

Achieving Design Quality in Fire and Rescue Service Buildings

SUMMARY



To assist Fire and Rescue Authorities in achieving good design in their building projects, Communities and Local Government have commissioned, in conjunction with CABE, *Achieving Design Quality in Fire and Rescue Service Buildings*.

The best that design can offer

The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) needs well designed buildings in the right locations in order to perform its functions, fulfil its responsibilities and bring the Service into the 21st Century and beyond.

Many older buildings, while perhaps no longer serving functional needs adequately, are civic buildings of distinction by good architects.

The Service should continue the tradition of seeking the best that design can offer.

Without suitable buildings, performance and service will suffer and, at the same time, costs will be higher than necessary.

Why good design matters

Quality determines that buildings will stand the test of time as well as fulfil current requirements. Good design is not merely a matter of style or opinion. Without it a building may suffer from functional limitations, convey a poor or inappropriate image of the organisation, be expensive to run, be made of materials that need replacement sooner than they should or cost a lot to repair.

A well designed building can provide a comfortable and efficient place to work, a place for users and the public to enjoy and be proud of and one that can be adapted to inevitable changes over a long and effective life.

Quality matters in the smallest details, from the architraves and the handles on the lockers, to the major elements of a building. A well-designed building provides good value for money over its whole life.

Ultimate responsibility for achieving well-designed, effective FRS buildings lies with Fire and Rescue Authorities and Chief Fire Officers (CFOs), so the messages in the guide, *Achieving Design Quality in Fire and Rescue Service Buildings*, are for them as well as the project teams charged with delivering the accommodation.

Buildings that embrace the community

The shift in emphasis to prevention of fires introduces a changed role for the FRS in the community to which their buildings must respond. FRS buildings have a complex role to fulfil. They have to accommodate a number of highly specialised facilities for firefighters, and for storage and maintenance of equipment and vehicles. They also house more routine activities, such as offices and staff amenities which should be designed to the best contemporary standards found in other building types.

Buildings that embrace the community should be welcoming in approach and aspect, well sited, and with attractive, suitable internal spaces effectively separated from the secure operational areas of the building and site. FRS buildings need up to date technology and special security for some areas as well as encouraging interaction with the community. They must also meet the aspirations of public buildings for sustainability and value. They must be more than merely 'good enough'; they need to be of high quality design that will provide best value to the FRS and their communities over time. In addition, FRS services may need to co-locate with other public services such as police, ambulance or local authority services, with similar requirements for location and access. Such opportunities and challenges should be taken into account from the start of a project.

Attaining a well designed project

To meet all these needs is a challenge. The distinction between a functional building providing whole life value for money, achieved to time and budget, and one displaying a "degree of innovation, imagination, and/or stimulus providing some aesthetic pleasure and enhancing the corporate image"³ is not simply achieved by employing a well known or *avant-garde* designer. It is a matter of team work started well before any design or implementation group has been selected.

To achieve all these things in the right balance, projects need the commitment, vision and support of FRAs, elected Members, Chief Fire Officers, Senior Officers/Managers and station managers.

The design and project team cannot provide a really good building without good support from the top.

Good design

The guidance outlines to Fire and Rescue Authorities how good design works for everyone, it is inclusive and results in places where the diverse workforce can carry out their everyday activities equally and confidently.

The Guide also seeks to establish how strong environmental credentials can be embedded into a building's design from the outset at a time when we recognise the need to mitigate the effects of climate change.

The aim of the guidance is not to differentiate between what is good and what is bad design but to ensure that projects have in place the necessary conditions for achieving good design.

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Further information

Further information is contained in the guide, *Achieving Design Quality in Fire and Rescue Service Buildings*, ISBN 978 185 112 886-0, available from:

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This guidance will help Fire and Rescue Services to meet the challenge of finding new and innovative ways of working, providing the facilities to work effectively in our communities and to help the Service play its part in protecting the environment.

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