outside the expected norm and should be monitored. The percentage of calls in excess of twenty minutes at 6.67% for fires and 9.09% for special services is slightly outside the expected norm.

Issues of concern to the Fire-fighters included:

1. Inadequate parking for Fire Station appliances;
2. Inadequate parking space for Fire-fighters vehicles;
3. A bottle bank located at the entrance to the Fire Station is causing problems for vehicles entering and exiting the Fire Station during call-outs (now removed and relocated elsewhere in Oldcastle);

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Specific locally raised issues include:

1. Short notice of nomination by Human Resources when nominated to go on courses;
2. Further education and IT training organised to suit full-time staff but not part-time staff such as Fire-fighters;
3. Lack of contact with Council officials other than Senior Fire Officers.

Nobber Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Nobber Fire Station was constructed in 1965 (approximately) and is designated as a one pump station with one bay. It is located in the centre of Nobber and receives approximately 35 call-outs per annum. It should be noted that Nobber Fire Station as well as serving the town of Nobber serves a large rural hinterland.

The station is fairly accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. The site of the Fire Station has a very limited capacity for expansion if necessary. The condition of the external and internal structures is fair but both externally and internally decoration is very necessary.

It should be noted that the station has no training yard (Navan Station is used for training exercises) and therefore does not comply with the DoEHLG draft guideline for Fire Stations. It is recommended that this be addressed as soon as possible.

The station is assigned two appliances. The first turn-out is a 1987 Class B appliance. The second appliance is a 2005 Jeep. The station is generally well equipped.

The response times for Nobber Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out in the table below.

- | | |
|---|------|
| • Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires: | 3:52 |
| • Number of incidents: | 18 |
| • Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Special Services: | 2:17 |
| • Number of incidents: | 9 |

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 16.67% 10-20 mins: 72.22% >20 mins: 11.11%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 30.00% 10-20 mins: 50.00% >20 mins: 20.00%

At approximately thirty five call-outs per annum Nobber is the least active Fire Station in Co. Meath. However because of its location between the three towns of Navan,

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Kells and Ardee it is strategically placed to provide critical support to these three stations in the event of a major incident.

The Time Mobile for fires at 3:52 is within the expected norm of five minutes and the Time Mobile for 2:17 is well within the expected norm of five minutes. The percentage of calls in excess of twenty minutes at 11.11% for fires and 20% for special services is outside the expected norm and should be monitored.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. CAMP - (a) There is a view that the CAMP operators are not always following the set call-out procedures in relation to PDAs. (b) Directions provided by CAMP are not always appropriate;
2. The Fire Stations in Co. Louth (E.g. Ardee) are not part of CAMP and therefore Ardee Fire Station tends to be deployed to calls which should be passed to Nobber Fire Station from CAMP;
3. The appliance is old and needs to be replaced. Note: The replacement of this appliance is on order at present;
4. First Responder training and defibrillator could be better utilised in the event of a cardiac arrest locally.

Ashbourne Fire Station

Staffing (10)

- Retained Station Officer - 1
- Sub-station Officer - 1
- Driver Mechanics - 1
- Fire Fighters - 7

Ashbourne Fire Station was constructed in 1999 and is designated as a one pump station with two bays. It is located at Raon Cross, Ashbourne close to both the town of Ashbourne. It receives approximately 200 call-outs per annum. It should be noted that Ashbourne Fire Station as well as serving the town of Ashbourne serves a large rural hinterland.

The station is very accessible from the point of view of the Fire-fighters attending for fires and from the point of view of appliances exiting the station. The station has very good capacity for expansion if necessary. The overall condition of the station i.e. the external and internal structure is very good. Externally and internally some decoration would be desirable. The station is very good from a general suitability point of view

The station is assigned two appliances. The first turn-out is a 2003 Class B appliance. The second turn-out is a 1986 Class B appliance. The third appliance is a 2006 Water Tanker. The station is generally well equipped and the appropriate manual for all equipment is on station.

The response times for Ashbourne Fire Station as recorded by CAMP are set out in the table below.

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- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Fires: 4:19
- Number of incidents: 101
- Average time from 'Time Ordered' to 'Time Mobile' for Special Services: 5:53
- Number of incidents: 61

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for Fires
< 10 mins: 47.25% 10-20 mins: 43.96% >20 mins: 8.79%

% Breakdown of calls from Time ordered to time in attendance for S/S
< 10 mins: 24% 10-20 mins: 64% >20 mins: 12%

The Time Mobile for fires at 4:19 is within the expected norm of five minutes and the Time Mobile for special services at 5:53 is outside the expected norm of five minutes and should be monitored. The percentage of calls in excess of twenty minutes at 8.79% for fires and 12% for special services is outside the expected norm and should be monitored. The station is particularly well located at Raon Cross close to the M1 motorway.

Specific locally raised issues include:

1. Dublin Fire Service attending on virtually all emergency calls in Co. Dublin and on occasions activating a station from Finglas which passes through or near Ashbourne to areas in Co. Dublin within two miles of Ashbourne;
2. First Responder refresher training needs to be provided for some personnel;
3. Provision of advanced driver training;
4. Meath County Council should provide all training courses in Co. Meath;
5. More pre-fire planning and major emergency planning should be provided.

East Meath Fire Service Provision

An arrangement currently operates whereby Drogheda Borough Council Fire Service provides fire cover in parts of East Meath. There is however no formal Section 85 Agreement in place in relation to same approved by the respective Fire Authorities. The absence of a formal Section 85 arrangement must be addressed and rectified as soon as possible.

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Common issues

The following is a description of common issues raised by Meath County Council Fire Service personnel over the course of the extensive Strategic Plan consultative process:

1. Callout by Ambulance Service Control: HSE Ambulance Service generally do not call the Fire Service until they identify that they are unable to effect a rescue. The public assumption that both services are called out at the same time and that the Fire Service takes 20 to 30 minutes longer to turn out than the Ambulance Service. Fire Service personnel feel that this is an unfair representation of the service's response to call-outs.

It is understood that a new interrogative system for road traffic accidents (RTAs) is being piloted in the north-west. Depending on its success if adopted nationally it may resolve this issue.

2. PDAs and other issues with CAMP: The majority of the Fire Stations are of the view that the PDAs across the county should be revisited and verified with directions from the nearest/fastest responding Fire Station. There is also a requirement for a formal methodology of dealing with errors made by CAMP in either calling out of incorrect Fire Stations or providing incorrect or misleading information as to location of incidents. The majority of the Fire Stations acknowledge that CAMP is improving and that errors are on the decrease.

It is recommended that a formal written complaints procedure should automatically be submitted to CAMP and where Meath County Council is at a financial loss as a result of any action or inaction of CAMP or other callout centre. This financial loss should be recouped as a matter of policy.

3. Call-out arrangements in adjoining counties: In relation to the Co. Louth and Kildare Fire Authorities call-out arrangements, the fact that neither of these two counties are part of the CAMP systems means that the Fire Stations from these counties appear to ignore the PDAs in the border areas of Co. Meath and tend to turn out their own next nearest Fire Stations.

It is recommended that where inappropriate attendances by Fire Stations from outside the county occur in Co. Meath, Meath County Council should not recoup the adjoining counties their costs as a matter of policy.

4. Major Emergency Planning: The majority of the Fire Stations express the desire to see a full scale county-wide Major Emergency Exercise organised to test their major emergency procedures. It is recommended that although it is time consuming, costly and difficult to arrange a full scale Major Emergency Exercise is the best way to check the response capacity of the Emergency Services.

It is recommended that a Major Emergency Exercise be organised once every three years with associated desktop and communication exercises held more often. It is noted that this will be covered under the new Major Emergency Planning Framework.

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5. Fire Service Skills: Fire Service skills such as First Responder including defibrillator experience, chainsaw operations, and Instructor capacity are under utilised by the public at large and other areas of the Council.

It is recommended that enhanced communication procedures, public awareness campaigns and public open nights be held at each Fire Station in order to assist in addressing this issue.

6. Instruction by Junior Officers: Junior Officers should have a more active role in such areas as Fire Service Instructors and Pre-fire Planning.

It is noted that at a time of scarce resources the over reliance on Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers to provide relatively basic training is questionable. It is recommended that this training be provided by officers at Station or Sub-Officer rank once they have received the appropriate training.

7. Civil Defence (see also Chapter 9): There was a wide variety of views of the role of Civil Defence and its potential for interaction with the Fire Service. Some stations have been utilised by Civil Defence for training and meetings while other stations had no knowledge of the Civil Defence service in general. Some stations expressed the view that there should be greater liaison with Civil Defence while others saw it as a suitable recruiting ground for the Fire Service.

It is recommended that there would seem to be a lot to gain in a situation where both Civil Defence and the Fire Service fully cooperate and make their expertise available to one another for training purposes. A greater degree of liaison between the two services would ensure a more coordinated local authority response to major incidents and major emergencies.

8. Community Fire Initiative: All stations are satisfied with their participation in school visits and anticipated that it would reap rewards over time.

It is noted that this initiative together with the Dynamic Risk Assessment proposals in the Fire Service Change Programme will be seen by most Fire-fighters as the most positive developments in the programme.

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Discussions with Senior Fire Officers in adjoining Fire Authorities

As part of the consultative process Senior Fire Officer from counties adjoining Co. Meath were approached for their views in relation to the local/regional/national development of Fire Services in general. Common issues arose between Fire Authorities which for the most part reflect the views of the Senior Officers, Junior Officers and Fire-fighters in the Meath County Council Fire Service.

These issues are summarised as follows:

1. The need to reach agreement on the nearest Fire Station being called to each incident irrespective of which Fire Authority's area the incident occurs. Implementation of same is seen as being of high priority.
2. The need to reach formal Section 85 agreements where one Fire Authority is rendering services regularly in another Fire Authority's area. The agreement should cover all aspects of arrangements including operational, prevention, financial and administrative.
3. The need to review and revise the PDAs and to ensure that the appropriate PDAs are being turned out by the mobilisation centres.
4. The need to clarify in detail the appropriate PDA for each stretch of motorway in the region.
5. The need to affect economical efficiencies by not turning out more Fire Stations than a particular PDA determines other than for sound operational reasons.
6. The need to clarify who delivers Schools Fire Safety Programme where an outside Fire Station provides first response fire cover in an area in an adjoining Fire Authority (E.g. parts of East Meath).
7. In determining nearest Fire Station the need to recognize the faster turnout ability and quicker attendance times of a full-time Fire Station as opposed to a retained station.
8. The need to standardise PDAs across the region.

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Section Five: Fire Prevention

Meath County Council Fire Service contends that it implements its legislative responsibilities under the Fire Services Act 1981 & 2003.

General Obligations with regard to fire safety and fire safety inspections are carried out as per Section 18 of the Fire Services Act by the three Senior Fire Officers i.e. Chief Fire Officer, and two Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers.

The three Senior Officers are the only authorised persons for the purposes of the Fire Services Act 1981 & 2003 in Meath County Council.

The following table sets out the level of inspections carried out from 2003 - 2009:

Table 2: Level of Inspections

2003	<i>Premises Inspected</i>	<i>Number of Inspections</i>
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 13	72	75
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 24	90	98
Total FSA 81	148	148
Petroleum Outlets	15	15
FSA 81 Fire Safety Notice Served	1	
2004	<i>Premises Inspected</i>	<i>Number of Inspections</i>
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 13	48	48
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 24	85	85
Total FSA 81	120	120
Petroleum Outlets	11	11
FSA 81 Fire Safety Notice Served	5	
2005	<i>Premises Inspected</i>	<i>Number of Inspections</i>
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 13	40	40
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 24	75	75
Total FSA 81	110	110
Petroleum Outlets	7	7
FSA 81 Fire Safety Notice Served	2	
2006	<i>Premises Inspected</i>	<i>Number of Inspections</i>
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 13	42	42
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 24	80	80
Total FSA 81	115	115
Petroleum Outlets	8	9

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FSA 81 Fire Safety Notice Served	0	
2007	<i>Premises Inspected</i>	<i>Number of Inspections</i>
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 13	45	45
Inspections FSA 81 Sec 24	85	85
Total FSA 81	105	105
Petroleum Outlets	5	5
FSA 81 Fire Safety Notice Served	2	

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Section Six: Major Emergency Planning

In addition to the requirement to provide an effective emergency response to the normal range of emergencies the Fire Authority must also respond to Major Emergencies. The relatively new *'Framework for Major Emergency Management'* (2006) has designated local authorities (in their capacity as Fire Authorities), as one of three 'Principal Response Agencies' (PRAs), to deliver and co-ordinate an inter-agency response to such emergencies. The other agencies involved are An Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive. Each agency responding to a major emergency incident is governed by its own principal legislation. In the case of Fire Authorities this is the Fire Services Act 1981 & 2003 and Emergency Operations Regulations 1987.

These are the bodies designated to respond in accordance with the framework. These agencies also provide the country's principal emergency services, which usually provide the initial response to major emergencies. Meath County Council, the Garda Division of Co. Meath, and the Dublin North East administrative area of the Health Service Executive constitute the principal response agencies for Co. Meath.

A Major Emergency Plan for Co. Meath has been developed and adopted based on the template developed by the Major Emergency Management section of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management.

The following is an assessment under a number of headings by the Council's A/Major Emergency Planning Officer of the current status of Major Emergency Planning in Meath County Council.

Risk identification:

- Generic risk assessments completed
- Contact made with a number of high profile industries: Tara Mines, Xtratherm, Irish Cement, Lagan Cement

Special arrangements:

- None identified at this time

Interface with other local authority services:

- Regular contact with other sections in context of Major Emergency Management preparation and training

Arrangements with other local authorities:

- Regular working contact with Major Emergency Management Officers in Region
- Regional Major Emergency Management Plan in place
- Need for re-examination of Fire Service response in relation to adjoining authorities particularly Dublin, Kildare and Louth. It is recommended that an update model be agreed.

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Special equipment (a) provided (b) required:

- The Fire Service has a good range of specialist vehicles based in Navan and have recently refurbished a vehicle as an on-site command and control vehicle. Work is in progress in kitting out same with radios & communications devices etc.
- Civil Defence has a similar vehicle with a meeting room capability for on-site command and control.
- Louth County Council has been identified and most of the equipment is now in place.

Special training arrangements:

- Non-emergency staff briefed on roles under new framework.
- Major Emergency Management Training on-going at regional level.

Major Emergency Management Exercises – frequency, participants & organization:

- Two regional table-top exercises - Gardaí, HSE, Fire Service, Civil Defence, local authority staff, site stakeholder in one exercise
- Cross local authority local table-top exercise - Gardaí, HSE, Fire Service, Civil Defence, local authority staff
- One local functional communications exercise (Slane Concert) - Fire Service, local authority staff
- Two regional table-top exercises - Gardaí, HSE, Fire Service, Civil Defence, local authority staff, site stakeholder in one exercise
- One regional live exercise - Gardaí, HSE, Fire Service, Civil Defence, Red Cross, local authority staff
- One local table-top exercise - Gardaí, HSE, Fire Service, Civil Defence, local authority staff
- More regional exercises planned under new framework: (1) local co-ordination centre, (2) casualty bureau, (3) Fire Service, (4) local authority staff, (5) Ambulance Service, (6) Gardaí, (7) Civil Defence, (8) Red Cross, & (9) Utilities

It is clear that there is a need for ongoing appraisal as to how the local authority will respond in the event of a Major Emergency. The A/Major Emergency Planning Officer in the above report draws attention to two elements:

- The need for a review of special arrangements for a Major Emergency
- The need for greater clarity to be brought to the Fire Service response

The A/Major Emergency Planning Officer has developed the Major Emergency Management Plan. It is recommended that a more multi-sectoral approach be taken to the Major Emergency Management Plan in order to ensure its conversion into a workable document.

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Section Seven: Building Control Act & Regulations

Under the Building Control Act, which provided for the establishment of Building Control Authorities and the making of Building Regulations & Building Control Regulations, Meath County Council Fire Service is authorised to determine Fire Safety Certificates for Co. Meath.

The three Senior Fire Officers assess and make recommendations on all fire safety certificates applications.

Table 3: Fire Safety Certificate Applications

<i>Year</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>
Approx no. of apps	160	216	214	236	301	350	420	440	315

A Fire Safety Certificate is a certificate granted by the Building Control Authority certifying that the building or work, if constructed in accordance with the plans documents and information submitted, would comply with the Requirements of part B of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations.

With the exception of dwellings and certain agricultural developments, a Fire Safety Certificate is required for the following:

- All new buildings (excluding dwellings other than apartments and flats);
- Specified material alterations to buildings;
- Specified extensions to buildings;
- Material changes of use of buildings.

In Meath County Council the processing of Fire Safety Certificates takes one to one and a half days of administrative time at present. The Planning Section has assigned one Clerical Officer to administer commencement notices under the Building Control Regulations and the view has been expressed that as commencement notices are critical to all financial, compliance, and enforcement elements of core 'Planning' work, the Planning Section is of the view that this element of the Building Control function would be best placed by remaining within the Planning Section's responsibilities.

It is further stated that the Building Control Officer has long been involved in Planning Enforcement work as inspections under the building code invariably turn up planning related matters. They submit that there is an 'economy of scale' achieved in terms of resources in having the Building Control Officer closely associated with Planning Enforcement. Building Control can also assist the Planning Section in general in achieving the cessation of unauthorized activity as its directions are mandatory and immediate and also less time consuming than the planning enforcement procedures. It is worth noting that the Building Control Officer has an ongoing Planning Enforcement caseload.

Another major body of work required to be carried out by Building Control Authorities is the inspection and reporting on buildings in the course of construction

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and where appropriate taking the necessary action specified in the legislation for any breaches of the regulations discovered in the course of the inspection. In the case of the Co. Meath Building Control Authority this work is carried out by an officer in the Planning Section.

The question of where the Building Control function would most ideally be located is an important one for every Building Control Authority. Outside of the major cities it does not merit a stand alone section and as a result tends to be appended to either the Planning Section or the Fire Service in the vast majority of counties.

The primary income stream for the Building Control Section is from Fire Safety Certificates generated by the Fire Service. The process of combining Building Control and Planning Enforcement inspections is advantageous. In the event that the Building Control Section becomes part of the Fire Service it should continue with this arrangement, and also carry out the registering of commencement notices on the iPlan database on an agency basis in order to facilitate the orderly processing of development levies by the Planning Section.

A further question is as to whether the Fire Services including Building Control because of its close interaction with the Planning Section should remain within the Environment Directorate or be re-assigned to the Planning Directorate. It should be noted that in the vast majority of local authorities it is located in the Environment Directorate.

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Section Eight: Planning Development Control Reports

In addition to the Fire Prevention activity referred to previously in the report the Senior Fire Officers advise on a number of planning applications as provided for under Section 13 of the FSA 81 in accordance with the table below over the period 2000-2005 & 07/08/09.

Table 4: Planning applications commented on by Senior Fire Officers 2000 – 2009

<i>Planning Type</i>	<i>Year 2001</i>	<i>Year 2002</i>	<i>Year 2003</i>	<i>Year 2004</i>	<i>Year 2005</i>	<i>Year 2007</i>	<i>Year 2008</i>	<i>Year 2009</i>
Community	0	26	126	100	124	Breakdown unavailable		
Agriculture	1	10	91	83	93			
Extraction Industry	0	8	23	21	69			
Commercial	11	118	365	468	427			
Industrial	0	23	69	68	69			
Residential*	10	93	392	513	Unavailable			
Mixed User Developments	3	40	92	Unavailable	Unavailable			
Total	25	318	1158	1253	782	298	218	123

*Includes the following:

- Housing estates
- Apartments
- Greater than four houses
- Other

There is a general agreement that the current arrangement whereby the Planning Section selects the files that it requires to be advised on by the Fire Service. This has resulted in the number of files being reduced from 1253 in 2004 to 123 in 2009. The inherent danger in this arrangement is that conditions attached to a Fire Safety Certificate subsequently may necessitate a further planning application or may determine whether a grant of planning permission is appropriate at all.

The current interdepartmental reporting arrangement in relation to planning files whereby the Fire Service is requested to comment on files that are ultimately refused needs to be addressed with a view to ensuring that only those files where a grant of planning is being positively considered are referred for advice.

See comments in relation to Building Control in the previous section.

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Section Nine: Civil Defence

Civil Defence is part of the local authority response to emergencies and Major Emergencies in particular. The Civil Defence Controller in Co. Meath is the Director of Services with responsibility for Environment/Water, HR & Emergency Services. The existing arrangements for Co. Meath are as follows:

Co. Meath Civil Defence operates eight multi-skilled training centres throughout the county at: Ashbourne, Duleek, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Navan, Oldcastle & Trim. There are additional specialist training classes which interested volunteers from each training centres attend. These are: fire-fighting, technical rope rescue, welfare, inflatable boat, kayak & radio net controllers.

Premises

Co. Meath Civil Defence is currently renting premises on the Balmoral Industrial Estate where equipment, transport and clothing stores are located. The premises are approx 4,400 square foot which is quite small for the amount of equipment and activity taking place.

No. of active volunteers

- 153 registered
- 115 average attend weekly classes
- Balance on fringe but generally considered available

Data on skill sets

- Multi-discipline training in all eight units

Core skills:

- First Aid
- Radio Communications
- Basic Rescue & Search skills, Map reading
- Manual Handling

Optional Specialist training

- Technical Rope Rescue (Team 15)
- Welfare (Team 12)
- AFS (12)
- Boat (9)
- Kayaking (10)
- Radio Net Controllers (8)

Equipment available (type, age, condition)

- Ambulances Road x 3 (1996, 2000, 2002 – 2 ex HSE)
- Ambulance 4 x 4 x 1 (2003)
- 16 Seat Mini-bus x 2 (2000, 2008)
- Command & Control Unit – Truck c/w briefing room (1990)
- Class B Fire Appliance – Dennis c/w all Ladders & Std pump
- equipment (1985)

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- Mobile catering unit (1991)
- 4 x 4 x 7 Seater (2003)
- 4 x 4 x crew-cab (2005)
- Operational Support & Equipment vehicle (2001)
- 4.6mt inflatable boat c/w trailer
- 12 kayaks
- 2 x twin wheel ifor Williams trailers
- All well maintained, desirable to upgrade fire appliance but is fully functional

Compatibility of equipment with Fire Service equipment

- Fire appliance fully compatible with Fire Service

Relationship with Fire Service

- Use number of Fire Stations for training classes

Major Emergency Planning role

- Fully integrated in Major Emergency Plan (local authority resource)
- Emergency accommodation

It is notable that the Meath Civil Defence's 1993 Mini-bus has been replaced, the 1996 Ambulance has been upgraded. As well as this two additional ambulances have been acquired from the HSE. The training centre in Ashbourne has also been re-established.

Relationship with Fire Service

Relationships with Senior Fire Officers and Fire Service personnel is generally not an issue but there is a perception among volunteers that the role of Civil Defence is not fully understood by the Fire Service despite the fact that A.F.S. instructors are trained by the Fire Services Council.

The main area of training common to Civil Defence and the Fire Service is Fire-fighting, which is a small element of the overall Civil Defence activity in Co. Meath. While Civil Defence provides de-fibrillation training to the Fire Service in some other counties, this is not the case in Co. Meath.

In 2002 Civil Defence were instructed by the then Director of Service to assist with flood water pumping in Mornington but that was the only occasion in memory where Civil Defence personnel have worked alongside the Fire Service personnel and has not occurred since.

The Civil Defence Officer asserts that Meath Civil Defence has assisted colleagues in other counties with provision of fire cover at concert events but has not been allocated this duty at events in Co. Meath.

In the context of a Major Emergency Meath Civil Defence has a wide range of equipment, transport and training. Areas where assistance could be provided include: First aid and casualty transport, search & rescue - land & water, water pumping, rest centre management, welfare, radio communications, traffic & crowd management and evacuation. If all were required at the same time it may require some prioritization and depend on volunteer availability.

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An overview of the activities of Civil Defence as outlined by the Civil Defence Officer and volunteer staff suggest the following:

1. There are well developed procedures in accordance with national templates;
2. Civil Defence contains a wide variety of skills that could be usefully utilised in a Major Emergency;
3. There is a critical mass of multi-skilled volunteers strategically located throughout the county;
4. There is a wide variety of equipment which would be complementary to the primary emergency services (Ambulance Service, Fire Service and Gardaí) in a variety of emergency situations;
5. There are qualified and accredited instructors which could be utilised more by the Council in the training of other sections of the Council including the Fire Service.

As both the Fire Service and Civil Defence work side by side in a Major Emergency scenario it is important that there is a mutual understanding of each others role and skill sets. There is also a need to develop confidence in each others ability in order to discharge assigned roles. It should be noted that the provision or otherwise of fire cover at concert events by Civil Defence is a matter for the controller of Civil Defence.

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Section Ten: Financial & Human Resources issues

Financials: Cost of Fire Service

In 2009 the net annual budget for Meath County Council Fire Service was estimated at €3,570,759 while the outturn was €3,768,091 or €197,332 of an over run. This compares with an overrun of €551,933 in 2008 and an overrun of €90,824 in 2007. The major cause of the overrun in 2008 & 2009 was due to the collapse in income from Fire Safety Certificates.

Table 5: Fire Service Budget

	<i>Net Budget</i>	<i>Actual Expenditure</i>	<i>Difference</i>
2006	2,266,529.00	2,475,705.19	(209,176.19)
2007	2,572,755.00	2,663,579.10	(90,824.10)
2008	3,092,301.00	3,644,233.53	(551,932.53)
2009	3,570,759.00	3,768,091.00	(197,332.00)

In 2006 the net Fire Service budget was 2.67% of the total revenue budget of the Council. In 2007 it was 2.65% of the total revenue budget. In 2008 it was 2.57% of the total revenue budget and in 2009 it was 3.3% of the total revenue budget and in 2010 it is 3.8%.

The Farrell Grant Sparks report sets out the local authority expenditure compared to the net Fire Service budget for each of the Fire Authorities in the country for 1999. In that year the net Fire Service budget constituted 3.32% of the Meath County Council revenue expenditure. As such Meath was the third lowest in both percentage terms as well as per head of population in the country of similar unitary Fire Authorities. The range varied from 6.2% in the case of Offaly to 2.45% in the case of Monaghan with an average of 4.59% of the local authority revenue budget for similar authorities. In the case of expenditure per head of population the lowest was Kildare at €7.87 with the highest being Leitrim at €30.12 while Meath had an expenditure of €12.06. The average for similar authorities was €149.35.

In 2007 Meath County Council's expenditure on the Fire Service is the second lowest in the country at €23.44 per head of population the lowest being Kildare at €23.32 per head of population while the average for retained stations was €40.39 per head of population with the national average at €58.43 per head of population.

In the current difficult national economic situation it will not be possible to quickly achieve an increase in the Fire Service revenue budget from a new source of revenue. However it may be possible to address some of the relative under funding of the service by the reallocation of existing resources where appropriate to the Fire Service from elsewhere in the Council.

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The current schedule of Fire Service charges effective from the 20th July 2009 represents the best balance between avoiding abuse of the service by people calling the service out for any reason at all and running the risk of people being afraid to call out the Fire Service because of the cost factor. The advent of the CAMP system requires the calling out of the Fire Service to all alarm calls. The only way the Fire Service can control the number of false alarms is by setting a substantial charge for false alarms.

Human Resource issues

At the time of preparation of this report there were no substantive issues or outstanding negotiations between the trade unions & local authority management on any Fire Service matter. In relation to recruitment to the Fire Service the national agreed conditions apply with the exception of rostering which is discretionary to each local authority.

Any local issues of a Human Resource nature are recounted in the various station reports and anything considered to merit a recommendation is covered in the section on recommendations.

On a perusal of the profile of the Fire-fighters in the Fire Service it is noted that of the seventy retained personnel two are female (which is higher than average for the Irish Retained Fire Service), 44% of the Fire-fighters were aged between thirty and forty years of age, 36% were aged between forty and fifty years of age, with 11% under thirty and 9% over fifty years of age.

It is noted that general atmosphere and moral in the Fire Service is positive and high respectively. This is a complement to the staff management skills of the Chief Fire Officer and his Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers who meet, liaise and train with the Fire-fighters on an ongoing basis.

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Section Eleven: Current Interfaces and Reporting Relationships

Current Interfaces

The Meath County Council Fire Service interfaces with a number of other sections in the local authority. Examples of these interfaces are as follows:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Sections Involved</u>
1. Planning:	Planning, Water Services, Transportation, Environment, Fire
2. Building Control:	Building Control, Fire Planning
3. Finance:	All Sections
4. HR Issues:	All Sections
5. Major Incidents/ Major Emergencies:	Fire, Civil Defence, Water Services, Transportation, Environment, Housing
6. Dangerous Structures:	Housing, Building Control, Fire
7. Major events:	Water Services, Transportation, Environment, Fire, Civil Defence

Successful outcomes for the Council are dependant on a professional working relationship between all sections, as well as a clarity of inputs, timeliness of action by each section and clear direction from the line managers of the various sections.

It is quite clear in relation to the Fire Service that:

1. The relationship at management level is good and there was no evidence of personality clashes;
2. Within a changing economic environment and associated resource implication there is a need at middle management level for a stronger focus on, and understanding of, strategic planning, as well as a need for greater openness to change in the interest of the whole organization;
3. At operational level there is a good relationship between the Fire-fighters with internal sections such as Infrastructure, Environment and the Area Offices. There is also a good relationship with key outside agencies such as Ambulance Service/HSE and Gardaí. There is however a lack of clarity on the part of the majority of Fire-fighters in relation to the role and capacity of the Civil Defence Service.

Reporting Relationships

Because of the disciplined nature of the Fire Service a clear command structure on all matters operational is necessary. The Chief Fire Officer reports directly to the Director of Services for Environment/Water, HR & Emergency Services who has the delegated responsibility for the Fire Service from the County Manager.

In the areas of management of budgets, administration of such areas as Planning, Fire Prevention, Major Emergency Planning, Building Control, Licensing, Safety Health and Welfare at Work the responsibilities and reporting relationships become less well defined. Greater clarity and proactive management needs to be assigned to these areas.

In the case of Civil Defence the reporting relationship is to the Director of Services who is the delegated Controller of Civil Defence.

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The introduction of *'Better Local Government – a Programme for Change'* heralded the end of the dual reporting relationship system of local government with the concept of 'Service Managers' i.e. Directors of Service with responsibility for the management of all aspects of each service.

This follow through on this concept has been slower in some local authorities than others. In some areas of Meath County Council there would appear to be a leaning towards the old 'dual reporting' relationship and the clear separation of the technical and administrative duties/responsibilities.

In relatively recent years local authority staff have been promoted to more senior management positions on the understanding that they embrace the new management structure and carry out additional responsibilities and in so doing permit more junior staff to take some of their previous responsibilities.

In the absence of a core complement of clerical and administrative staff in the Fire Service the responsibility for administrative management has been left to other sections such as Planning, Environment and Finance. It is recommended that this has and will continue to seriously disadvantage the Fire Service especially in the current economic climate where staff numbers overall are being reduced as these other sections will need to prioritise their own core activities.

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Section Twelve: Safety, Health and Welfare at Work

The Safety Health and Welfare of employees, the public and visitors to the workplace is one of the single most important challenges facing modern society. This responsibility is set in Ireland by the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Acts of 1989 and 2005. This is a considerable challenge to industry where there is a fixed site and a controlled environment. However, the challenge to the emergency services especially the Fire Service is infinitely greater considering the requirement to operate in a wide variety of sites usually in an uncontrolled and often rapidly changing environment. This in no way reduces the requirement on the emergency services to comply with Safety, Health and Welfare legislation.

Fire Services have a strong culture of safe working. Traditionally they have been strong in the provision of effective personal protection clothing and equipment, custom built equipment and appliances specifically designed for operation safely in emergency situations in accordance with well rehearsed drills. However, traditionally there has been a general antipathy to formal processes and procedures in the mistaken belief that if you do not have formal processes and procedures you cannot be blamed for failing to implement them. This attitude fails to recognise that it is a far greater breach of the legislation not to have the processes and procedures in the first place.

There is also the perception that Fire Service personnel with limited resources in impossible situations using their creativity and innovation have achieved unimaginable outcomes. It is further contended that the introduction of such formal processes and procedures would stifle the creative and innovative instinct of the Fire Service personnel.

Formal processes and procedures ensure that the maximum amount of hazard analysis and risk assessment is carried out in advance with considered responses weighted to match the severity and intensity of the specific risk. This having been done prior to attendance at the incident means that the Fire Officer will be much better informed and resourced on arrival, and by implementing the principles of dynamic risk assessment still be able to use his/her creative and innovative instincts in a more targeted and controlled manner to achieve a safer, as well as successful, outcome.

A fundamental part of the safety, health and welfare legislation is the concept of the Safety Statement. In order to assist Fire Authorities in fulfilling their statutory obligations the Fire Services Change Programme drafted an Ancillary Safety Statement template.

The Ancillary Safety Statement template is structured to reflect the comprehensive approach that is necessary to plan for safe work and is intended to be compatible with relevant local authority parent safety statements. The template is formatted for conversion for use by individual Fire Authorities. It is not intended to be prescriptive therefore its contents must be reviewed and amended where necessary to reflect local circumstances.

The Ancillary Safety Statement template recognises the issues arising from the uncertainties of managing safety in the context of Fire Service operations. It includes the concepts of 'the competent person' and 'dynamic risk assessment' in emergency operations management, and deals with generic risks associated with the main

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categories of operations, as well as the risks associated with operations involving specific settings. The approach to this subject, promulgated in this document, is linked closely with the National Incident Command System.

Safety Policy

The safety policy of the local authority is contained in the Corporate Safety Statement which reflects the local authority's intent to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees of the authority.

Ancillary Safety Statement

The Fire Service Ancillary Safety Statement addresses the working environments encountered by the Fire Service, where combining need, risk and resources in a wide range of situations has long been a feature of service management.

The Ancillary Safety Statement sets out the approach which this Fire Authority adopts in relation to managing safety and in particular meeting its statutory obligations under Section 20 of the 2005 Act. The detailed arrangements for the implementation of the local authority's safety policy, as it applies to the Fire Service should be set out in this Ancillary Safety Statement.

This Ancillary Safety Statement sets out to:

1. Document the systems and procedures for the management of safety, health and welfare to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and other relevant statutory instruments;
2. Ensure that the Fire Service is operating to best practice, taking account of relevant codes of practice and standards;
3. Ensure that all reasonable care is taken to prevent personal injury, ill health and damage to property and to protect all staff members and third parties affected by fire service activities from foreseeable work hazards;
4. Provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment, with safe systems and methods of work;
5. Provide all staff members with the information needed to work safely;
6. Set down how safe working is achieved through training;
7. Facilitate consultation with all staff members on health and safety matters; and;
8. Facilitate the role of a Safety Representative(s).

The holding of an annual information session on safety issues with all employees as part of normal working arrangements, is required in accordance with section 8.2.g of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (2005). The Ancillary Safety Statement underpins and forms the basis for communication with all employees about safety issues.

The Ancillary Safety Statement must be reviewed where there has been a significant change in the matters to which it refers, where there is reason to believe the safety statement is no longer valid or on the direction of an inspector of the HSA.

The Ancillary Safety Statement template sets out in a comprehensive fashion a methodology for Fire Authorities to meet their statutory requirements. However the template is of necessity generic and its satisfactory implementation requires that each

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Fire Authority identifies risks specific to its fixed workplaces, its specific environment the means to combat them and a system of recording the actions taken, their frequency and by whom.

The Meath County Council Fire Service Ancillary Safety Station follows closely the recent generic template developed by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government Fire Services Directorate nonetheless Specific Safe Work Practice Sheets should be prepared. This is currently being addressed by way of the compilation of 'Standard Operating Guidelines' which are being compiled by the Fire Service nationally in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

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PART TWO

Recommendations

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Section One: Future Arrangements

It is apparent that the Meath County Council Fire Service has not evolved in line with the Fire Services in other counties of a similar size, population and level of perceived risks. The achievement of the recommended model may not be feasible in the short-term due to a number of factors i.e. public sector jobs embargo, current national economic circumstances, and the cutbacks required of all local authorities in order to achieve significant savings. However it should be feasible to commence this process with the medium to long-term goal being a fully restructured Fire Service.

This long-term recommendation can be achieved by way of a number of interim steps. For example it is recommended that the current Civil Defence Officer retains his current reporting relationship for as long as he remains in the post of Civil Defence Officer but that his successor should report directly to the Chief Fire Officer in order to allow a greater degree of integration of these two crucial emergency services. As it is recommended that the any successive Civil Defence Officer would have additional duties in relation to Major Emergency Planning and Corporate Governance he/she would require an Assistant Civil Defence Officer in order to assist in his Civil Defence and Corporate Governance duties.

Figure 3 outlines how the new structure might look.

Recommendation 1:

The Fire Service to be restructured as a business centre within the Environment Directorate with its own technical and administrative structure under the direct management of the Chief Fire Officer.

It is recommended that there be three 'business units' in the restructured Fire Service i.e.:

- a) Operational Fire Service
- b) Major Emergency Planning including Civil Defence
- c) Community and Fire Prevention including Building Control and Dangerous Buildings

It is considered necessary to recommend an interim structure because of the current embargo on recruitment to local authorities. In order to put the interim structure in place it is proposed that it will be necessary to transfer two Engineers, a Staff Officer and a Clerical officer from other sections within Meath County Council. The provision of two part-time Training Instructors could be recruited from the retained Junior Officer ranks at an annual cost of approximately €20,000. If suitable candidates do not have the necessary instruction skills at present it is recommended that this be provided to them as a matter of urgency.

The additional cost of this interim step would be approximately €290,000. It is envisaged that this funding would come from a greater percentage of the Fire Safety Certificate income being allocated to the new Fire & Building Control Section, as well as the transfer of staff from other Council sections.

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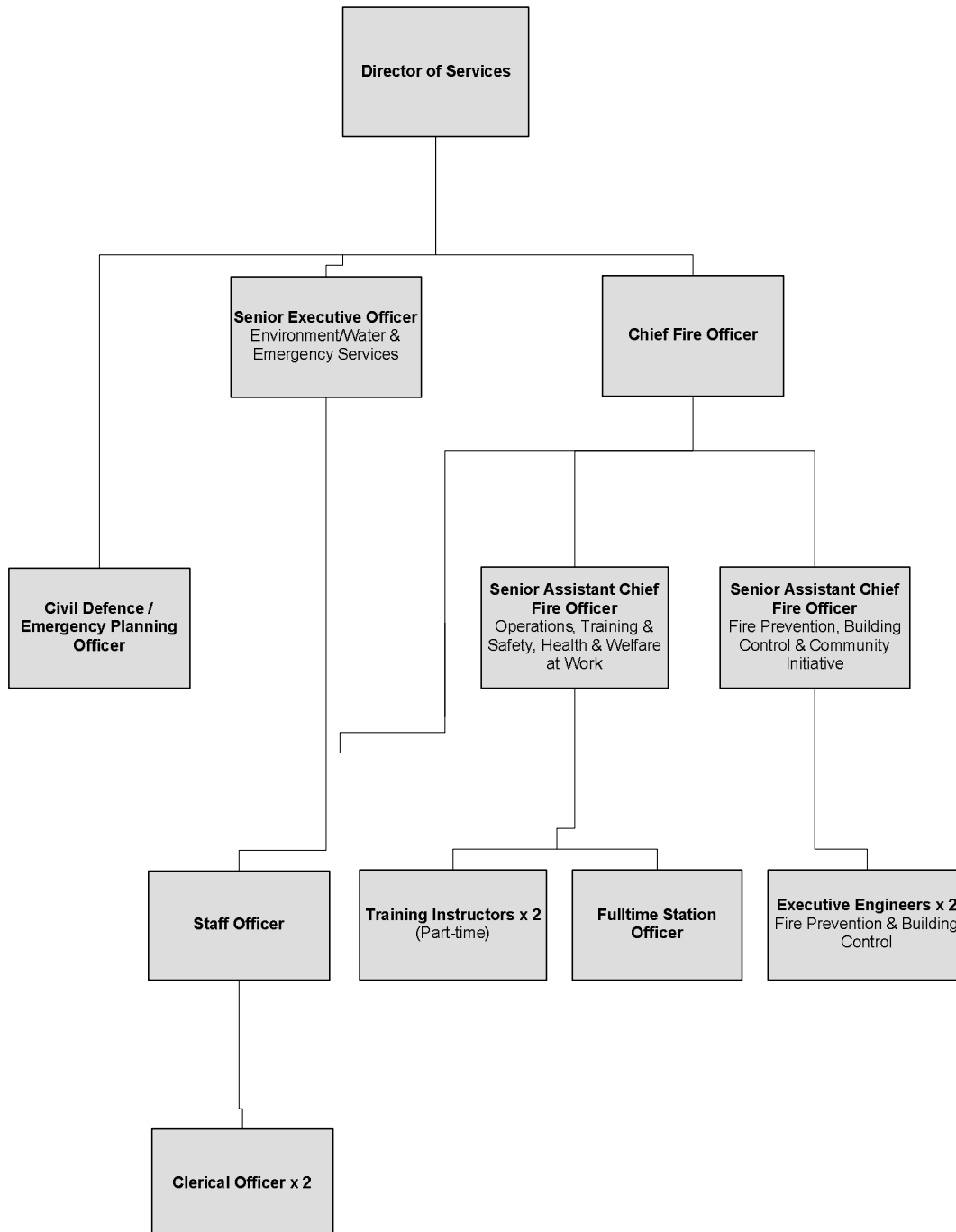
Recommendation 2:

In the short to medium-term the Fire Service should be restructured along the lines of Fig: 2: 'Proposed Interim Structure'.

This represents an interim step between the present structure and the proposed long-term business structure.

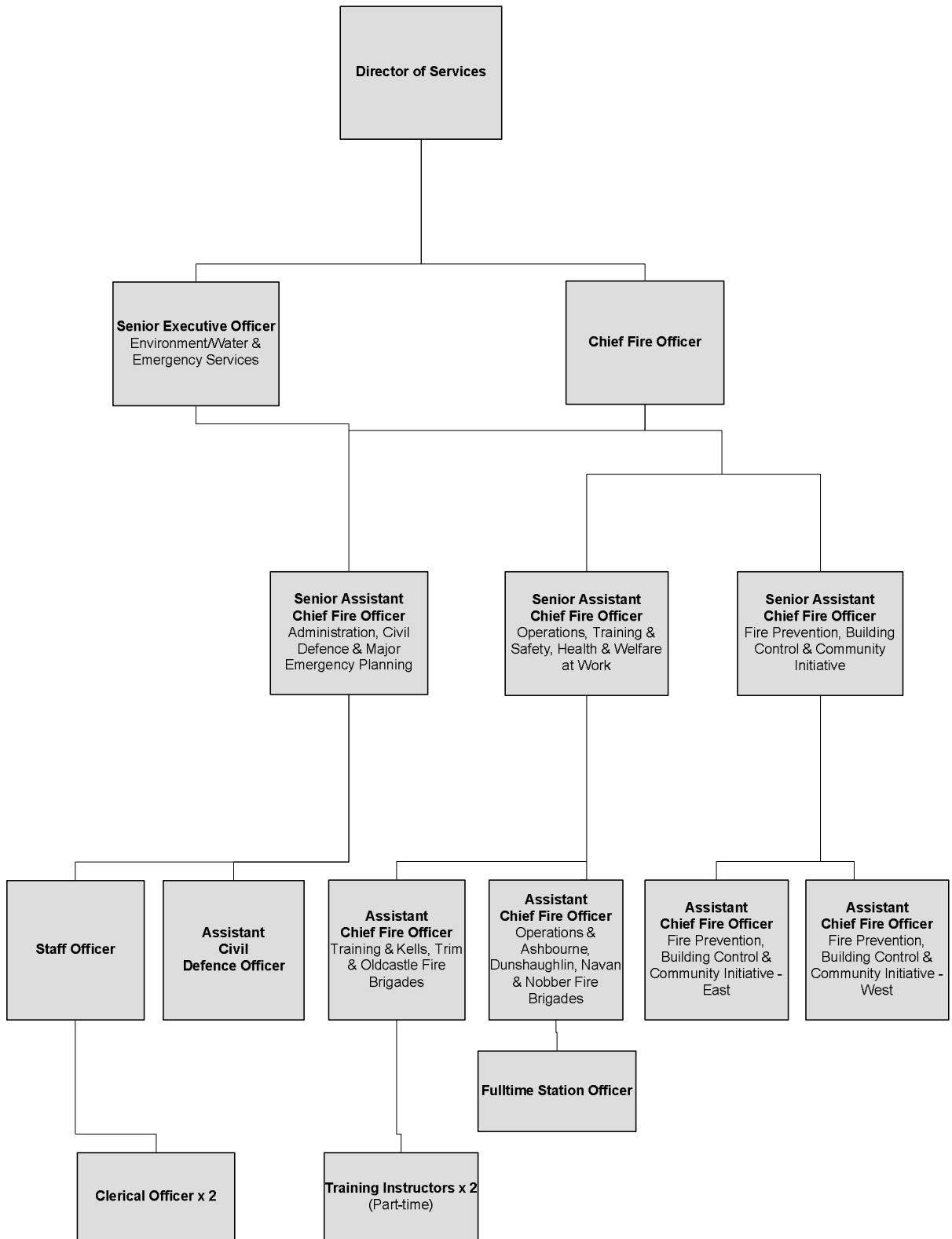
Fig: 2 *Proposed interim structure*

Note: Senior Fire Officers are required to be interchangeable in their roles and may be redeployed by the Chief Fire Officer at any time



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Fig: 3 *Proposed long-term structure*



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Section Two: Corporate Legislative Responsibilities

Legislative responsibilities are clearly set out earlier in this document. The recommendations in relation to the discharge of the Corporate Legislative Responsibilities are as follows:

A Section 26 Plan sets out how a Fire Authority plans for fire and emergency operations highlighting the provisions made by it in respect of organisation, appliances, equipment, Fire Stations, water supplies, extinguishing agents, training, operational procedure and such other matters as may be relevant for dealing with operations of an emergency nature.

Recommendation 3:

Develop a detailed Section 26 Fire and Operations Plan as required under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. This should be developed complete with appendices and brought before the elected members of Meath County Council for approval and adoption.

This plan should then be furnished to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government as legally required.

This plan should be reflective of the Section 85/86 agreement under the Local Government Act 2001 with the Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority.

In relation to the provision of Fire Services in 'East Meath', the following is noted:

1. It would be difficult to outline a sustainable case to the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government on purely operational grounds for a new Fire Station in East Meath.
2. The savings to Meath County Council in the day to day operation of such a Fire Station would be minimal. This is due to the fact that Drogheda Borough Council Fire Service would always be the first response to parts of Co. Meath, including East Meath in accordance with Section 5:16 of the Ancillary Safety Statement. This view is based on an estimate that the average annual running cost of the Fire Station in Co. Meath at €360,844 in 2008 compared to the recoupment to Drogheda Borough Council of €262,620 in 2008, €177,808 in 2007 and €123,629 in 2006.
3. The areas of East Meath to be served by Drogheda Borough Council Fire Service should be clearly defined.
4. The services to be provided should be clearly outlined and defined.
5. The payment regime should be clearly outlined and defined in order to reflect the actual cost of providing of the agreed services. This cost should be fair and reasonable for both authorities as it would appear that the existing payment regime is punitive on Meath County Council.

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Recommendation 4:

Enter into a Section 85/86 agreement under the Local Government Act 2001 with Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority.

This agreement should set out precisely the services being provided for Meath County Council by Drogheda Borough Council as provided for under section 10 of the Fire Services Act.

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Section Three: Standards Employed

There is a requirement on a Fire Authority to set its own standards of fire cover in the absence of national standards. Most authorities have adopted standards based to some extent on the UK model. There are risk based models in existence in The Netherlands and in parts of Germany however such models should not be adopted unless all the parameters are exactly the same.

Prudence would indicate that a standard reflective of performance indicators applied to the Fire Service would be appropriate, i.e. a turnout time from the Fire Station not exceeding five minutes from the time of callout and a travel time not exceeding fifteen minutes.

If there are areas of the designated fire ground where attendance within twenty minutes cannot be normally achieved these should be identified, a specific risk assessment of the area carried out, and if appropriate an attendance time in excess of the norm designated and recorded in the Section 26 Plan.

Recommendation 5:

The Fire Authority should formally adopt specific written standards of fire cover.

These should be monitored and any exceedences reported on, together with details of any extenuating circumstances to the Chief Fire Officer.

A large amount and variety of training expertise exists in different sections of the Council. Despite this the individual elements of the local authority tend to import expertise from outside agencies. Examples of where there would appear to be underutilised instructor skills are as follows:

1. Breathing Apparatus Wearing, Confined Spaces Training, Fire-fighting and First aid Fire-fighting – Fire Service
2. EMT, First Responder and First Aid training – Civil Defence
3. Information Technology – IT Section
4. River Search and Rescue and Boat Handling – Fire Service and Civil Defence

Recommendation 6:

Meath County Council should set-up an inventory of all accredited instructors in each section of the Council and promote the utilisation of these in-house resources by all sections of the Council in preference to outside agencies.

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Junior Officers have expressed an interest in participating more in the Fire Service Instruction program. It is considered that this is appropriate and that the Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers should have minimal involvement in Fire Service Instruction other than at a Senior Manager level.

Recommendation 7:

Re-organise the provision of Fire Service Instruction with a view to reducing the level of Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer operational participation.

Recommendation 8 is now necessary in order to give effect to recommendation 7 in order that tasks are carried out by staff of the appropriate grade.

Recommendation 8:

Train a number of retained Junior Officers as Fire Service Instructors if they are not appropriately trained at present.

A number of the Fire Stations drew attention to the fact that they had not received refresher training in accordance with the approved guidance. This should be rectified as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 9:

Plan the timely provision of refresher training especially in relation to Manual Handling and First Responders in accordance with approved guidance.

It is generally accepted that the work of First Responder is the responsibility of the Ambulance Service and is not a core responsibility of the Fire Service. However prudence would dictate that the Fire Service should have the capacity to provide first-aid to its own members should they require treatment at an incidence in order to comply with Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (section 8(2)g).

Recommendation 10:

Bring the number of trained First Responders in each Fire Station to average half the members of the service in each station.

It was noted that there is a degree of resentment amongst Fire Service personnel that they are not being called out in a timely fashion to road traffic accidents by CAMP or the Health Service Executive (HSE). An initiative being piloted in the north-west whereby the controller asks three questions off the caller i.e.:

1. Is there a fire?
2. Is anyone trapped?
3. Is the car overturned or on its side?

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If the answer to any one of the three is 'yes' then the appropriate Fire Station is turned out contemporaneously with the Ambulance Service. This system has the effect of ensuring that the Fire Service is at the majority of road traffic accidents where their services are needed.

Recommendation 11:

CAMP East and the HSE to be requested to implement the '3 question' system (as outlined above) as implemented in the north-west in determining the need to call out a Fire Service to a Road Traffic Accident (RTA).

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Section Four: Station Areas

A new office headquarters for the proposed Fire and Building Control Services Section should be constructed in Navan. By virtue of the location of the Navan Fire Station (Fire Service HQ) adjacent to a developing shopping and commercial area of the town, it would seem to have the potential to attract substantial offers as a commercial site.

Should a suitable and more accessible site be identified for the Navan Fire Station (**e.g. close to the motorway**) the potential long-term strategic economic interests of the local authority would dictate that an alternative location for the proposed headquarters be identified.

Recommendation 12:

A site for the new headquarter offices of the revamped Fire and Building Control Services Section should be acquired.

The selected site should also be suitable to accommodate a new Navan Fire Station should it become necessary or economically viable.

It is recommended that the existing station at Dunshaughlin is no longer fit for purpose or capable of expansion. The advent of the new motorway will require that a modern accessible and rapid response Fire Station in Dunshaughlin will be more necessary than heretofore.

Recommendation 13:

A site should be acquired for a new Fire Station in or close to Dunshaughlin suitable to accommodate all the necessary Fire Station facilities.

The existing Fire Station at Oldcastle, which was constructed circa 1980, has a number of inadequacies not least of which is a lack of space for Fire-fighters to quickly park their vehicles at or in the vicinity of the Fire Station when alerted. This must be addressed. The existing bottle-bank at the front of the Fire Station is reputed to have caused delays for Fire-fighters seeking to access or egress the station and should be relocated as a matter of priority.

Recommendation 14:

Oldcastle Fire Station:

- a) Additional accessible land should be acquired for Fire Service parking at the rear of Oldcastle Fire Station;
- b) The proposed extension to Oldcastle Fire Station should proceed as a matter of urgency;
- c) The bottle-bank at the front of the station should be relocated in order to facilitate access and egress from the Fire Station.

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It is noted that there is currently no training yard at Nobber Fire Station (Navan Station yard is used for training exercises) and therefore the station does not comply with the DoEHLG draft guideline for Fire Stations. It is recommended that this be addressed as soon as possible.

Recommendation 15:

It is recommended that suitable provision of a training yard at Nobber Fire Station is provided.

It is noted that there may be an issue at certain times (e.g. race days and busy shopping days) in terms of access for Fire-fighters to the Navan Fire Station. This must be addressed in the short-term by special callout arrangements.

Recommendation 16:

Interim callout arrangements should be put in place in relation to congestion issues in the vicinity of Navan Fire Station on specific occasions until a permanent solution can be identified.

It is noted that there may be an opportunity to generate savings if the current complement for a one-pump station was reduced from ten to nine. However as half of the stations are at a complement of nine at present the savings would be minor. It would be a matter for the Chief Fire Officer to decide if special circumstances existed to warrant being above the national guideline.

Recommendation 17:

The complement of each Fire Station should be reviewed in accordance with current national guidance.

There is a strong feeling amongst the fire personnel that there is a lack of knowledge in their communities of the full extent of the services which the Fire Service can provide. Same could be promoted by way of adverts in local press, leaflet drops, drill nights open to the public or any combination of the above.

Recommendation 18:

Actively promote in the community the non-core emergency response capabilities of the Fire Service such as First responder in accidents and defibrillation in the event of a heart-attack.

The need for recommendation 18 arises is due to the following:

1. There is a general perception that there are errors in the current PDAs operated by CAMP.
2. The construction of a large number of motorways in the county has altered the dynamic of the Fire Stations resulting in certain stations being in a position to gain access to certain areas in a more timely manner than other stations could heretofore.
3. To ensure that the correct PDA is turned out to all areas.

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Recommendation 19:

Carry out a complete review of the Pre-Determined Attendances (PDAs) for the county in order to ensure that the Fire Station capable of the fastest response to the particular area is the first called out irrespective of the Fire Authority jurisdiction in which it is located.

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Section Five: Fire Prevention

In the course of the consultation exercise with the Senior Fire Officers in relation to licensing and other fire prevention matters normal practice on these matters was outlined. Given the limited resources at the disposal of the Fire Service the service continues to achieve a high level of inspections, however, it would be in the service's interest to document a clear policy in terms of the annual programme of inspections. This could be incorporated into the Section 26 Plan under the category of 'such other matters as may be relevant' and should be reflective of the available resources.

The advent of Fire Safety Certificates and the dramatic increase in planning applications during the period of the 'Celtic Tiger' stretched many local authorities to the extent that their fire prevention activities tended to be reactive rather than proactive.

In the event of any disaster all Fire Authorities will come under scrutiny as to their policy in relation to Fire Prevention, Fire Safety Certification and implementation of Building Control Standards. For this reason it would be considered prudent to implement the following recommendation.

Recommendation 20:

In relation to Fire Prevention matters the Council should set down in a comprehensive policy statement as to how it proposes to discharge its statutory responsibilities under the Fire Services Act and the other Licensing Acts.

To give effect to this policy statement the Fire Service should draw up an annual programme of inspections including during performance inspections.

In relation to recommendation 20 it is noted that all such premises were inspected or licensed at some time. There is no policy of following up on licensing or testing other than when new installations are seen to be constructed. It is important that where such premises cease to trade that it is properly decommissioned either temporarily or permanently.

Recommendation 21:

Develop a proactive policy in relation to sites governed by the Dangerous Substances Acts and Regulations with a view to ensuring all premises eligible for licenses are regularised or decommissioned.

Dealing with dangerous/potentially dangerous structures in the absence of a fire can pose a problem for the Fire Service particularly if there are third parties affected. Although it is not a common occurrence it nonetheless would be prudent for the Council to bring clarity to the role of the Fire Service in relation to the implementation of the relevant section of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964.

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Recommendation 22:

Develop a written policy as to the role of the Fire Service in relation to Dangerous Structures legislation.

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Section Six: Major Emergency Planning

Although Civil Defence is not formally currently linked to the Fire Service in Meath County Council it has nonetheless (as the voluntary civil protection agency in the county) an important role at certain major incidents and major emergencies where the Fire Service is the primary agency of the local authority.

It is recommended that in order for the Council to provide the most effective and efficient response to major incidents and major emergencies the complimentary roles of the Fire Service and Civil Defence should be determined and mutually understood by both services.

Recommendation 23:

A working group consisting of Senior Fire Officers of the Fire Service and the Civil Defence Officer should be set up to agree specific roles for the Fire Service and Civil Defence at major incidents and major emergencies.

This group should seek to ensure compatibility of the appliances, equipment (including communication equipment) and operational procedures with a view to providing an integrated emergency response on behalf of the local authority.

The holding of major emergency exercises is critical for local authorities in order to ensure their preparedness.

Recommendation 24:

Full scale major emergency exercises involving all emergency agencies should be held on average every three years. Desktop and communications exercises should be held regularly in the intervening years.

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Section Seven: Building Control.

The vast majority of the funding generated by Building Control emanates from Fire Safety Certificates prepared by the Fire Service. With this in mind the amalgamation of the Fire Service with Building Control would be in order. A number of other local authorities have successfully adopted this approach.

Recommendation 25:

Create an integrated Fire & Building Control Services Section with the necessary complement of both technical and clerical/administrative staff necessary to discharge all the functions.

The inspection of buildings is already part of the functions of the Fire Service under the Fire Services Act. The provision of the additional resources to the Fire Service in order to take responsibility for the additional work in Building Control and Planning Enforcement would be a logical extension in order to ensure the officers of the Fire Service have an intimate knowledge of the built environment and the issues in relation to same.

Recommendation 26:

Develop an inspectorial capacity in the Fire & Building Control Services Section which would also have a capacity to provide assistance on an agency basis to other sections of the Council including the Planning, Housing and Environment Sections.

There is a clear need to strengthen the clerical and administrative capacity of the Fire Service. This in part would be in order to enable the section to carry out all clerical and administrative duties for not alone the Fire Service (including billing and cash collection) but also for Building Control and Civil Defence.

Possible staffing arrangements in both the interim structure and the long-term structure have been set out.

Recommendation 27:

Develop a clerical/administrative capacity for all aspects of the administration of the Fire, Building Control & Civil Defence functions.

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Section Eight: Planning Development Control Reports

The current arrangement whereby the Planning Section determines the files which it considers may be of concern to the Fire Service runs the risk of:

1. Relevant files not being referred, and where files which are referred and processed by the Fire Service these files may be being refused by the Planning Authority for good planning reasons other than any issue of a fire nature.
2. The following might be considered as a method to eliminate the unnecessary processing of planning files.

Recommendation 28:

Planning files where the case Planning Officer would be disposed to recommending a grant of planning permission should only be referred to Fire Service for comment.

In relation to the next recommendation i.e. recommendation 29, it is considered that this arrangement could work efficiently and effectively for both sections. In addition it would provide a front of house facility in Fire & Building Control Services which will be required when it is allocated a new headquarters facility.

Recommendation 29:

In addition to processing commencement notices under Building Control (see Recommendation 25) the administration in Building Control should also populate iPlan with the relevant information in order to allow the Planning Section seamlessly carry on the processing of planning and development levies.

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Section Nine: Civil Defence

Civil Defence has a need for a new headquarters in Navan. The headquarters should be consolidated with the proposed new headquarters building for the Fire Service. Shared facilities would be beneficial to both services and the local authority in general.

Recommendation 30:

Consolidate Civil Defence and Fire Service resources in Navan on a single campus.

The Fire Service tends to outsource their First Responder training to other agencies and/or other Fire Services. The Fire Service should come to an arrangement with the Meath Civil Defence in order to provide appropriate training for the Fire Service.

Recommendation 31:

Arrange to have Meath Civil Defence provide certain training to the Fire Service e.g. First Responder Training and Refresher Training.

In relation to recommendation 32 such an arrangement would ensure consistency across the two functions in Fire-fighting techniques. It would also assist in building confidence and mutual respect within the two functions. It would be made clear to both functions that the primary fire-fighting function resides with the Fire Service at all times and that the fire-fighting role of Civil Defence is as volunteer back-up assistance to the Fire Service in times of protracted fires and where the Fire Service's own resources are fully committed (as determined by the Chief Fire Officer or his deputised Senior Fire Officer).

Recommendation 32:

Arrange for Fire-fighting training to be provided to Civil Defence by the Fire Service on a formal basis.

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Section Ten: Financial and Human Resources Issues

The level of funding for the Fire Service per head of population is the lowest in the country for a retained Fire Service as per the Department of Environment Heritage & Local Government statistics.

Recommendation 33:

Increase funding to the Fire Service in Co. Meath to a level per head of population approaching the national average.

Targeting the strategically important areas for further funding will lead to a more effective and efficient Fire Service while still remaining well below the national average.

Recommendation 34:

Target the increased funding for the Fire Service on those areas identified as under-resourced in this report.

During the consultative process for this report there were a number of complaints from Fire-fighters that although they were aware of Workplace Partnership and Personal Development initiatives they felt that they had not been made available to them. They stated that if they were offered training it was during the working day which was not suitable to retained/part-time employees.

Recommendation 35:

The Human Resources Section (in conjunction with the Senior Fire Officers) to arrange for station visits at least every two years and proactively engage with the Fire-fighters in relation to all self-development and other personnel development initiatives in the Council together with the other HR initiatives such as Grievance Procedures and Safety Health and Welfare policies.

The proper supervision of training drills to ensure the completion of the training programme and the maintenance of training records is a crucially important part of the work of the Fire Service. This issue should be primarily supervised by the relevant Station Officer with periodic specialist sessions taken by Senior Fire Officers.

Other specialist areas of the Council should also have an involvement in the training of Fire-fighters e.g. Health & Safety and Human Resources. This formal documentation of the supervisory arrangements would reduce pressure on the Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officers to attend drills as well as the consequent amount of 'time-off-in-lieu'.

Recommendation 36:

Arrangements for the supervision of training drills should be formally documented.

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Section Eleven: Safety Health and Welfare

Although the Fire Service in general and Meath County Council Fire Service in particular (despite operating in hazardous places of work) have an excellent record in the Safety Health and Welfare at Work it must nonetheless be accepted that it is no longer sufficient to operate safely alone. Safe processes and procedures of work must also be documented, recorded and followed at all times.

It is necessary to ensure that all work places whether fixed or temporary are risk assessed, identified hazards analysed and appropriate procedures devised in order to mitigate or eliminate the risk. This must all be documented. In the case of fixed workplaces a generic risk assessment serves only as an aide-memoir and must be backed up with a specific risk assessment and hazard analysis.

Specific Safe Work Practice Sheets need to be prepared together with written procedures including appropriate checklists to monitor and record the safety inspection carried on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, six monthly or annually as appropriate and by whom. This is currently being addressed by way of the compilation of 'Standard Operating Guidelines' which are being compiled by the Fire Authorities nationally in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

Recommendation 37:

A safety register should be prepared for each fixed workplace consisting of:

- a) Safe Work Practice Sheets identifying specific hazards, their location together with the appropriate actions to be taken;
- b) A register of when inspected, by whom, current condition, actions taken and by whom;
- c) Training provided and documented in relation to DoEHLG 'Standard Operating Guidelines' (SOGs);
- d) Full adherence to 'Standard Operating Guidelines'.

It is considered that specific Safe Work Practice Sheets and specific Hazard Identification/Risk Assessment for Meath County Council Fire Service must be devised. Formal inspection and reporting procedures must be set-out and subsequently monitored and reported on regularly.

Recommendation 38:

The Health and Safety Officer of Meath County Council should:

- a) Audit the specific Hazard Identification/Risk Assessment sheets prepared by the Fire Service;
- b) Examine the specific Safe Work Practice Sheets for completeness;
- c) Examine the checklists, their frequency and the reports generated by them;
- d) Prepare an annual report to the Director of Services with responsibility for the Fire & Emergency Services annually.

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It is necessary to establish a formalized Health and Safety regime in the Fire Service in order to ensure compliance with statutory Health and Safety requirements.

Recommendation 39:

The Health and Safety Officer of Meath County Council should attend one drill night annually at each Fire Station and advise the relevant Senior Fire Officer on:

- a) The contents of his annual report to the Director of Services;
- b) Specific issues which arose in relation to that station;
- c) Measures that should be taken in order to address the issues in question into the future.

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PART THREE

Implementation

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Strategic Plan 2009 - 2014

This section outlines proposals for the implementation of the Meath County Council Fire Service Strategic Plan 2009 - 2014.

The main recommendation is to achieve the following over the next five years:

The Fire Service to be restructured as a business centre in the Environment Directorate with its own technical and administrative structure under the direct management of the Chief Fire Officer. Three business units to be established in the restructured Fire Service including:

1. Operational Fire Service
2. Major Emergency Planning including Civil Defence
3. Community & Fire Prevention including Building Control & Dangerous Buildings

Achieving this objective will require certain affordable steps to be taken. The timelines set out below are more indicative than prescriptive however it is recommended that they be adhered to as closely as possible so as not to lose the initial momentum of implementation.

Phase 1

Within six months the following 'Corporate Legislative Responsibilities' should be reviewed by implementing the following recommendations:

1. Develop a detailed Section 26 Fire and Operations Plan as required under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. This should be developed complete with appendices and brought before the elected members of Meath County Council for approval and adoption. This plan should then be furnished to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government as required by law. This plan should be reflective of the Section 85/86 agreement under the Local Government Act 2001 with Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority.
2. Enter into a Section 85/86 agreement under the Local Government Act 2001 with Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority. This agreement should precisely set out the services being provided to Meath County Council Fire Authority by Drogheda Borough Council Fire Authority as provided for under section 10 of the Fire Services Act.

Under the 'Standards Employed' heading the following recommendation should be implemented as part of Phase 1:

1. The Fire Authority should formally adopt specific written standards of Fire Cover. These should be monitored and any exceedences reported, together with details of any extenuating circumstances in all cases, to the Chief Fire Officer.
2. Meath County Council should setup an inventory of all accredited instructors in each section of the Council. These should be promoted throughout the local

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authority and utilised by all sections of the Council in preference to outside agencies.

Under the 'Station Areas' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 1:

1. Interim callout arrangements to be put in place in relation to congestion issues in the vicinity of Navan Fire Station on specific occasions until a permanent solution can be found.
2. A Working Group consisting of Senior Fire Officers and the Civil Defence Officer should be set up in order to agree specific roles for the Fire Service and Civil Defence at major incidents and major emergencies. This group should seek to ensure compatibility of appliances, equipment (including communication equipment) and operational procedures with a view to providing an integrated emergency response on behalf of the local authority.

Phase 2

Within the subsequent six months as many of the following recommendations as possible should be carried out as is feasible bearing in mind the current economic climate and severe restrictions on staff recruitment.

Under the 'Future Arrangements' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. In the short to medium term the Fire Service should be restructured along the lines set out in Fig: 2 Proposed Interim Structure. This represents an interim step between the present structure and the proposed long-term business structure.
2. Reorganize the provision of Fire Service Instruction with a view to reducing the level of Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer participation.
3. Train a number of retained Junior Officers as Fire Service Instructors if there are not enough trained at present.
4. Plan the timely provision of refresher training especially in relation to Manual Handling and First Responders in accordance with approved guidance.
5. A site for the new headquarter offices for the restructured Fire & Building Control Services Section should be acquired. The selected site should also be suitable for a new Fire Station headquarters should it become necessary or economically viable to relocate the existing Navan Fire Station.
6. A site should be acquired for a new Fire Station in or close to Dunshaughlin with a view to providing a Fire Station with all the necessary facilities.
7. Any Fire Station deficiencies should be addressed in line with national guidelines e.g. Nobber Fire Station Training Yard.

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8. The complement of each Fire Station should be reviewed in accordance with national guidelines.
9. Actively promote the non-core emergency response capabilities of the Fire Service such as First Responder in accidents and defibrillation in the event of a heart attack throughout the community.
10. Carry out a complete review of the Pre-Determined Attendance's for the county in order to ensure that the Fire Station capable of the fastest response to the particular area is the first called out irrespective of the Fire Authority it is located in.

Under the 'Fire Prevention' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2

1. In relation to Fire Prevention matters Meath County Council should set down in a comprehensive policy statement how it proposes to discharge its statutory responsibilities under the Fire Services Act and the other Licensing Acts. To give effect to this policy statement the service should draw up an annual programme of inspections including during performance inspections.
2. Develop a proactive policy in relation to sites governed by the Dangerous Substances Acts and Regulations with a view to ensuring that all who are eligible for licenses are regularised or decommissioned.
3. Develop a written policy as to the role of the Fire Service in relation to the Dangerous Structures legislation.
4. Full scale Major Emergency Exercises involving all emergency agencies should be held on average every three years. Desktop and Communications exercises should be held regularly in the intervening years.

Under the 'Building Control' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. Create an integrated Fire & Building Control Section with the necessary complement of both Technical and Administrative/Clerical staff necessary to discharge all the functions.
2. Develop an inspectorial capacity in the Fire & Building Control Section which would also have a capacity to provide assistance on an agency basis to other sections of the local authority including Planning, Housing and the Environment.
3. Develop an administrative capacity for all aspects of the administration of the Fire & Building Control functions.

Under the 'Planning Development Control' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. Only planning files where the case planner would be disposed to recommending a grant of planning permission should be referred to the Fire Service for comment.

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2. In addition to processing commencement notices under Building Control the relevant staff in Building Control should also populate iPlan with the relevant information in order to allow the Planning Section to seamlessly carry on the processing of Planning & Development levies.

Under the 'Civil Defence' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. Arrange for Civil Defence to provide training for the Fire Service e.g. First Responder Training and Refresher Training.
2. Arrange for training provided in Fire-fighting to be provided to Civil Defence by the Fire Service on a formal basis.

Under the 'Finance and Human Resources' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. Increase the funding of the Fire Service in Co. Meath to a level per head of population approaching the national average.
2. Target the increased funding for the Fire Service to those areas identified as under resourced in this report.
3. The Human Resources Section should arrange for station visits at least every two years and proactively engage with the Fire-fighters in relation to all of the self development and other HR policies and initiatives in the Council.
4. Arrangements for the supervision of training drills should be formally set down.

Under the 'Safety Health and Welfare at Work' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 2:

1. A safety register should be prepared for each fixed workplace consisting of:
 - a) The Safe Work Practice Sheets identifying specific hazards, their location together with the appropriate action to be taken;
 - b) A register of when inspected, by whom, current condition, action taken and by whom.
2. The Health and Safety Advisor of Meath County Council should:
 - a) Audit the specific Hazard Identification/Risk Assessment sheets prepared by the Fire & Rescue Service;
 - b) Examine the specific Safe Work Practice Sheets for completeness;
 - c) Examine the checklists, their frequency and the reports generated by them;
 - d) Prepare an annual report to the Director of Services with responsibility for the Fire & Emergency Service on an annual basis.
3. The Health and Safety Advisor of Council should attend one drill night annually at each Fire Station and advise the Fire personnel on:
 - a) The contents of the annual report to the Director of Services;
 - b) Specific issues that may have arisen in relation to that station;

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- c) Measures that need to be taken in order to address these issues into the future.
4. Implement Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) for the Fire Service.

Phase 3

Within the following twelve months the following recommendations, in so far as economical circumstances allow, should be implemented.

Under the 'Standards Employed' heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 3:

1. CAMP East and the HSE should be requested to implement the '3 question' system as implemented in the north-west in determining the need to call out the Fire Service to a Road Traffic Accident.

Under the Station Development heading the following recommendations should be implemented in Phase 3:

1. In relation to Oldcastle Fire Station the following actions are recommended:
 - a) Additional accessible land should be acquired for Fire Service parking at the rear of Oldcastle Fire Station;
 - b) The proposed extension to Oldcastle Fire Station should proceed as a matter of urgency;
 - c) The bottle-bank at the front of the station should be relocated to facilitate access and egress from the Fire Station.

Under the 'Civil Defence' heading the following recommendation should be implemented in Phase 3:

1. Consolidate Civil Defence and the Fire Service resources in Navan on a single campus.

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Footnote

The above programme is not intended to be prescriptive but rather it is a consultant's view of how the full potential of the Meath County Council Fire & Building Control Services Sections could be best developed over a five-year period (or longer if economic circumstances and government policy dictate).

There is no doubt that many of the recommendations contained in this plan will be welcomed by the stakeholders. Equally it is understood that a number of the proposals will be treated with an element of skepticism by some stakeholders as they envisage substantial change to existing practices and routines.

None of the proposed changes are recommended for the sake of change but rather because it is contended that as a collection of recommendations if implemented this report will constitute a pragmatic and economic Strategic Plan for the Development of the Fire Service in Co. Meath.