

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

Code of Corporate Governance 2014/15

Introduction

In the context of local authorities corporate governance is defined as the system by which an authority directs and controls its functions and relates to the community it serves. Put simply, good governance enables the authority to do the right things in the right way for the right people at the right time. The fundamental principles of corporate governance are openness, inclusivity, integrity and accountability.

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to the principles of effective corporate governance and has, therefore, adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, which follows the latest guidance on corporate governance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), entitled:

"Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – Framework"

The CIPFA/SOLACE guidance outlines six core principles, each of which is supported by sub-principles to provide a governance framework.

The six core principles are:

- 1 Focussing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
- 2 Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles
- 3 Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour
- 4 Taking informed and transparent decisions, which are subject to effective scrutiny and management of risk
- 5 Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective
- 6 Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

The core principles and sub-principles outlined by CIPFA/SOLACE are shown in bold in this document.

The Fire Authority's Code of Corporate Governance specifically sets out what the Fire Authority is doing to ensure that it meets the requirements of each of these principles throughout all aspects of its Service. On a practical basis, the Code defines the Fire Authority's framework by reference to key processes, procedures and documents, which contribute to effective corporate governance.

Adoption and Review of the Code

The Framework document also stresses that systems and processes must be monitored for their effectiveness in practice and subject to review on a continuing basis to ensure that they are up-to-date.

The Chief Fire Officer is responsible for ensuring that the Code of Corporate Governance is reviewed annually and the full Fire Authority is responsible for approval and adoption of the Code each year. The Treasurer is responsible for ensuring that an independent audit of the Code is carried out annually by Internal Audit as part of their rolling programme of work. The results of this audit will form part of the overall assurance for the Annual Governance Statement, signed by the Chair, Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer of the Fire Authority.

Principle1

Focussing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area

1.1. Exercising strategic leadership by developing and clearly communicating the authority's purpose and vision and its intended outcomes for citizens and service users

1.1.1. Develop and promote the authority's purpose and vision

The fundamental purpose of the Fire Authority is to provide and maintain a fire and rescue service capable of fulfilling the statutory requirements of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.¹

In addition, set out clearly, on the Fire Authority's Service Plan, which can be found at the following link on the website:

www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-02-14-service-plan-web.pdf

are:

Our purpose

Save and protect life, property and the environment
from fire and other emergencies

and

Our Vision

Putting Shropshire's Safety First

Our Vision is most readily identifiable through our logo:



which is displayed on all letter headings, compliments slips, corporate documents, vehicles and buildings.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents>

The Service Plan also sets out the four aims of the Fire Authority:

1. To be there when you need us in an emergency with a professional and well equipped team
2. To reduce the number of fires in our community
3. To reduce the number of fire related deaths and serious injuries
4. To deliver fire and rescue service, which provides value for money for our community now and into the future

1.1.2. Review on a regular basis the authority's vision for the local area and its implications for the authority's governance arrangements

The Fire Authority's vision for the local area and its implications for governance arrangements stem from its strategic planning process. Reviewed annually, this process has been developed over recent years around a number of inter-dependent activities and milestones. The Authority has agreed a 2020 Strategy (from 2015 to 2020), which will further align these areas / processes to provide a long-term, costed strategy, which aims to manage the expectations of the community, whilst satisfying the legal framework, within which the Fire Authority must operate.

The 2020 Strategy incorporates the requirement upon the Fire Authority to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to identify and assess all fire and rescue related risks, which could affect its communities, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature. It will achieve this, whilst also planning for the budget cuts likely to occur through to 2020.

Medium Term Corporate Plan (MTCP)

This Plan incorporates the essential contents of the Public Value review 2010 to 2015. It is a working document, which details how the Service intends to develop, cost and implement future proposals / changes, identified as part of the Public Value review and IRMP. The latest version of the MTCP, which includes proposals arising from the 2020 Strategy, can be found at the following link.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/medium-term-corporate-plan-2013-2018.pdf>

Service Plan

The Fire Authority's aims and Public Value measures for the Service are set out within the annual Service Plan (see link on page 3).

1.1.3. Ensure that partnerships are underpinned by a common vision of their work that is understood and agreed by all partners

Each partnerships entered into is supported by a partnership agreement, which sets out clearly and succinctly what the partnership aims to achieve and what each of the partners will do. The agreement also states to which of the Fire Authority's strategic aims the partnership contributes.

The Fire Authority works closely with both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils. The Chief Fire Officer sits on the Chief Officers Group and the Children's Trust Executive in Shropshire and the Local Strategic Partnership Executive in Telford & Wrekin. All of these Groups include the Chief Executives or key managers of the Police, Primary Care Trust and other key local services. The Service is also represented on the community safety boards in each area and contributes to the wider safety strategies of all participants.

1.1.4. Publish an annual report on a timely basis to communicate the authority's activities and achievements, its financial position and performance.

The Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance contains updates on the Authority's activities, achievements, financial position and performance over the previous twelve months. It also provides details of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The Annual Statement of Assurance is accessible on the Service's website via the following link:

http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/SFRS%20Annual%20Statement%20of%20Assurance%202012-13%20Version%201_0.pdf

In addition to the Annual Statement of Assurance the Fire Authority publishes the following related documents, which provide financial and performance information:

- Service Plan
www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-02-14-service-plan-web.pdf
- The Audit Findings produced by external auditors
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fra/07-external-audit-annual-governance-report-2012-13.pdf>
- Annual Audit Letter produced by external auditors
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fra/05a-annual-audit-letter-2012-13.pdf>
- Medium Term Corporate Plan
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/medium-term-corporate-plan-2013-2018.pdf>
- Council Tax information
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Shropshire-and-Wrekin-FRA-Budget-2014-15.pdf>
- Statement of Accounts, including the Annual Governance Statement
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/statement-of-accounts-2012-13.pdf>
- Findings and Action Plan from Operational Performance Assessment
<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fra/13-findings-and-recommendations-opa-2012.pdf>

1.2. Ensuring that users receive a high quality of service whether directly, or in partnership, or by commissioning

1.2.1. Decide how the quality of service for users is to be measured and make sure that the information needed to review service quality effectively and regularly is available

A system has been put in place whereby long-term quality monitoring of all projects within the Fire Authority's Service Transformation Programme will be carried out. The Service's Quality / Customer Care Group will conduct quality audits of these projects and report its findings to the Service Management Team. This will assist in assessing the quality of service for users.

In addition, users are able to make complaints and post compliments and comments via the Service's website at the following link:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/contact>

All complaints are dealt with in accordance with a robust complaints procedure and any issues identified are addressed. They are analysed regularly throughout the year by the Service Management Team and annually by the Fire Authority to identify any trends.

1.2.2. Put in place effective arrangements to identify and deal with failure in service delivery

An established performance management process exists, which provides reports to meetings of the Service Management Team and the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee on the Service's performance against Public Value performance measures. Wherever failure or slippage in delivery is identified, action is taken without delay to rectify the situation.

All incidents are debriefed and the significant results communicated to management. This ensures that failures or near misses are identified and acted upon.

The Fire Authority has a clear, well-publicised complaints procedure, which requires complaints to be dealt with rigorously and promptly. Complaints, and improvement actions arising from them, are monitored by management and an annual report on complaints is taken to Members.

A summary record of complaints is also available for scrutiny by Members at every meeting of the full Fire Authority.

An audit regime is in place to scrutinise the operational readiness of all fire stations and operational staff. This ensures that the Area Command Team completes a minimum of two operational / practical audits for each station / watch along with one full station / watch audit in every twelve-month period. Completed documentation for each audit is verified and signed and is required to evidence areas for improvement. Risk-critical elements are rectified immediately along with minor issues. Major-non-risk critical issues are resolved through station management teams and subsequent audits.

The process is of a cyclical nature, ensuring that remedial measures have been taken and accounted for and that outcomes are reported to the appropriate managers and to the Service Management Team. These outcomes directly influence Service exercise planning strategy and the audit trail throughout follows clear and transparent guidelines, which enables scrutiny and assurance at all levels throughout the Service.

1.3. Ensuring that the authority makes best use of resources and that tax payers and service users receive excellent value for money

1.3.1. Decide how value for money is to be measured and make sure that the authority or partnership has the information needed to review value for money and performance effectively. Measure the environmental impact of policies, plans and decisions

The Authority tests whether it is providing value for money, i.e. 'Public Value', through:

- Its Public Value Measure 7, i.e. 'A quality audit of all projects within the Service Transformation Programme will be carried out'
- Its costs
- Services, which are appropriate for, and consistent with, achieving planned targets, as agreed with all stakeholders
- Comparative information from other fire and rescue services and suppliers
- Consultation with the public and stakeholders

The Authority is, therefore, clear that value for money means:

- Services are of the right quality, being both fit for purpose and meeting local need
- Services are delivered economically, i.e. competitively, whether in-house or by an external provider
- Services are provided efficiently by the Authority or working with partners
- Services are effective in meeting the needs of the public and at the right time
- Diverting resources constantly from areas, which are no longer a priority, to fund improvements in areas that are.

The Authority's objectives in achieving value for money are to:

- Target resources towards meeting local need
- Deliver its corporate aims
- Integrate best value principles within existing management, planning and review processes
- Provide services, which meet local needs most economically, efficiently and effectively
- Benchmark, where possible, and adopt good practice
- Ensure it develops a culture of continuous improvement
- Adopt 'Public Value'
- Ensure its managers are trained and developed to achieve value for money as is required of them

The Fire Authority has the following comprehensive range of methodologies and structures for promoting and delivering value for money (full details of which can be found in the Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority Medium Term Corporate Plan):

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/medium-term-corporate-plan-2013-2018.pdf>

- Fire Authority policy
- 2020 / Integrated Risk Management Planning process
- On-going efficiencies
- Optimum use of reserves
- Base budget reviews and Statement of Accounts
- Effective use of information technology
- Effective corporate procurement mechanisms and outsourcing
- Achieving economies through joint working
- Operational Performance Assessment
- Service Transformation Programme
- Community Assurance
- Continuous improvement
- Customer feedback
- Scrutiny
- Audit
- Public Value performance measures

The Authority assesses its environmental impact through an environmental management system, which is registered to ISO14001:2004 international standard. This system enables the Authority to target those of its operations, which have the most negative impacts on the environment, and put in place measures to minimise those impacts by changing its policy, mitigating risks or managing the effects.

It also has in place a strategy, which shows how it will reduce its use of natural resources and its impact upon the environment. This strategy is supported by delivery plans to address climate change, mitigation and adaptation, achieve energy and water efficiency, and optimise the use of renewable resources.

The Authority also considers the environmental impact of its suppliers of goods and services within its commissioning and procurement decisions and is working with them to achieve improvements.

Principle 2

Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

2.1. Ensuring effective leadership throughout the authority and being clear about executive and non-executive functions and of the roles and responsibilities of the scrutiny function

2.1.1. Set out a clear statement of the respective roles and responsibilities of the cabinet and of the cabinet members individually and the authority's approach towards putting this into practice

The Authority does not operate executive arrangements and does not, therefore, have a cabinet or separate scrutiny function. Its committees, sub-committees and working groups have little or no delegated powers and virtually all decisions are, therefore, subject to scrutiny by the full Fire Authority. Working groups of the Fire Authority do, however, report to its various committees, which in effect, therefore, fulfil a scrutiny role.

The Authority has an annual work plan, which sets out the responsibilities it must undertake throughout the year. Work plans are also in place for the principal committees of the Authority.

All of the Authority's committees and working groups have terms of reference, which detail the functions to be carried out by them and any delegated powers they have and which can be accessed via the following link.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-3-v1.1-february-2014.pdf>

Financial Regulations Standing Orders (see link below) set out specific financial duties / functions of the Fire Authority, its committees, chief officers and statutory officers.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-8-v1.1-february-2014.pdf>

2.1.2. Set out a clear statement of the respective roles and responsibilities of other authority members, members generally and of senior officers

The general roles, rights and obligations of Members are contained in the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and the Code of Conduct (see link below).

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-12-v1.0-august-2013.pdf>

The more specific roles of Members, Members with special responsibilities and of Member Champions are set out in the following Role Descriptions:

- Member
- Chair of the Fire Authority
- Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority
- Leaders of the Main Opposition Groups
- Chair of the Strategic Risk and Planning Members' Working Group
- Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee
- Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee
- Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee
- Vice-Chair of the Audit and Performance Management Committee
- Chair of the Standards and Human Resources Committee
- Vice-Chair of the Standards and Human Resources Committee
- Equality and Diversity Champion
- Risk Management and Audit Champion

There is also a Role Description for the Fire Authority's Independent Person, who will be consulted on the decision to investigate complaints and before a decision on an investigated complaint is made. The Independent Person may also be consulted on other standards matters, including by the Member, who is subject to an allegation.

All Role Descriptions can be found via the following link.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-13-v1.0-august-2013.pdf>

Financial Regulations Standing Orders set out specific financial and other duties / functions of the Fire Authority, its committees, the Chief Fire Officer, Monitoring Officer and Treasurer. Delegations to specific officers are documented in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (see link below).

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-5-v1.1-february-2014.pdf>

Job descriptions are in place for all senior officers, which clearly state their respective roles and responsibilities.

The Authority has service level agreements, detailing the roles and responsibilities of its Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Solicitor, and a Protocol for the Role of Monitoring Officer. It also has a service level agreement, setting out the role of its Treasurer and Section 151 Officer.

Details of allowances payable to Members of the Authority are laid down in the Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances (see link below) and in individual role descriptions.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-11-v1.2-april-2014.pdf>

2.2. Ensuring that a constructive working relationship exists between members and officers and that the responsibilities of members and officers are carried out to a high standard

2.2.1. Determine a scheme of delegation and reserve powers within the constitution, including a formal schedule of those matters specifically reserved for collective decision of the authority, taking account of relevant legislation, and ensure that it is monitored and updated when required

Financial Regulations Standing Orders 2.1 and 2.2 set out the specific matters reserved for collective decision of the Authority.

Delegations to specific officers are documented in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, Financial Regulation Standing orders and Standing Orders relating to Contracts (see link below).

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-7-v1.1-february-2014.pdf>

Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers are monitored and updated to take into account relevant legislation and other developments as and when required and are reviewed at each Annual Meeting of the Authority.

Each of the Authority's committees has terms of reference, which clearly state their powers and any authority delegated to them.

2.2.2. Make a chief executive or equivalent responsible and accountable to the authority for all aspects of operational management

The Chief Fire Officer's job description and Scheme of Delegation to Officers state that the Chief Fire Officer is responsible, and directly accountable, to the Authority, for all aspects of operational management.

2.2.3. Develop protocols to ensure that the leader and chief executive negotiate their respective roles early in the relationship and that a shared understanding of roles and objectives is maintained

The Authority's Protocol on Member / Officer Relations sets the tone for Member / officer relations generally. It lays down the roles of Members and officers and the main areas of Member responsibility, clearly stating that "it is not the role of Members to involve themselves in the day-to-day management of the Fire and Rescue Service".

The Authority does not have a leader but it does have a Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chief Fire Officer (together with relevant Service managers) holds a Chair's Briefing at least monthly with the Chair and Vice-Chair and he meets with the Chair informally more regularly. The Leaders of the Opposition Groups are also invited to attend the Chair's Briefing.

In addition, the Chief Fire Officer's annual performance appraisal is conducted by the Chair and Vice-Chair, at which the job description of the Chief Fire Officer is reviewed. Both Members are, therefore, fully aware of roles and responsibilities.

2.2.4. Make a senior officer (the S151 officer) responsible to the authority for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal financial control

The Treasurer is the Authority's most senior professional finance officer. The post of Treasurer is identified in the Shropshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1997 as having responsibility for the combined fire service fund, as amended by subsequent legislation enabling the Authority to become self-precepting. As such, the Treasurer is the officer responsible for the proper administration of the financial affairs of the Authority (in effect the equivalent of the S151 officer).

The service level agreement with Shropshire Council for the provision of Treasurer states:

The Corporate Head of Finance and Commerce of the Council will act as Treasurer and Section 151 Officer to the Customer to ensure the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority as required by the statutory duties associated with s 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Regulations Act 2003.

The Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders for the Regulation of Financial Matters and Financial Regulation also stipulate the responsibilities of the Treasurer. In the absence of the Treasurer, the Head of Finance, as deputy S151 officer, undertakes the responsibilities outlined above. The Head of Finance is a member of the Service Management Team.

2.2.5. Make a senior officer (usually the monitoring officer) responsible to the authority for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with

The Authority has appointed a Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with its procedures and with legislation. The responsibilities of the Monitoring Officer are set down in the Authority's Financial Regulations Standing Orders and Protocol for the Role of Monitoring Officer.

The Authority also has in place service level agreements relating to the provision of clerk and monitoring officer services and legal services, which clearly state the responsibilities of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

2.3. Ensuring relationships between the authority, its partners and the public are clear so that each knows what to expect of the other

2.3.1. Develop protocols to ensure effective communication between members and officers in their respective roles

The Authority's Protocol on Member / Officer Relations sets out clearly the respective roles of Members and officers, what each can expect from the other, the advice, information and support to which Members are entitled and to whom they should direct requests for such.

2.3.2. Set out the terms and conditions for remuneration of members and officers and an effective structure for managing the process, including an effective remuneration panel (if applicable)

The remuneration, to which Members are entitled, is clearly laid down in the Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances and in Member Role Descriptions.

Although not required to do so, the Authority calls upon an Independent Remuneration Panel from time to time to carry out reviews of Members' allowances and make recommendations to the Authority.

Officers' remuneration is defined in their contracts of employment. A Brigade Managers' Employment Panel exists to review the pay and conditions of service of Brigade Managers, in accordance with a process agreed by the Authority. The pay and conditions of service of other officers are governed by national pay review bodies.

2.3.3. Ensure that effective mechanisms exist to monitor service delivery

The Authority has agreed seven Public Value Measures in order to monitor service delivery. In addition there are supporting directorate objectives, which are managed through directorate business plans.

A report is taken to each quarterly meeting of the Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee, which clearly identifies performance against Public Value measures. The Committee may ask for further details of specific areas of good or poor performance to be reported to the full Authority.

Performance information is published on the Service's website:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/12a-pv-perf-measures-apr-2013-to-mar-14.pdf>

Performance measurement information is co-ordinated and administered through the Service's Planning and Performance Department, which validates the annual return required by Communities and Local Government.

Regular reports are considered by the Service Management Team, which focus on priorities for the Fire Authority and are used in the formulation of action plans for the Service.

Officers continue to develop a performance management system, which will improve how management information is collated and disseminated. Work is continuing to provide improved systems for inputting, manipulating and accessing information throughout the Service, which will assist in performance measurement.

A system has been put in place whereby long-term quality monitoring of all projects within the Fire Authority's Service Transformation Programme will be carried out. The Service's Quality / Customer Care Group will conduct quality audits of these projects and report its findings to the Service Management Team. This will assist in assessing the quality of service for users.

In addition, users are able to make complaints and post compliments and comments via the Service's website at the following link:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/contact>

All complaints are dealt with in accordance with a robust complaints procedure and any issues identified are addressed. They are analysed annually to identify any trends.

Working in partnership with the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officer Association and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, the Fire Authority undertook an Operational Performance Assessment review during 2012. The findings and action plan, resulting from the Assessment, have led to the two Fire Authorities forming a strategic alliance to deliver service improvements, based on improvements in command and control delivery.

2.3.4. Ensure that the organisation's vision, strategic plans, priorities and targets are developed through robust mechanisms, and in consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders, and that they are clearly articulated and disseminated

The Authority's vision, strategic aims, priorities and targets are developed through the following mechanisms.

Consolidated 2020 and Integrated Risk Management Planning

The consolidated 2020 strategic planning process ~~aims to aligns~~ a number of past planning processes and adds scenario-based planning to create the Fire Authority's '2020 Strategy'. This approach provides a means by which the Fire Authority, through structured two-way consultation with staff and the community, can create a range of potential scenarios, to which the Service might be exposed in future years.

The outcome of the process will be a costed, long-term strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan. The first phase developed a range of potential scenarios with Members of the Fire Authority and stakeholder groups. Consultation with all staff then took place regarding the most likely impact of these scenarios upon the Service in future years.

Having completed the first phase, the Service then consulted with appropriate stakeholders with a view to publishing the Strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015 to 2020 in the latter part of 2014.

Budget Consultation

The budget consultation process also assists in identifying the needs / priorities of Shropshire's citizens and feedback obtained is reported to the Fire Authority.

Government Legislation

Many of the Fire Authority's priorities are imposed by the Government. Specifically the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and National Framework documents have introduced additional statutory duties and requirements. The Fire Authority recognises that the introduction of the Framework documents necessitates the need for regular reviews of its strategic aims to ensure that there is a clear link with those additional duties and requirements.

The outcomes of other assessments previously required by the Government, such as Operational Assurance and Use of Resources, have been incorporated into the Fire Authority's strategic plans. Likewise the outcomes of any future assessments, which may supersede the now defunct Comprehensive Area Assessment, will be dealt with in the same way.

The findings from the Service's Operational Performance Assessment, conducted during 2012 have been incorporated within the Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance and Service Transformation Programme to ensure that service improvements are delivered.

Consultation and Communication

The Authority has many ways of consulting and communicating with its citizens and stakeholders, such as:

- Attendance at council neighbourhood and tasking group meetings
- Attendance at Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings
- 2020 Strategy and Integrated Risk Management Planning consultations
- Meetings with its Trades Unions
- Publications and leaflets
- Press releases and close relationships with the local media
- Social media, including the Fire Authority's website
- The presence of the Retained Service in local communities and businesses
- House-to-house visits
- Local fire safety campaigns
- Fire station open days
- Established links and regular meetings with local organisations and schools
- Local meetings throughout Shropshire to discuss the Authority's aims and priorities
- Attendance at local and regional exhibitions and shows
- Partnership working
- Involvement of the Fire Authority's Members, as Members also of Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Councils
- Process for public participation in Fire Authority meetings
- Contributing to national stakeholder groups, such as the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Local Government Association Fire Services Commission
- Support of local and national issue-based groups and networks, including Rainbow Film Festival (a local LGBT group), Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum and Rights and Fairness Telford

- Participation in local cultural diversity events
- Membership of Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH), Shrewsbury Action Against Racism (SAAR), Women in the Fire Service (WFS)

2.3.5. When working in partnership, ensure that members are clear about their roles and responsibilities both individually and collectively in relation to the partnership and to the authority

Brigade Order Administration 5 Part 1 sets out in detail the Authority's partnership strategy and function and specifies the information, which must be set out in all of its partnership agreements. This includes the partnership aims, objectives, expectations and roles of each partner.

The Authority's Code of Conduct provides guidance on disclosable pecuniary interests and the requirement for Members to declare any such interests at the commencement of meetings.

**2.3.6. When working in partnership:
Ensure that there is clarity about the legal status of the partnership
Ensure that representatives of organisations both understand and make clear to all other partners the extent of their authority to bind their organisation to partner decisions**

The Brigade Order referred to in 2.3.5 above requires that all partnerships, in which the Authority is involved, are subject to robust assessment by its Risk Management Group. When deciding whether the Authority should enter into, or remain in, a partnership, the Group considers a number of criteria, including responsibilities, commitments, financial arrangements and any legal or insurance implications of the partnership. Where considered necessary, the Group takes advice from the Authority's insurers and solicitors.

Principle 3

Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour

3.1. Ensuring members and officers exercise leadership by behaving in ways that exemplify high standards of conduct and effective governance.

3.1.1. Ensure that the authority's leadership sets a tone for the organisation by creating a climate of openness, support and respect

The Authority is committed to the principles of good corporate governance and accordingly has adopted this Code of Corporate Governance, which is reviewed and audited annually and a compliance report produced by Internal Audit for scrutiny by the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

The standards of the Authority are made clear in its Core Values, which are fundamental to all it does.

Core Values

Service to the Community

We value service to the community by:

- Working with all groups to reduce risk
- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Being answerable to those we serve
- Striving for excellence in all we do

People

We value all our employees by practising and promoting:

- Fairness and respect
- Recognition of merit
- 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
- Providing varying solutions for different needs and expectations
- Promoting equal opportunities in employment and progression within the Service
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination

Improvement

We value improvement at all levels of the Service by:

- Accepting responsibility for our performance
- Being open-minded
- Considering criticism thoughtfully
- Learning from our experience
- Consulting others

The Fire Authority has a clear, well-publicised complaints procedure, which requires complaints to be dealt with rigorously and promptly.

3.1.2. Ensure that standards of conduct and personal behaviour expected of members and officers, of work between members and officers and between the authority, its partners and the community are defined and communicated through codes of conduct and protocols.

The Authority has a wide range of codes, policies and procedures governing the conduct of members and officers, including:

- Code of Corporate Governance
- Members' Code of Conduct
- Members' Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality
- Protocol on Member / Officer Relations
- Complaints Procedures relating to Members and staff
- Single Equality Scheme
- Positive about Disabled People Statement
- Equality of Opportunity and Fairness at Work
- Discipline
- Grievance
- Positive Action Statement
- Whistle Blowing
- Gifts and Hospitality for Officers
- Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy
- Information, Communications and Technology
- Freedom of Information and Data Protection
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Standards of Dress and Appearance
- Smoking in the Work Place
- Alcohol and Employment
- Substance Misuse and Employment
- Standards in Display and Viewing of Material in the Workplace
- Ethical Procurement Policy
- Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy

These documents are based on Government guidance and best practice and lay down the standards expected from both Members and staff.

3.1.3. Put in place arrangements to ensure that members and officers of the authority are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders and put in place appropriate processes to ensure that they continue to operate in practice

The Authority has in place a number of policies and procedures to ensure that its Members and officers are not involved in decisions or processes, in which they may have a conflict of interest.

Both the Members' and Employee Codes of Conduct set out clearly that Members and employees of the Authority must not be influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in any matter relating to the Authority. Each Member must complete a Register of Interests, which is held at Brigade Headquarters and is open to public inspection. The Register, which is also accessible via the Service's website (see link below), is updated as necessary, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, and at least annually.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-service/fra-members>

'Disclosable Pecuniary Interests' appear as a standing item on the agenda for every meeting of the Authority and its committees. In addition an advice note on such interests is made available to all Members at every meeting. Details of all disclosable pecuniary interests declared by Members are recorded in a register maintained by the Corporate Support Manager, so that they are easily accessible for inspection.

Officers are required to declare formally any interest in contracts or proposed contracts. The Service also has in place a system for registering the business interests of its most senior officers and those involved in financial matters, which is reviewed annually.

There are Member and employee protocols on gifts and hospitality, which are reviewed by the Standards and Human Resources Committee. There is also a register, in which details of gifts and hospitality are recorded, and this is subject to review by the Chief Fire Officer.

The terms of reference and procedures of the Authority's Standards and Human Resources Committee enable it to deal with any breaches of the Members' Code of Conduct. For staff there is a clear and fully-documented disciplinary process to deal with misconduct.

The Authority has a well-established complaints procedure, which details how complaints should be handled, and which ensures that the process is monitored. The Complaints Log, containing all complaints made, is available to Members at each meeting of the full Authority and an annual report is taken to Members, outlining the complaints made, action taken and lessons learned. This can be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/11-summary-of-compliments-and-complaints-11-12-to-13-14.pdf>

The Service's policy on whistle blowing encourages employees, who have concerns about illegality or malpractice, to speak up without fear of reprisal.

This policy is further reinforced by the Authority's Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy. These documents can be accessed via the following links:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/reporting-illegality-and-malpractice-whistleblowing>

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/section-1-v1.2-april-2014.pdf>

There is also a standard clause in Authority contracts, advising contractors of the whistle blowing policy.

The Fire Authority is classed as 'Moving towards excellent' under the National Fire and Rescue Services Equality Framework. The actions, outlined in the Fire Authority's Single Equality Scheme Action Plan, when implemented, will take the Authority closer to achieving the 'Excellent' classification.

This clearly demonstrates that the Fire Authority is addressing equality and diversity objectives specific to the Fire and Rescue Service and that it is focussing on outcomes and continuous improvement. The Service has also undertaken an assessment of the 'Service Delivery and Community Engagement' element of the Excellent Framework.

The Authority has a Member Champion, who is actively involved in promoting equality and diversity and who has contributed significantly to achievement of 'Moving towards excellent'. The Member Champion sits on the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, which is made up of senior executives and managers and is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer. An annual report on the work of the Group is taken to the Authority's Standards and Human Resources Committee, which also receives an annual report on equality and diversity.

3.2. Ensuring that organisational values are put into practice and are effective

3.2.1. Develop and maintain shared values including leadership values for both the organisation and officers reflecting public expectations, and communicate these with members, officers, the community and partners

The Authority's Core Values are fundamental to all that it does. They are included in the annual Service Plan and are repeated in other key documents, such as Members' and Employee Handbooks.

3.2.2. Put in place arrangements to ensure that systems and processes are designed in conformity with appropriate ethical standards, and monitor their continuing effectiveness in practice

The Fire Authority's systems and processes comply with ethical standards set down in legislation and Government guidance or derived from best practice. Appropriate Members and / or officers regularly review procedures and codes to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

The Authority achieved the 'Moving towards excellent' level within the National Fire and Rescue Services Equality Framework, which ensures that it mainstreams equality and diversity into all aspects of its business. The Service has also undertaken an assessment of the 'Service Delivery and Community Engagement' element of the Excellent Framework.

The Authority has in place policies, procedures and plans to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and guidance, associated targets for improvement and systems to monitor effectiveness and progress.

Officers operate standardised recruitment policies and processes, including employee reference checks and Criminal Records Bureau checks for designated posts.

See also 3.1.3 above for further information about the systems and processes in place.

3.2.3. Develop and maintain an effective standards committee

The Authority has a well-established Standards and Human Resources Committee, which is advised by the Authority's Deputy Monitoring Officer. In addition there are procedures in place to deal with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct.

3.2.4. Use the organisation's shared values to act as a guide for decision making and as a basis for developing positive and trusting relationships within the authority

The work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, meetings of which Trades Union representatives are, from time to time, invited to attend to discuss relevant agenda items, and of the Standards and Human Resources Committee ensures that the core values of the Authority are at the heart of its decision making.

There are regular meetings between union representatives and senior management, and staff are consulted on policy changes and major service developments. Members' participation in consultation with staff has been held up by external auditors as best practice and has resulted in excellent working relationships within the Authority. Consultation with staff sits at the core of the Authority's 2020 strategic planning process and Integrated Risk Management Planning, thus ensuring that staff are fully engaged.

3.2.5. In pursuing the vision of a partnership, agree a set of values against which decision-making and actions can be judged. Such values must be demonstrated by partners' behaviour both individually and collectively

Officers have developed a method of assessing partnerships to ensure that officers, Members and partners are clear in the aims and purpose of any partnership working and know their respective responsibilities and commitments.

The assessment criteria include how the aims and objectives of each partnership contribute to the Authority's Corporate Equality Action Plan and its aims. Partnership agreements formally set out the aims of the partnership, expectations, roles and reporting requirements.

The Service works with two key partners, Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Councils, in the development and implementation of their Local Strategic Plans.

The priority outcomes, which are included in local strategic plans, reflect the vision (to improve significantly the quality of life for Shropshire people by working together) and priorities of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Community Strategies. These Community Strategies set out how performance will be measured and monitored and include general principles for managing performance.

The partnerships, in which the Service engages within Shropshire Council involve regional, public and local agencies and the voluntary and community sector. Partners work together to meet local needs and improve the quality of life in Shropshire. The key partners, including the Primary Care Trust, Police and local voluntary agencies, work within a series of tasking groups focused on specific issues, such as community safety.

The Service is a prominent member of the Chief Officers Group and contributes to its aims at all levels. The Service contributed, and is committed, to the objectives of the community strategies.

Within Telford & Wrekin Council, the Service also engages with Council-led and local partnerships to deal with specific issues, as well as the wider Council agenda. It is a prominent member of the Community Safety Partnership groups in each area and the Telford & Wrekin Local Strategic Partnership Executive Group.

Principle 4

Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk

4.1. Being rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken and listening and acting on the outcome of constructive scrutiny.

4.1.1. Develop and maintain an effective scrutiny function which encourages constructive challenge and enhances the authority's performance overall and that of any organisation for which it is responsible

The Authority does not operate executive arrangements and does not, therefore, have a cabinet or separate scrutiny function. Its committees, sub-committees and working groups, however, have little or no delegated powers. In effect, therefore, all Members of the Authority are able to scrutinise and challenge the recommendations made by its committees, when they come before the full Authority for approval. Working groups of the Fire Authority do, however, report to its various committees, which in effect, therefore, fulfil a scrutiny role.

There is an effective Audit and Performance Management Committee, whose purpose is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Fire Authority's financial and non-financial performance and to oversee the financial reporting process. The Committee also oversees the process of assessing progress toward achieving the Fire Authority's predetermined aims, as set out in the Service Plan.

4.1.2. Develop and maintain open and effective mechanisms for documenting evidence for decisions and recording the criteria, rationale and considerations on which decisions are based

There is a standard format for all committee reports, which includes background to the report and any recommendations for decision together with reasons behind those recommendations. All reports contain a section for legal comment and financial implications and list the background papers, which are integral to understanding the report.

All meetings of the Authority and its committees are independently minuted by trained staff working to a common format. Minutes include a summary of any debate, motions, results of votes and decisions resolved. All Authority and committee minutes (except those classed as exempt or confidential by virtue of the direction of a Government Minister) are available electronically via the website (see link below).

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-service/fra/meetings>

The Authority is committed to openness in all of its dealings and to this end has adopted a procedure for public participation at its meetings and those of its committees, which the public may attend. The procedure is set out in its Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business. It also has in place a policy relating to filming, photographing, recording and using social networks at its meetings.

Its agendas and reports are available to the public and publicised on its website and intranet in advance of meetings. The Fire Authority also has very clear rules governing access to information and the grounds on which information should be excluded from the public domain.

4.1.3. Put in place arrangements to safeguard members and officers against conflicts of interest and put in place appropriate processes to ensure that they continue to operate in practice

Both the Members' and Employee Codes of Conduct set out clearly that Members and employees of the Authority must not be influenced by conflicts of interest in any matter relating to the Authority. Training sessions on the Code of Conduct are provided for Members, which officers may also attend. The Employee Code of Conduct is brought to the notice of employees through the Employee Handbook.

The Fire Authority's Members' Handbook provides a link to the publication issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government entitled 'Openness and transparency on personal interests – A guide for councillors', which gives basic, practical information to Members on registering and disclosing pecuniary interests. Furthermore, in order to avoid any conflicts of interest, the Fire Authority has decided that Members, having disclosed a pecuniary interest in a matter, should leave the room, whilst that matter is discussed.

'Disclosable pecuniary interests' appear as a standing item on the agenda for every meeting of the Authority and its committees. In addition a guidance note on disclosing pecuniary interests in meetings is made available to all Members at every meeting. The guidance note states where the full terms of the Code of Conduct can be found and also that Members may seek advice about disclosing pecuniary interests from the Fire Authority's Monitoring Officer.

Members and officers are reminded each year of their duty to disclose related party transactions and a statement about such transactions is included in the final accounts.

Officers are required to declare formally any interest in contracts or proposed contracts. The Service also has in place a system for registering the business interests of its most senior officers and those involved in financial matters, which is reviewed annually.

There are Member and employee protocols on gifts and hospitality, which are brought to their notice through their respective handbooks.

4.1.4. Develop and maintain an effective audit committee (or equivalent) which is independent of the executive and scrutiny functions or make other appropriate arrangements for the discharge of the functions of such a committee

There is an effective Audit and Performance Management Committee with clear terms of reference, which are based on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy guidance and reviewed annually. The Committee meets four times a year and has a work plan, detailing all of the functions it must discharge throughout the year.

4.1.5. Ensure that effective, transparent and accessible arrangements are in place for dealing with complaints

The Authority has a well-established complaints procedure, which is easily accessible on its website via the following link.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/contact/complaints-procedure>

The procedure details how complaints should be handled and ensures that the process is monitored. The Complaints Log, containing all complaints made, is available to Members at each meeting of the full Authority and an annual report is taken to Members, outlining the complaints made, action taken and lessons learned. Details of complaints are also taken quarterly to the Service Management Team.

All complainants are provided with a copy of the Service's Guide to Complaints, which states that complaints can be made electronically online or in writing. The Complaints procedure includes an undertaking that the Service will acknowledge a complaint within 5 working days and provide a written response within 28 working days.

Complainants are informed that, if they are unsatisfied with the response, they have the option to contact the Chief Fire Officer in the first instance and then, if still unsatisfied, the Local Government Ombudsman. Complainants are provided with the Ombudsman's address and telephone number.

4.2. Having good-quality information, advice and support to ensure that services are delivered effectively and are what the community wants/needs

4.2.1. Ensure that those making decisions whether for the authority or the partnership are provided with information that is fit for the purpose – relevant, timely and gives clear explanations of technical issues and their implications

The duties of the Authority's statutory officers, namely the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer are laid down in Financial Regulations Standing Orders and those of the Chief Fire Officer in his job description. These include the giving of relevant and timely advice.

The responsibilities of the Authority's Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Solicitor are set out in service level agreements with Telford & Wrekin Council and again they encompass providing advice. The Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council for the provision of Treasurer also specifically refers to provision of advice.

The Fire Authority and its committees each has an annual work plan, which sets out the reports required and when, and the officers involved in producing them. The information provided by officers in those reports is relevant, timely and clear, thus facilitating the decision-making process.

4.2.2. Ensure that proper professional advice on matters that have legal or financial implications is available and recorded well in advance of decision making and used appropriately

There is a standard format for all committee reports, which includes sections for legal comment and financial implications, prompting the writer to seek advice in these areas.

Prior to publication Authority and committee reports are assessed by a solicitor in Legal Services of Telford & Wrekin Council (with whom the Authority has service level agreements for the provision of clerking, monitoring officer and legal services) and legal comment added, where appropriate. The Corporate Support Manager also reviews all such reports prior to publication and passes those, which have financial implications to the Authority's Head of Finance for consideration, who may in turn forward them to the Treasurer for advice.

The Treasurer and Monitoring Officer receive the papers for, and are invited to attend, the monthly meetings of the Service Management Team, enabling them also to have input to the decision-making process at this level.

4.3. Ensuring that an effective risk management system is in place

4.3.1. Ensure that risk management is embedded into the culture of the authority, with members and managers at all levels recognising that risk management is part of their jobs

The Fire Authority has embedded a robust system for identifying and evaluating all significant risks, which is tied in with producing its Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and AGS Improvement Plan.

The Service has an established Risk Management Group, which is responsible for ensuring that the Authority has an effective and efficient risk management process in place. It is made up of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Corporate Governance), Head of Finance, Planning and Performance Manager, Corporate Support Manager and the Authority's Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit. The latter is also the Chair of the Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee.

The Group, which meets regularly, monitors the Fire Authority's Corporate Risk Register, which sets out and evaluates all significant risks identified. Each risk is assigned to a risk owner, with action plans put in place to ensure the risks are mitigated as far as possible. In addition, the Group evaluates emerging risks, including those identified by officers and Internal and External Audit, and reports to the Service's senior management team.

The officers involved in the Risk Management Group also have regular discussions with the Authority's insurers regarding risk management issues.

As part of this process all reports to the senior management team and to the Fire Authority must consider any significant risk implications. These are also a standing item on the agenda for each senior management team meeting.

Reports on risk management are taken to the Fire Authority's Strategy and Resources Committee and the Audit and Performance Management Committee receives reports on service improvements, which are to be included in the Annual Governance Statement Improvement Plan. In addition the full Fire Authority regularly reviews the Corporate Risk Register.

Furthermore, regular assessment of risk is made at meetings of the Service Transformation Board, when new projects are considered. Risk is also assessed throughout the life of projects by the effective implementation of PRINCE2 project management methodologies.

The Authority has a Risk Management Policy Statement and a Risk Management Protocol (see link below), which outlines the roles and responsibilities of Members and staff and the procedures for managing risks. These were first adopted in 2006 and are reviewed regularly.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Admin%203%20Part%202%20-%20Risk%20Management%20Protocol.pdf>

Internal Audit undertakes a number of planned, risk-based reviews of various elements of the systems and internal control procedures across a range of functions in the Authority. Each review contains an opinion on the internal controls in place and any unsatisfactory audit opinions result in recommendations for improvement, which are implemented by management.

Copies of these reviews are sent to the Authority's Treasurer and discussed with the External Auditors. Internal Audit work is guided by, and reflects, professional best practice, in particular the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

4.3.2. Ensure that effective arrangements for whistle-blowing are in place to which officers, and all those contracting with or appointed by the authority have access

The Service's policy on whistle blowing encourages employees, who have concerns about illegality or malpractice, to speak up without fear of reprisal. This policy is further reinforced by the Authority's Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy. There is also a standard clause in Authority contracts, advising contractors of the whistle blowing policy. The whistle blowing policy is publicised in the Employee Handbook and is accessible via the website at the following link.

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/reporting-illegality-and-malpractice-whistleblowing>

4.4. Using their legal powers to the full benefit of the citizens and communities in their area.

4.4.1. Actively recognise the limits of lawful activity placed on them by, for example, the ultra vires doctrine (beyond the legal powers of the council) but also strive to utilise their powers to the full benefit of their communities.

4.4.2. Recognise the limits of lawful action and observe both the specific requirements of legislation and the general responsibilities placed on authorities by public law

4.4.3. Observe all specific legislative requirements placed upon them, as well as the requirements of general law, and in particular to integrate the key principles of good administrative law (rationality, legality and natural justice) into their procedures and decision making processes

The Authority has appointed a Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer, whose duties include ensuring the legality and fairness of decision making. The Monitoring Officer is the Assistant Director: Law Democracy and People Services of Telford & Wrekin Council and his Deputy, the Legal Services Manager.

The Monitoring Officer, or his Deputy, attends all meetings of the full Authority and reviews reports to the Authority and its committees prior to publication. They provide advice and guidance on new legal developments and have access to specialist legal officers.

In close liaison with the Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers the Corporate Support Manager plays a key role in ensuring that robust scrutiny, rules of natural justice, standards of conduct, efficiency, transparency, legality and high standards of corporate governance are delivered in practice through the Authority's decision-making process.

Principle 5

Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective

5.1. Making sure that members and officers have the skills, knowledge, experience and resources they need to perform well in their roles

5.1.1. Provide induction programmes tailored to individual needs and opportunities for members and officers to update their knowledge on a regular basis

As Members receive comprehensive training and development from their constituent authority, the Fire Authority provides an induction for new Members, which focuses specifically on the Fire Service in order to avoid duplication of resource. In addition Members regularly receive presentations and development sessions on various topics to ensure that their knowledge is up-to-date.

Specialist training is also provided to members of committees, such as the Audit and Performance Committee and the Standards and Human Resources Committee, to improve knowledge on technical issues and update Members on new developments.

There is a programme of organised training for managers, delivered at the appropriate level and procured to national /regional standards.

Induction sessions are delivered to all staff but in different ways to suit the differing working arrangements across the organisation.

Further learning needs are identified through skills assessment, one-to-one meetings / supervision and performance appraisal.

5.1.2. Ensure that the statutory officers have the skills, resources and support necessary to perform effectively in their roles and that these roles are properly understood throughout the authority

Members of staff in specialist areas, such as finance and human resources, maintain their Continuous Professional Development, as required by their own professional body.

Interview skills training is part of the Service's management development programmes. All posts have job descriptions and person specifications, detailing the essential and desirable abilities, qualifications and experience necessary to undertake the duties of any post.

The Service continues to be accredited against the Investors in People standard and is committed to training and developing its staff. Staff appraisals occur at least once a year, when training needs are identified.

The Service has a Training and Development Centre, which organises and delivers a multitude of professional and personnel development courses and programmes.

5.2. Developing the capability of people with governance responsibilities and evaluating their performance, as individuals and as a group

5.2.1. Assess the skills required by members and officers and make a commitment to develop those skills to enable roles to be carried out effectively

Collective learning and development needs are identified through each Fire Authority committee and the individual needs of Members by means of a questionnaire, which is sent out annually to Members.

The Service continues to be accredited against the Investors in People standard and is committed to training and developing its staff. Staff appraisals occur at least once a year, when training needs are identified.

The Service has a Training and Development Centre, which organises and delivers a multitude of professional and personnel development courses and programmes. Training is also offered on generic areas, such as risk management, data protection, freedom of information and human resource issues.

5.2.2. Develop skills on a continuing basis to improve performance, including the ability to scrutinise and challenge and to recognise when outside expert advice is needed

The Service's commitment to Member and staff training helps ensure that Members and officers have the necessary skills to challenge effectively and improve existing policies and performance.

Members of staff in specialist areas, such as finance and human resources, maintain their Continuous Professional Development as required by their own professional body.

The Service readily uses outside expert advice in those areas where specialist knowledge is required, such as pensions specialists, construction professionals, energy and water consultants etc. The Service also uses external legal advice when required.

5.2.3. Ensure that effective arrangements are in place for reviewing the performance of the executive as a whole and of individual members and agreeing an action plan which might, for example, aim to address any training or development needs

Collective learning and development needs are identified through each Fire Authority committee and the individual needs of Members by means of a questionnaire. These needs are co-ordinated and training is offered to meet the highest level of need, balancing available budget against development need.

5.3. Encouraging new talent for officers and members of the authority so that best use can be made of individuals' skills and resources in balancing continuity and renewal

5.3.1. Ensure that effective arrangements are in place designed to encourage individuals from all sections of the community to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the authority

The Service has the following in place to facilitate effective engagement with, and participation from, all sections of the community:

- Membership of Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH), Shrewsbury Action Against Racism (SAAR) and Women in the Fire Service (WFS)
- Involvement in local and national issue-based groups and networks, including Rainbow Film Festival (a local LGBT group), Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum and Rights and Fairness Telford
- Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan
- Positive Action for the Recruitment of women and members of ethnic minorities for operational employees
- A Gap Analysis and Action Plan to move to 'Excellent' within the Fire Service Equality Framework
- Management training plan, ensuring that all staff are enabled to mainstream equality and diversity
- Equality and diversity and cultural awareness induction training for new starters and training, updates and refreshers for established employees
- Participation in local cultural diversity and equality community events
- Attendance of operational personnel at Local Joint Committee meetings
- Vulnerable Persons Advocates
- The community outreach vehicle attends local events throughout the County, as do retained duty staff and watches from local stations

All posts have job descriptions and person specifications, detailing the essential and desirable abilities, qualifications and experience necessary to undertake the duties of any post. The Service positively welcomes applications from all sections of the community and particularly from those who are under-represented in the Service.

The Service is an accredited Investors in People organisation and has been re-accredited with the Disability Two Ticks Symbol. It is a member of Stonewall and Networking Women in the Fire Service.

Diversity is one of the Service's Core Values, namely:

We value diversity in the Service and the community by:

- Treating everyone fairly and with respect
- Providing varying solutions for different needs and expectations
- Promoting equal opportunities in employment and progression within the Service
- Challenging prejudice and discrimination

5.3.2. Ensure that career structures are in place for members and officers to encourage participation and development

The Service is committed to the Investors in People scheme. Staff are annually appraised, which includes the identification of training and development needs.

There is a well-established training and development programme for management and operational training.

Collective learning and development needs are identified through each Fire Authority committee and the individual needs of Members by means of a questionnaire. These needs are co-ordinated and training is offered to meet the highest level of need balancing available budget against development need.

Principle 6

Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

6.1. Exercising leadership through a robust scrutiny function which effectively engages local people and all local institutional stakeholders, including partnerships, and develops constructive accountability relationships

6.1.1. Make clear to themselves, all officers and the community to whom they are accountable and for what

The Fire Authority's Medium Term Corporate Plan sets out its core priorities and key performance measures, where its money comes from and how that money is spent. The Annual Statement of Assurance (see link below) summarises the achievements of the Fire Authority and its Service over the previous year and sets out its performance against its Public Value measures.

http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/SFRS%20Annual%20Statement%20of%20Assurance%202012-13%20Version%201_0.pdf

The annual Service Plan (see link below) provides an overview of the Service's purpose and how that will be achieved and sets out its aims and public value measures.

www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2014-02-14-service-plan-web.pdf

The Annual Governance Statement provides the Fire Authority's annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters. The Statement shows how the Fire Authority has had due regard to the expectations, set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan, and the requirements, included in the National Framework.

6.1.2. Consider those institutional stakeholders to whom the authority is accountable and assess the effectiveness of the relationships and any changes required

The Fire Authority is accountable to the Department of Communities and Local Government, to whom it provides performance data as and when requested.

As a combined fire authority for Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils, the Fire Authority has close links with both of those organisations through the Councillors, who constitute the Fire Authority, and the close working relationships that exist between officers.

The Service has identified its key institutional stakeholders, the majority of which are included in the Partnership Register. This is regularly reviewed by the Risk Management Group with a view to assessing the outcomes achieved by each partnership.

The Service is a key player in the Shropshire Partnership, 'Shropshire Together' and the Telford & Wrekin Local Strategic Plan Executive Group, which are multi-agency groups responsible for delivering quality services with a wide range of partners, including:

- West Mercia Police
- West Mercia Probation Trust
- Public Health England via the Local Resilience Forum
- Shropshire County Clinical Commissioning Group
- Job Centre Plus
- Representatives from the Business Board, Youth Parliament, Association of Local Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly

The Fire Authority works closely with both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils. The Chief Fire Officer sits on the Chief Officers Group and the Children's Trust Executive in Shropshire and the Local Strategic Partnership Executive in Telford & Wrekin. All of these Groups include the Chief Executives or key managers of the Police, Primary Care Trust and other local services. The Service is also represented on the community safety boards in each area and contributes to the wider safety strategies of all participants.

Within Telford & Wrekin Council, the Service also engages with Council-led and local partnerships to deal with specific issues, as well as the wider Council agenda. It is a prominent member of the Community Safety Partnership groups in each area and the Telford & Wrekin Local Strategic Partnership Executive Group.

6.2. Taking an active and planned approach to dialogue with and accountability to the public to ensure effective and appropriate service delivery whether directly by the authority, in partnership or by commissioning

6.2.1. Ensure clear channels of communication are in place with all sections of the community and other stakeholders, and put in place monitoring arrangements and ensure that they operate effectively

The Service has an Engagement Strategy, setting out the principles, which the Service will follow to inform and improve its internal and external consultation and communications.

The Service has introduced the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr to extend its reach within the community. It also uses Yammer for internal communications.

6.2.2. Hold meetings in public unless there are good reasons for confidentiality

All meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees are held in public. The public will only be excluded where information, classed as exempt under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, would be disclosed and the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information or where a Government Minister has directed that information is to be classed as confidential.

6.2.3. Ensure that arrangements are in place to enable the authority to engage with all sections of the community effectively. These arrangements should recognize that different sections of the community have different priorities and establish explicit processes for dealing with these competing demands

The Authority has many ways of consulting and communicating with its citizens and stakeholders, such as:

- Attendance at council neighbourhood and tasking group meetings
- Attendance at Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, where relevant
- 2020 Strategy / Integrated Risk Management Planning Consultations
- Meetings with its Trades Unions
- Publications and leaflets
- Press releases and close relationships with the local media
- The Fire Authority's website
- The presence of the Retained Service in local communities and businesses
- House-to-house visits
- Local fire safety campaigns
- Fire station open days
- Established links and regular meetings with local organisations and schools
- Local meetings throughout Shropshire to discuss the Authority's aims and priorities
- Attendance at local and regional exhibitions and shows
- Partnership working
- Involvement of the Fire Authority's Members, as Members also of Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Councils
- Process for public participation in Fire Authority meetings
- Contributing to national stakeholder groups, such as the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Local Government Association Fire Services Commission
- Membership of Fairness, Respect, Equality Shropshire (FRESH), Shrewsbury Action Against Racism (SAAR) and Women in the Fire Service (WFS)
- Involvement in local and national issue-based groups and networks, including Rainbow Film Festival (a local LGBT group), Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum and Rights and Fairness Telford
- Participation in local cultural diversity events

6.2.4. Establish a clear policy on the types of issues they will meaningfully consult on or engage with the public and service users about including a feedback mechanism for those consultees to demonstrate what has changed as a result

The Fire Authority has a duty to consult on a range of Fire and Rescue Service issues, including Integrated Risk Management Planning. Furthermore, the Fire Authority is committed, through its 2020 Strategy to consult with the public and other stakeholders to ensure that the services, which it delivers, the level of those services and the way, in which they are provided, are agreed and accepted by the public.

6.2.5. On an annual basis, publish a performance plan giving information on the authority's vision, strategy, plans and financial statements as well as information about its outcomes, achievements and the satisfaction of service users in the previous period

The Fire Authority publishes an Annual Assurance Statement, which provides details of its governance and culture and also summarises its achievements and performance against its Public Value measures during the previous year.

The Service Plan, also published annually, sets out the Fire Authority's purpose and core values and how they will be achieved, together with its aims and the measures, which will be used to monitor performance against those aims.

The Annual Governance Statement provides the Fire Authority's annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters. The Statement shows how the Fire Authority has had due regard to the expectations, set out in the Integrated Risk Management Plan, and the requirements, included in the National Framework.

Finally, the Medium Term Corporate Plan, the Fire Authority's overarching strategic planning document, sets out its plans for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in respect of:

- Medium Term (five-year) Financial Planning
- Integrated Risk Management Planning
- Corporate Risk
- Service Transformational Planning
- Community Assurance
- Public Value Measures

The Plan's aims are to ensure that the Authority has sufficient resources to deliver its objectives and to manage risk and uncertainty.

6.2.6. Ensure that the authority as a whole is open and accessible to the community, service users and its officers and ensure that it has made a commitment to openness and transparency in all its dealings, including partnerships, subject only to the need to preserve confidentiality in those specific circumstances where it is proper and appropriate to do so

All meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees are held in public. The public will only be excluded if information to be considered is classed as exempt under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act and the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, or where a Government Minister has directed that information is to be classed as confidential.

Rules concerning exempt information are clearly laid down in the Fire Authority's constitution with a presumption that items will remain open to the public unless they meet specific criteria.

The Service has a dedicated officer, who is committed to ensuring the principles of Data Protection, Freedom of Information and transparency are followed.

6.3. Making best use of human resources by taking an active and planned approach to meet responsibility to staff

6.3.1. Develop and maintain a clear policy on how staff and their representatives are consulted and involved in decision making

The Service actively involves staff at all levels of decision making. Open staff briefings are held regularly, including opportunities to help shape and comment on key policies and strategies, such as the Medium Term Corporate Plan, Budget Strategy, and development of resources, such as new equipment and buildings.

The 2020 strategic planning process, which encompasses Integrated Risk Management Planning, ensures that all members of staff have the opportunity to be consulted, and contribute meaningfully to key decisions relating to the services offered by the Fire Authority, their level and the way in which they are delivered.

The appraisal process provides a one-to-one opportunity for staff to contribute to the production of mutually agreed personal development plans. Senior managers regularly meet with all unions and enjoy an excellent working relationship with them.

The Service holds “Investors In People” (IIP) accreditation and had no significant issues identified at the last review.