

Report of Attendance at the Fire 2005 Conference, 2-3 November 2005, G-MEX Centre, Manchester

This year's conference was held over two days at the G-Mex Conference Centre in Manchester. There were four main conference themes: New Dimensions; Managing our People; Delivering the Vision and New Challenges in Command and Control.

The conference opened with a Ministerial Address by Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government who highlighted the four major risk areas currently facing the Fire and Rescue Service. He was followed by Frank Sheehan, Chief Fire Officer of the West Midlands who spoke about planning arrangements undertaken for a regional response. Steve House, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police gave an account of dealing with the terrorist attacks in July and how previous exercises undertaken had proved to be invaluable. Presentations were also made by speakers from America and Tamuil Nadu who spoke about their experiences in dealing with the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina respectively.

A number of workshops were held during the two days and included Water Rescue, Arson Task Force, Co-Responding and the Regulatory Reform Order. A workshop on Equality and Diversity examined recent results of research undertaken at the University of Birmingham (INLOGOV) and at the Anglia Polytechnic University. Research undertaken at Birmingham presented an optimistic picture of progress on equality and diversity issues within the Service. Whilst work on equality issues had been previously undertaken due to the legislative requirement, the Service now appeared to be taking greater ownership of this area and was prepared to invest so as to move forward with initiatives thereby ensuring that the Service reflected the make up of its communities. Research results from East Anglia highlighted some of the difficulties that equality officers encountered which included a high turnover of equality personnel, isolation of equality personnel and a lack of sharing of good practice. The second session within this workshop included keynote presentations on a number of areas which provoked a lively discussion. Members were pleased to note that CFO D Mackay was one of the keynote speakers.

The second day opened with a presentation by Beverley Alimo-Metcalf on "Winning Hearts and Minds", and was followed by an inspirational presentation by Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson on "Creating the Winning Bid". Roy Bishop, Deputy Commissioner, London Fire and Rescue Service closed the session with his presentation on "A New Environment" in which he reflected on his Service's experience in responding to the terrorist attacks earlier in the summer.

The second day concluded with the Presidential Address by Tom Carroll and the Ministerial Address by Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the ODPM. (Copies of both addresses are available from the Corporate Services Department.)

The conference was supported by an exhibition which included "Disaster City", a simulated Urban Search and Rescue exercise involving the collapse of a multi-storey building and demonstrated the skills and equipment employed by the Fire and Rescue Service and in particular the enhanced specialist capability for dealing with such incidents.