

Making Cheshire Safer

Cheshire Fire Authority Corporate Plan and
Integrated Risk Management Plan 2008/09





Contents

Foreword

1. Introduction

Our vision, aims, objectives, values and targets
Key achievements and key proposals

2. Assessing the risks

National, regional and local issues
Our approach to risk

3. Our response to risk

Reducing the risk to our communities
Developing and improving our response to emergencies

4. Corporate Plan

Tackling the corporate challenges to the Authority

5. Performance and financial management *(This section will be included in the final version of the Plan, due for publication on March 28, 2008)*

Headline targets to monitor progress on IRMP5
Progress against key performance indicators
Medium term financial plan

6. Glossary of terms

Foreword

Assessing the practical risks facing the communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington and then ensuring a fast, effective and flexible response is the Fire Authority's fundamental priority.

But if we are to continue to make our area a safer place for everyone who lives, works or visits here, then it is vital that we respond to the wider opportunities and threats which will influence our ability to deliver the emergency services our communities deserve.

The next couple of years will see the biggest changes to the way in which public services are delivered across our area in over a quarter of a century. Not only will several councils be abolished and replaced by new ones with wider powers, but the effectiveness of all public services will be judged through a new system of Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

These agreements aim to reduce bureaucracy, simplify national funding streams and allow local areas to have greater freedom to spend on local priorities – provided local agencies can demonstrate they are tackling the issues of key concern for their communities.

Helping our partners achieve these joint performance targets is a key priority for us and we will be ensuring our community safety, protection and emergency response services are delivered to best support the LAAs across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

Also important for us over the next year will be a programme of work in response to several major emergencies and tragedies which occurred elsewhere in the country in 2007. The increasing effects of climate change saw unprecedented flooding in Yorkshire, Humberside and Gloucestershire, followed by tidal surge alerts on the South East coast. While Cheshire, Halton and Warrington escaped relatively unscathed this time, it is clear that flooding is now a major potential threat in the future.

Our search and rescue specialists were involved in the height of the floods and then in the extremely demanding recovery operation following the Warwickshire warehouse tragedy. Clearly we will be making sure we learn any of the lessons which emerge from the investigation to improve the safety of both our staff and our communities in the future.

Finally, we are pleased at the progress we are making on equality and diversity both in terms of recruitment and in developing effective links to improve the safety of minority ethnic communities. There remains a lot to do, however, and we will be setting ourselves further challenging targets to help us remain on track to deliver clear improvements to the safety of ALL communities in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.



Steve McGuirk
Chief Fire Officer



Tony Hooton
Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority

Introduction

Cheshire Fire Authority has a clear focus on improving the safety of local communities and delivering its vision of ‘zero preventable deaths’.

This Plan is the key strategic document which sets out how that vision can be achieved, the resources needed and the targets and milestones used to measure progress.

As the public body responsible for providing a fire and rescue service to the communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington, the Fire Authority must maximise the use of its resources. Effective risk management is, therefore, critical in deciding how we prioritise our response to best protect the safety of local residents and businesses.

As a result, this Corporate Plan now incorporates our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). This is a statutory document which all fire and rescue services are required to publish each year to explain how they have analysed local risks and the action they intend to take to prevent and limit the impact on their communities.

Also included are details of our performance over the past few years in key areas such as reducing fire deaths and injuries and improving the safety of our most vulnerable residents.

That means this document brings together all our strategic planning so that our staff, our communities and our partners can be clear on how we have:

- Analysed and identified the risks facing our communities
- Prioritised and allocated the resources needed to respond
- Set and monitored our performance targets and standards

Aiming for excellence

The last few years have seen major reductions in the numbers of accidental fires and injuries across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. At the same time we have also visited around one fifth of all households through our Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme, offering safety advice and fitting free smoke alarms. In addition, we have focused on modernising and improving the efficiency of our services and the increase in Council Tax for fire and rescue services in Cheshire was the lowest of any Fire Authority in the country.



These improvements have already helped the Authority to be recognised by independent inspectors as one of the best performing in the country, with top marks for its frontline services and a “good, performing well” verdict overall. The Authority is committed, however, to continuous improvement and its ambition is to deliver a truly excellent service to local communities.

The proposals set out in this Plan are fundamental to achieving that goal and we will continue to consult and involve all key stakeholders including our staff and our communities as we develop them.

Our vision

**Our vision is about where we want to be;
our mission is about what we want to do;
our objectives are the actions we will take;
our values are about how we do it.**

So that our communities, staff and partners are clear about the Service's vision and how that translates into our day to day work, we have established three key aims and seven

organisational objectives. To measure our performance in delivering these aims and objectives we have established a number of headline targets and milestones, with responsibility assigned to the Service's three functions of Community Risk Reduction (CRR) Emergency Response (ER), and Corporate Services (CS).

Vision

Our vision is a Cheshire where there are no preventable deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies.

Mission

Our mission is to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests.

Our three key aims are to:

**Respond effectively to emergency incidents
(EMERGENCY RESPONSE)**

**Improve community safety by risk reduction
(PREVENTION & PROTECTION)**

**Deliver efficient and effective services underpinned by a robust governance framework
(CORPORATE SERVICES)**

Our seven organisational objectives are:

ER 1
Identify the risks facing local communities and ensure plans and resources are in place to respond

ER 2
Provide a flexible, efficient and resilient response to emergency incidents

CRR 1
Prevent dangerous anti-social and careless behaviour

CRR 2
Protect life, property and other interests through detailed risk analysis and assessment

CS1
Develop a workforce competent and able to realise our vision

CS2
Use inclusive consultation and communication to involve local communities in developing services which meet their needs

CS3
Ensure value for money and maximise investment in front line services

Our values

Achieving our objectives and delivering our services requires everyone in the Service to understand what the organisation as a whole is trying to achieve.

Having clear and consistent values helps people to know instinctively how they should act and what is required of them in their everyday work. Values underpin the decisions people make, the priorities they choose and influence the behaviours and attitudes they adopt. Values are particularly important during times of major change, and the Authority has fully supported the principles behind the national Core Values for the Fire and Rescue Service

These are:

Community - We value service to the community by:

- Working with all groups to reduce risk
- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Consulting, involving and responding to those we serve
- Aiming for excellence in everything we do

People - We value all our employees by practising and promoting:

- Fairness and respect
- Recognising and rewarding performance
- Honesty, integrity and mutual trust
- Personal development
- Co-operative and inclusive working



Diversity - we value diversity in the service and the community by:

- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Adapting our services and policies to meet the differing needs and expectations of our communities
- Promoting equal opportunities in employment and development in the Service
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination

Improvement - We value improvement at all levels of the Service by:

- Taking responsibility for our own performance
- Being open-minded and encouraging constructive criticism and challenge
- Learning from our experience and those of others
- Consulting and involving others

Key achievements in 2007/08

Independent inspection – achieved a “good, performing well” rating in the national Comprehensive Performance Assessment - putting Cheshire in the top six of all 46 fire and rescue authorities in the country. We also achieved the top 4 star rating for frontline services.

Funding – limited the increase in the amount of Council Tax needed by the Fire Authority to 1.5% - the lowest of any fire authority in the country.

Equality and diversity – we completed schemes and action plans covering Age and Gender and submitted our self assessment for Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. We held positive action events and promotional campaigns to increase interest among women and black minority ethnic communities in joining the Service. 10% of those who joined as firefighters were from under-represented groups.

Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) – we carried out over 45,000 HSAs in 2007, giving priority to those residents most at risk. We also set up agreements on data information with public and private sector partners to improve how we prioritise and target our HSAs.

Unwanted fire signals – we carried out a major consultation campaign with local businesses and launched a new policy to reduce the number of false alarms we attend and thereby improve our response to genuine emergencies.

Fire and Flu – we extended our joint campaign which sees our mobile stations used to offer free flub jabs and fire safety advice to residents over 65. Together with our NHS partners, we also received a top community award for the campaign at the North West Public Health Awards.

New technology and appliances - we continued to pilot our new midi appliances known as Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) and provided one as an extra appliance at Nantwich Community Fire Station.

Better facilities – we launched a major improvement programme which has seen extensive improvements at Nantwich, Ellesmere Port and Widnes Community Fire Stations to provide modern facilities as a base for our staff and equipment and to increase engagement with the local community.

New duty system – we agreed a new duty system with our day crewed staff to provide a more modern, consistent and comprehensive approach to the cover they provide.

Online access – we launched text messaging services to help deaf and speech-impaired residents request HSAs and to alert people and businesses to major incidents and key safety campaigns.

Extra training – we launched a new training programme for Fire Authority Members and carried out a second series of in-house seminars on key corporate topics.

Major incidents – we successfully dealt with what was a major incident in Crewe without any recorded injuries and supported colleagues elsewhere during major flooding and in the recovery afterwards.

Cadets – we supported an international aid project through our Fire Service cadets who built a second school in Ghana.



Youth programmes – we led the joint Respect project which has seen young people from across the area graduating after completing a demanding 12 week programme.

Community Safety Advocates – we recruited a further 7 advocates to increase our community work, including targeting vulnerable individuals in partnership with Social Services.

New business safety legislation – we rolled out a major campaign to raise awareness and implement a new fire safety order, including preparing to carry out new enforcement duties when required.

Payroll and pensions – we successfully let two new contracts to deliver our payroll and firefighter pensions services.

Key proposals for 2008/09

Local government review - we will dedicate resources to ensure we can maximise our contributions to all key themes of the Local Area Agreements. We will also work with key stakeholders to ensure the Authority's role and responsibilities are fully recognised as the new shape of local government in Cheshire is decided.

Equality and Diversity – we will set out a timetable and action plan to achieve Level 4 of the Local Government Equality Standard by the end of 2009.



Empowering our communities – In 2008/09 we will publish a new Community Empowerment Strategy to increase the opportunities for residents and businesses to get involved in developing our services. We will also develop action plans to help us target and engage with gipsy and travellers, migrant workers and Muslim communities.

The environment – we will develop a new Environmental Protection Policy setting out performance standards and targets so the Authority can measure the impact of work to reduce its 'carbon footprint' and consider biodiversity.

Road traffic collisions (RTCs) – we will work with our partners to meet targets on reducing the numbers killed and seriously injured on our roads and increasing the trauma skills of our staff.



Developing advocates and volunteers – we will develop the skills of our advocates in specialist areas and aim to increase our volunteers to 500 over the next two years and to 1,000 by 2013.

Sprinklers - We will re-launch our sprinkler campaign, with a particular focus on high risk premises such as schools and major domestic and commercial premises.



Access to critical information – to help us tackle business fires and improve firefighter safety, we will improve how we record and access information on the design and structure of commercial buildings.

New training centre – we intend to develop training facilities at Frodsham fire station to test and develop the incident command and control skills of our staff.

Improved vehicle replacement programme - we will deliver a vehicle replacement programme based on a continuing analysis of local risk profiles, the range of emergency incidents we respond to and the wide range of firefighting vehicles on the market.

Ongoing improvements – we will complete a number of longer term projects from last year's Plan, including changes to the way we crew our stations at Birchwood and Wilmslow.

Online improvements - we intend to develop our Intranet as the 'spine' of the organisation, linking up and integrating all online services.

New building – in 2008/09 we will complete a new extension to our Headquarters and progress our new community fire station at Runcorn.

High potential – we prepare for the introduction of a new high potential development scheme to fast-track suitable applicants

Assessing risks

2

Key influences

This section of the Plan focuses on some of the increasingly sophisticated tools and techniques we use to assist us in local risk analysis. In addition, however, there are an increasing number of wider local, regional and national issues which influence the Authority's future plans and proposals.

Local Government Reorganisation within Cheshire is the first and most obvious issue as this will not only affect the future structure of the Authority but also our planning and delivery of services at a local level.

In addition, we will be making sure we play our full part in the development of new Local Area Agreements which will cover all of the Fire Authority's area. These are intended to simplify some central funding, join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances. They involve all public agencies in a local authority area agreeing with the Government a set of challenging targets to improve the issues which are of most concern to their local communities.

While each local agreement will obviously have different priorities and targets, every one has to address four specific themes:

- children and young people
- economic development and the environment
- healthier communities and older people
- safer and stronger communities

We clearly have a major role to play in the last theme, but we know we can have a significant influence on all of the others as well. Specific projects and proposals which highlight the contributions we can make are set out later in the Plan.

Other key influences affecting the Authority's future planning include:

- A whole range of fire-specific national policies and guidance covering future

inspection arrangements, Government expectations on all fire authorities for 2008-2011, Equality and Diversity, a national Centre of Excellence and the development of the online Fire Gateway



- The continued roll-out of the Regional Control Centre project



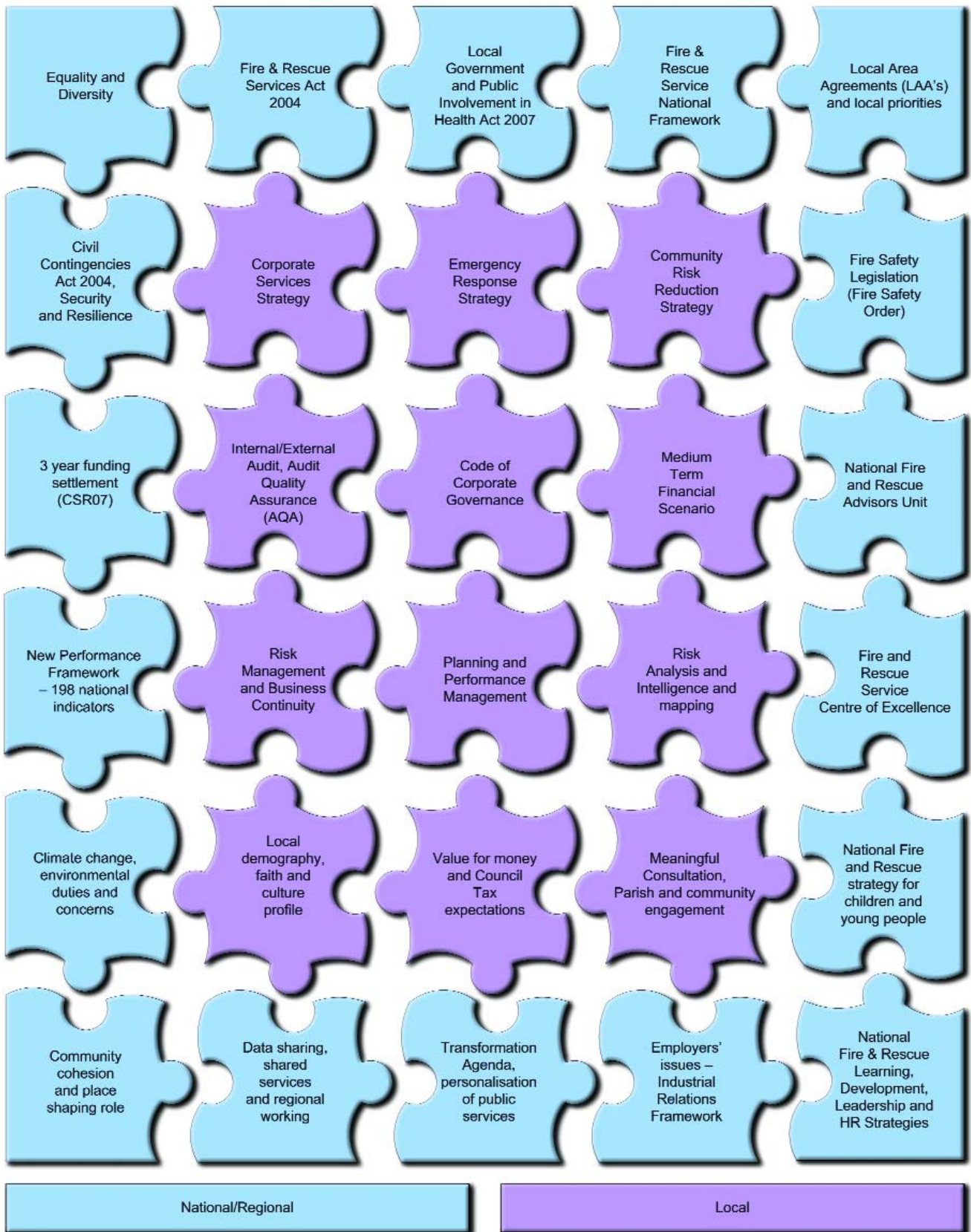
- New legislation over the enforcement of fire safety for specific national businesses
- Legal requirements to consult local communities and ensure effective management and internal political governance
- The implications of the Government's 2007 comprehensive spending review

Like all public agencies, there are also a host of other national and even global issues which will impact on how we deliver our services, such as:

- Climate change – not only our response to increased flooding risks but also the need for the authority to limit the impact it has on the local environment



National, Regional and Local Influences



- Increased migration - which can bring new safety concerns and potential increases in local community tensions
- Increases in the number of older people – with expectations that more residents will live independently in their own homes for longer
- Major growth in online services resulting in increased warehouse distribution centres where new construction methods can pose increased fire prevention and firefighting challenges

These and other influences and issues are highlighted in a more comprehensive Political, Economic, International, Social and Technological analysis (PEIST) available on our website - www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Population changes

The Authority has to ensure it is able to respond to the changing needs of local communities and the latest analysis shows that the total population of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington is set to rise by 1.2% to around 1,010,000 over the next five years. More importantly for the Service, however, is the fact that over the same period the numbers of people aged 65 or over will rise by 13% to 192,000.

That means directing resources to improve the safety of older people and focusing on areas where the risk this poses is most significant. Specific projects and proposals to address the issues are set out in the next section of the Plan, and it is clear that even greater partnership working will be required in the future.



While the proportion of black and ethnic minority communities in the Fire Authority's



area is set to remain relatively small at around 1.7% of the overall population, the Service will continue to implement local engagement projects and support greater cohesion. It is also taking action to develop strong links with the emerging communities of migrant workers such as the estimated 3,000 Polish people now living in the Crewe and Nantwich area and the growing Polish community in Chester.

Local risk changes

We have already highlighted that this document incorporates our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) - a statutory publication which every Fire Authority has to produce each year. The requirement to produce these local plans followed new legislation in 2004 which removed national standards of fire cover previously laid down by the Government.

In its place, Fire Authorities are required to set out in their IRMP how they have analysed the risks facing their local communities and the standards, policies and resources they will use to protect residents and properties. This now also includes the Authority's role as an enforcing body for new fire safety legislation and risk in commercial premises. Before each Plan is formally published, authorities are expected to consult and

involve all sections of their community and other key partners and stakeholders.

While the emphasis is on finding the best local solutions, there are still requirements on each authority to:

- help the achievement of national targets for the reduction of fire deaths and deliberate fires
- contribute to major emergencies which transcend local boundaries, such as flooding and terrorist incidents
- reduce the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergencies
- safeguard the environment and heritage
- provide value for money

The Fire Authority will also continue to take a leading role in the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Local Resilience Forum (CHWLRF). This is the body set up under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to co-ordinate the plans and activities of all 'Category One' Emergency Response services and 'Category Two' public authorities.

A key role of the forum is to maintain a Community Risk Register highlighting that potential hazards have been identified and assessed and emergency response plans put in place where needed. During 2008/09 the Service will continue to host the register on its website - www.cheshirefire.gov.uk – and participate in exercises to test the effectiveness of specific.

We will also be working with neighbouring fire and rescue services to ensure we fully consider the risk implications for communities effective by cross-border arrangements.

Our approach to risk

Our approach to risk management covers all the steps involved in identifying, assessing and judging risks, taking actions to reduce or anticipate them, and monitoring and reviewing progress. This robust analysis and evaluation is essential in ensuring the Authority is fully informed when it has to make decisions on how services need to be

adapted in response to changes in the risks facing local communities. It also informs our approach to an inspection regime as an enforcing authority of key fire safety legislation.

In our previous IRMPs – copies of which are on our website www.cheshirefire.gov.uk – we outlined how we had developed our own 'Cheshire Standard' for responding to emergencies. This involved reviews of research into the factors which influence the speed and impact of fire on people and property and detailed analysis of our attendance at incidents over a number of years. The work has also involved the development of predictive tools as well as historical analysis.

The Standard divides our incident types into eight specific categories such as house fires, business fires, road traffic collisions, etc. Attendance standards are then allocated in each category for every station, using the recognised methodology of multiplying how likely an incident is to occur by the seriousness of the outcome.

Our current standards include a response within 6 to 10 minutes for high risks and of 16 to 20 minutes for low risks. Our target is to achieve our standards on 90% of all occasions – a target which we are currently exceeding consistently.

We monitor changes in these risk levels and our latest analysis shows that none of the risk levels have increased over the last 12 months. However in 2008/09, five years after launching our local standards, we intend to carry out a fundamental review to ensure we are continuing to use and target our resources to best protect our local communities. The review will also ensure that we will be able to identify risks, incidents and trends at a truly local neighbourhood level. This will not only help us to target our community safety work even more precisely, it will also make it easier for us to work with our partners in protecting our most vulnerable residents.

As well as standards for emergency response, we also have standards for the time it takes our control room to handle 999 calls and alert our stations. The standards, with our 2006 performance in brackets are as follows:

- 50% of all calls to be handled in 45 seconds or less (55.49%)
- 75% in 60 seconds (79.54%)
- 90% in 90 seconds (96.46%)
- 99% in 120 seconds (99.24%)



New analysis techniques

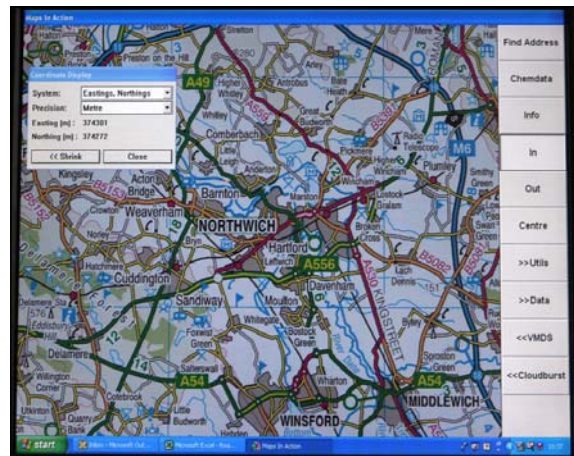
While local knowledge is always important in spotting possible risks and trends, the Service also uses a range of sophisticated analysis tools and techniques so it can target its resources where and when they will have most impact.

A key tool is the national Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit (FSEC) which brings together data on issues such as previous emergencies, population and buildings. It can then show what happens to risk levels if the number and availability of fire appliances changes.

In addition, we have worked in partnership with a specialist computer modelling company to develop our own programmes:

- The Incident Analyser provides sophisticated and detailed examination of incidents to enable best use of both our emergency response and fire prevention work

- The Simulator Toolkit allows the Service to run detailed 'what if' scenarios to help in planning the best use and location of its resources.



As well as our own data, we also work with information from other sources ranging from the census and the Index of Multiple Deprivation to flood risk planes from the Environment Agency. In addition, we are working increasingly with our local partners and some of the tools they use to identify potential areas and issues of community safety concern.

Our dedicated Risk, Analysis and Intelligence Team co-ordinates this research and information to ensure that we are able to plan our response to the risks facing our communities with more certainty and confidence. During 2008/09 we intend to extend the role of the Unit and the way in which we use risk analysis and intelligence to inform our development of policies and how we use our budget and other resources.

In addition, we have adopted a risk-based inspection programme for the 32,000 commercial premises within the Fire Authority's area which are now required to do their own risk assessment under the Fire Safety Order. This involves targeting high risk premises and working with businesses to improve their overall safety, with the ultimate use of enforcement action through the courts.

Our response to risk

3

Reducing the risks to our communities

The Authority has invested heavily in the work the Service carries out to protect residents and businesses and to prevent fires and other emergencies from happening in the first place. We believe this is already starting to have a major impact in key areas, especially in reducing the number of accidental house fires.

The hard work and dedication of our firefighters, community safety advocates, volunteers and partners has seen around 47,000 home safety assessments (HSAs) completed in 2007 – a phenomenal achievement.

One of our key projects over the next 12 months will be to develop and support this programme by improving the way we collect and share data. This will allow us to target our work more effectively so that we can ensure the groups and households most at risk get top priority.

Improving the safety of minority communities

– we will develop action plans to help us target and engage with gipsy and travellers, migrant workers and Muslim communities. We will do this by developing links with community leaders and building specialist knowledge and support among our advocates and volunteers. As well as reducing the risks facing these communities, we will also use our resources to work with our partners to build safer and stronger communities across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.



Improving the safety of people in vulnerable situations

– we will use data obtained through agreements with our

partners to improve the effectiveness of our risk analysis and mapping tools in helping us target people who are vulnerable because of their social or economic circumstances. We will also research the options which will allow us to identify and prioritise individuals who may feature in a number of different risk groups such as victims of domestic violence.

In addition, we will be lobbying the Ministry of Justice to encourage the sharing of vulnerable persons' information. We will also be highlighting within our own organisation and our partners the importance of early interventions as we all work to build healthier communities and help older people.

We know that homeless people are particularly vulnerable to fire and other safety risks so we will collaborate with our partners and key agencies in providing community safety programmes specifically targeted to support them.

Road traffic collisions (RTCs) – we will be working with partners across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington to meet targets set in national and local area agreements with regard to the reduction of the numbers killed and seriously injured. We also intend to enhance the trauma care skills of our staff to the highest possible standards through a dedicated training programme.

Fire Cadets - We will develop a more risk-based approach to the recruitment and development of cadet units. This will include looking at options to run schemes at specific locations such as schools and on estates. We will also look to set up units to engage and involve young people who are hard to reach or from minority groups.

Tackling anti-social behaviour – we will develop a joined up strategy involving firefighters, community safety advocates and volunteers with outreach fire stations to target young people at specific



locations and times such as nights and weekends. In addition we will look to strengthen links with targeted schools or pupil referral units.

Better fire safety education – we will review all of the material and demonstrations used by the Service to promote fire safety to young people and the wider community. We will research best practice and then draw up an action plan for replacement and renewal, including the possible development of a ‘safety town’ concept with partners.

We will also develop and improve the programme and content of our Community Safety Roadshows so we have a consistent approach which increases the impact and delivery of our safety messages out in local communities.

Maximising use of resources - We will develop more creative options for the use of the Authority’s dedicated £1.7 million community safety fund to support the take-up and development of our HSA programme. We will also look at options to channel some of the fund in support of innovative local community initiatives.

Developing advocates and volunteers – we will develop broader roles for our advocates and volunteers so they have specialist knowledge and skills on themes such as working with older people, supporting those with disabilities and engaging with homeless people. We will then train and support advocates in recruiting and supervising volunteers to help them.

Our target is to increase the number of our volunteers to 500 over the next two years and to 1,000 by 2013, and increase their involvement across all departments within the Service.

Preventing arson - we will continue our work to prevent arson and will focus on reducing high cost incidents involving anti-social behaviour. We will work with youth engagement staff to educate and divert young people from getting involved in anti-

social behaviour and support joint initiatives agreed with partners through local area agreements.

We will also work with local authorities to highlight increased risks from wheelie bins being set on fire and the potential dangers when this happens near to homes and other premises.

In addition we will launch a campaign to raise awareness of arson risks among local businesses and extend our traditional audit of premises to highlight wider safety risks.

Fire investigation – we intend to provide a more flexible 24/7 fire investigation service by broadening the type and role of fire investigators and looking at options to develop protocols with neighbouring Services in spate or exceptional conditions.



Working with business - we will review the impact of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by carrying out a series of audits with an initial focus on high risk premises.

Sprinklers - We will revitalise and re-launch our sprinkler campaign, with a particular focus on high risk premises such as schools and major domestic and commercial premises. The campaign will include political lobbying, marketing, publicity, high profile events together with demonstrations and enforcement.

Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) - we will continue with the next phases of our strategy to drive down the number of false alarms we

receive at premises with automatic detection systems. We will also be promoting the benefits of new advanced systems which offer better detection and easier management.

Local Authority Better Regulation Group - we will engage with this group by using some of the benefits and shared intelligence to help us in identifying risk and directing our enforcement activity.



Building safety - We will explore and forecast the implications for fire safety of new buildings and complex structures within Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. We will look at options including attendance of our staff on fire engineering degrees and getting specialist support from another fire and rescue service, a local university or the private sector.

Engaging with businesses - We will expand the existing role of business liaison officer to include advice and support for companies on business continuity. In addition we will develop strong relationships with other public agencies by highlighting our contribution to the economic development and enterprise themes of our local area agreements.

Promoting our campaigns - to support the above, we will look to increase the Authority's profile and 'brand' to support the promotion of its activities and campaigns by staging themed national conferences, seminars, high-profile visits and events.

Increasing our capacity - we will conduct fundamental reviews of both our community safety and our community fire protection departments to provide more flexible and effective services for residents, businesses and to improve support to the rest of the organisation.

The reviews will consider issues such as revised working patterns and the roles and responsibilities of staff to increase flexibility and to allow the Service to maximise the effectiveness and targeting of its safety campaigns. It will also involve the development of more focused performance management systems so the Authority can track more quickly and easily the effectiveness of the departments.

Improving and developing our response to emergencies

While we believe that our work to reduce the risks facing our communities is having a major impact, we are determined to continue providing a first class service capable of responding quickly and flexibly when fire and other emergencies do occur.

The first Audit Commission inspection of our front-line operational service gave the Authority top marks. We recognise, however, that we need to continually review the resources we have and how we use them to provide the most effective service for residents and businesses and to best ensure the safety of our firefighters.

As we highlighted earlier, a fundamental review of our Cheshire Standards of emergency response will be a key project for us this year. We will also be continuing to implement some of the long-term projects from our previous IRMP such as the review of our crewing arrangements at Birchwood and Wilmslow stations and the purchase of combined aerial appliances.

Set out below are a number of other key projects which we will be carrying out in 2008/09 and beyond in response to the risks and issues identified locally, regionally and nationally.

Access to critical information - As part of moves to both assist in tackling fires at commercial premises and to further increase firefighter safety, we will be improving our systems for capturing, interpreting, recording and accessing the information we store about the design and structure of buildings. We will also be developing our Incident Recording System (IRS) so it provides better information locally and can support the needs of the national IRS.

Improving skills and capacity – we will develop an in-house exercise programme to check on our operational capacity, competency and procedures. We will also introduce more effective and robust Station Management teams, systems and processes for both whole-time and retained duty system stations. In addition, we will enhance our station work routines, shift systems and officer rotas to further increase the number of positive hours so we can better meet the needs of both our communities and the organisation.



We will also develop our concept of a ‘virtual fire station’ – a central resource which will provide a more flexible way to respond to day-to-day and exceptional operational staffing needs.

New training centre – we intend to extend our facilities at Frodsham fire station to provide a state of the art training facility dedicated to improving and developing the incident command and control skills of our staff.

Business continuity - we will be identifying the critical activities of our emergency response function to ensure they can be maintained when a disruption to normal service occurs. We will also develop specific plans to address identified sources of risk and disruption to service delivery.

Improving debrief sessions – we will extend and improve our systems for gathering feedback following incidents and ensure that lessons learned are used to increase safety and enhance our service in the future.

Debriefs will be developed to include:

- an assessment of the effectiveness of governance arrangements
- the impact on the local community and key stakeholders
- the effect on the reputation of the organisation
- financial implications
- potential legal issues.

Firelink and FireControl – we will continue to carry out the work needed to prepare for the implementation of the regional control centre project in line with the agreed timetable. This includes ensuring checking data integrity and preparing for future data migration and planning for the future transfer of staff. We will also ensure the Authority plays a central role in the development of the local authority company responsible for the future management of the regional centre.

Develop our midi appliance project – We will continue to extend the use of our Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) to provide a more flexible service for our local communities. Stations where we will consider their use include: Frodsham, Winsford and/or Northwich, Stockton Heath, Ellesmere Port, Knutsford and Macclesfield. The Authority will look to consult and involve local communities in each of the station areas before work is started.

Improved vehicle replacement programme - we will deliver a vehicle replacement programme based on a continuing analysis of

local risk profiles and the range of emergency incidents we respond to.

Specialist equipment – a range of hi-tech resources for tackling major emergencies from chemical contamination to major flooding has been issued to fire and rescue services by the Government. The rollout of the scheme - called the New Dimension Programme – is now complete, with each region of the country provided with a near identical range of equipment. Ownership of the units we have received will transfer to us shortly and we will ensure effective maintenance programmes are put in place.



Corporate Plan

4

Cheshire Fire Authority believes that its work to improve the safety of local communities requires an effective balance of prevention, protection and emergency response, supported by strong corporate support and governance.

The Service's structure reflects this balanced approach, with the organisation made up of three functions, Community Risk Reduction, Emergency Response and Corporate Services, each led by a Brigade Manager - Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

This section of the Plan highlights the work of the Corporate Services function and the cross-cutting projects which affect all areas of the organisation.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) - the Authority is currently rated as 'Good' and 'performing well' by the Audit Commission, the national body which ensures public services deliver value for money. We will continue working to achieve the highest rating - 'excellent' and 'improving strongly'. We will also commit resources to assist our partners in achieving the targets set out in the local area agreements which will cover Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

As part of that commitment we also intend to provide a dedicated staff resource to assist the joint teams responsible for implementing the outcomes of the Local Government Review in Cheshire. We are determined to ensure that the contributions we can make across all key themes of local area agreements are properly recognised as the new structure of local government is developed.

As part of this work, we will review the structure and representation on our Performance Delivery Groups (PDGs) which currently match the boundaries of Halton, Warrington and the six Cheshire district councils. We will also review the guidance provided to our PDGs so that they can improve the way they engage with their local

communities and partners.

Equality and Diversity – we committed ourselves to obtaining Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by subjecting the Authority to a process of external verification. We intend to use the issues identified from that to help us achieve Level 4 by the end of 2009.

We will also continue to ensure we develop our Service in line with the emerging national equality and diversity strategy for the fire and rescue service.

Both our 2006 and 2007 recruitment campaigns have featured positive action events to encourage females and people from black and minority ethnic communities to consider a career with us. We intend to develop these campaigns further in the future to help us in making our workforce more representative of the local communities we serve.

Empowering our communities – the Authority's Community Engagement Strategy sets out its commitment to consulting with key stakeholders over the way it develops and delivers its services. This has already



• Sarah Dunn, star of TV's Hollyoaks, backed the Service's recent positive action events



seen the establishment of 'Response' - a panel of residents who have taken part in surveys and discussions which have already influenced the authority's key plans, its budget and access to its services.

In 2008/09 we will publish a new Community Empowerment Strategy to increase the opportunities for residents and businesses to get involved in developing our services in the future. In addition we will improve our links with Parish and Town Councils and ensure greater scrutiny of our work at a local level.

Listening to our customers – we will review the ways in which we get feedback from the people and businesses we provide a service to. We must know, be able to evidence and respond to who our customers are and what services they expect:

- Before, during and after emergencies
- From our business inspection and enforcement process
- From our community programmes, including home safety assessments (HSAs) and youth projects
- Through our comments, compliments and complaints policy

Climate change and the environment – the Authority now has a duty to consider biodiversity and its 'carbon footprint' when it develops its services and policies. A dedicated post has now been established to develop a comprehensive Environmental Protection Policy. This will cover issues such as liaison with the Environment Agency and the impact of appliances and firefighting tactics on the environment. It will also set out performance standards and targets so the Authority can measure the impact of its changes.

Better resilience - to improve resilience when the Service is responding to large-scale incidents, we will explore the potential for using support staff to provide extra resources.

Data sharing - We have already made major progress with partners in social care and



health on agreements to share information on at risk groups. In 2008/09 we will develop this further to ensure a cohesive and integrated approach to risk reduction via effective, efficient and ethical information sharing.

While we are confident that this joined-up approach will ultimately save lives and reduce injuries, we recognise the need to protect and respect people's personal data. We will therefore ensure we have appropriate controls in place and we would ask residents to accept that the data they have provided to us by other agencies will only be used to ensure they receive safety advice and support.

Developing our staff - We will work to embed the principles of the Integrated Personal Development System to ensure a consistent approach to recruitment, training, assessing competence and promotion.

To ensure the Service continues to develop the managers and leaders it needs for the future, in 2009 we are intending to launch a high potential fast-track scheme for a limited number of entrants. To further broaden access to careers in the organisation, we will also look at options to introduce apprenticeships and to improve recruitment from fire cadet units.

Developing our service – we have established an in-house Audit and Quality Assurance team to scrutinise the

performance of both front-line stations and internal departments. We will extend the use of the team in 2008/09 and use its work to support external audits and inspections of the Authority.

Online improvements - we intend to develop our Intranet as the 'spine' of the organisation, linking up and integrating all online services. In 2008/09 we will develop third party software integration policies, improved search facilities and establish online performance standards and targets. We will also review our internal service information system and look to implement an electronic document management programme. This will improve access to policies and procedures for all staff and ensure key documents are systematically reviewed and updated.

Procurement - we have completed a fundamental review of our procurement processes and procedures which will help the Authority to realise efficiencies in the future. We are intending to fully implement electronic invoicing in 2008/09 and will explore any potential benefits for the Authority in agreements through the North West Fire Services procurement group or the national Firebuy programme.

Improved maintenance - in 2008-09 we will develop asset management tracking across the Service and link this directly to our online financial system.

New buildings - in 2008/09 we will start to develop a new extension to our Winsford Headquarters, progress our new community

fire station at Runcorn and continue to explore the possibility of two new community fire stations in Chester.

Modernising support services - during 2008/09 we will explore the potential for working with our partners on a number of areas which could provide a more flexible, efficient and responsive service. This will involve continuing to participate in shared service initiatives both within the fire and rescue service and among our local government partners. We will consult with representative bodies on the following themes:

- Re-engineering
- Outsourcing
- Shared services

Increasing innovation - we will revamp and extend our staff suggestion scheme to highlight and reward good ideas throughout the organisation. We will also look to implement a new pay policy which will set out corporate standards for recognising exceptional performance.

Focus on performance - we will carry out a full review of our current performance management system and decide on its future development or replacement.

Member training - A Member-led working group is continuing to agree a programme of themed training sessions and in 2008/09 we hope the scheme will meet the quality standards set out by the North West Employers Organisation (NWE0) Charter.

Regional collaboration - Regional Management Boards (RMBs) were created in 2004 as part of the modernisation of the fire and rescue service. The move recognised that there are significant financial and operational efficiencies to be achieved by different services co-operating and collaborating in specific areas.

The most significant area of their work so far relates to mobilising appliances and emergency call handling and supporting the



delivery of national projects to introduce Regional Control Centres (RCCs) and the new, national communications scheme for fire and rescue. These two projects form an important element of a national, resilient fire and rescue infrastructure capable of handling major risks facing us now and in the foreseeable future. We have seen in recent years how the impact of climate change and terrorism can create incidents which can only be managed on a regional or national scale.



The Fire Authorities in the North West have established a company specifically to take forward these two projects and in 2008 - 09 the Service will continue to make essential preparations so we can switch over efficiently to the new systems in coming years. Cheshire will move onto the new communications system in 2009, but we will not be moving into the Regional Control Centre until 2010 at the earliest.

The RMB is also very active in other areas of collaboration including Fire Investigation, Procurement, and some elements of both training and Human Resources.

Cheshire Fire Authority will continue to support the activities of the RMB in coming years. In doing so we will be very conscious of maintaining the local service delivery through Local Area Agreements (LAAs) while still seeking regional economies and efficiencies where it is sensible and appropriate to do so.

Glossary of terms

ASC - anti-social behaviour contracts

ATF - Arson Task Forces

BCP - Business Continuity Plan - sets out what the Service needs to do so it can continue in the event of a major emergency

CCA - Civil Contingencies Act 2004

CFOA - Chief Fire Officers Association

CHAWREC - Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council

CLG - The Department for Communities and Local Government

CRR - Community Risk Reduction, the Service's function with the key role of reducing community risk

CSOs - Community Safety Officers

CPA - Comprehensive Performance Assessment

COMAH - Control of Major Accident Hazard sites

CS - Corporate Services, the function which manages the organisation's support services

CWHIC - Cheshire, Warrington and Halton Information Consortium

E-Fire Portal - a national project to provide online access to certain core services provided by fire and rescue authorities

ER - Emergency Response, the function which manages the Service's frontline emergency response staff and appliances

Firelink - the new national radio project to support the regional control centre programme

FSEC - the Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit, specialist software to help assess risk and the best use of resources

Flashover - the term used to describe the phenomenon of the contents of a room simultaneously bursting in to flame

Get Up and Get Out - one of the Service's programmes which works with disaffected young people

HATOs - Highways Agency Transport Officers

HSAs - Home Safety Assessments

HSE - Health and Safety Executive

IDeA - Improvement and Development Agency

IFE - Institution of Fire Engineers

IMS - Integrated Management System, computer system to co-ordinate financial and other support

information

IPDS - Integrated Personal Development Scheme

IRMP - Integrated Risk Management Plan

IRUs - Incident Response Units

Kooldown - one of the Service's programmes which works with disaffected young people

LAA - Local Area Agreements, new initiative to join up, measure and monitor the delivery of local services

LPSAs - Local Public Service Agreements, pacts between local and central government which guarantee extra funds provided key targets are met

LSPs - Local Strategic Partnerships, bodies responsible for bringing together public, private, voluntary and community groups to join up and improve local services

NFPA - National Fire Protection Association

NWDA - North West Development Agency

NWRA - North West Regional Assembly

Outreach fire station - mobile units used by the Service which can be set up in the heart of a local community to help deliver safety projects

PDGs - Performance Delivery Groups, used by the Service to monitor performance at local level

PEIST - an analysis of Political, Economic, International, Social and Technological issues facing an organisation

PISM - Post incident scene management, project to ensure lessons learned from fires and other emergencies are used to reduce risk in the future

RCC - Regional Control Centre, the national project for nine regional fire control centres

RRO - Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005, new Order brought together 100 separate pieces of safety legislation into one, with the emphasis on risk assessment

RMB - Regional Management Board - The National Framework requires all Fire Authorities to establish RMBs to assist collaboration and to deliver regional priorities.

RTCs - Road Traffic Collisions

TRVs - Targeted Response Vehicles, midi fire appliances designed to deal with smaller incidents

UKFSSART - UK Search and Rescue Team

USAR - Urban Search and Rescue Team

