

Findings and Recommendations arising from the Operational Performance Assessment 2012

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260205 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204.

1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of the outcome of the Operational Performance Assessment (OpA), conducted in 2012, and provides recommendations to address the identified collaborative areas for improvement. Members are asked to note that a reciprocal report will be simultaneously presented to Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the findings of the Operational Performance Assessment;
- b) Incorporate the findings within the Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance; and
- c) Approve proposals that the Fire Authority enter into detailed discussions with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority to form a strategic alliance aimed at delivering service improvements.

3 Background

The Government has stated within the current Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012¹ that robust mechanisms should be in place to provide independent assurance to communities and to the Government.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/2039159.pdf>

The Framework details important measures which will ensure that fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) provide local scrutiny arrangements and, in particular, states:

FRAs must provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in this Framework. To provide assurance, fire and rescue authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance.

(Paragraph 3.2)

Details regarding the style and presentation of the annual statement of assurance are provided at Fire Authority Report 14. The advocated approach to the assurance of operational matters is set out in the Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Toolkit (OpA)². It must be stressed that the OpA approach is encouraged, not mandatory.

4 Overview of the OpA Process

The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) developed the concept of OpA in 2009 in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. The OpA process is designed to form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the nation's Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), and provide FRAs and Chief Fire Officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

Self-assessment against the OpA Toolkit is recommended at least every three years. With the exception of one or two FRAs, all English FRSs have now scheduled (or completed) OpA peer reviews.

5 Approach to OpA

Recognising the potential for sharing expertise and identifying further collaborative opportunities, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) and Shropshire FRS commenced (in the spring of 2012) preparations for a formal OpA peer review.

The collaboration led to the publication of two FRA specific self-assessments, both of which included improvement action plans, identifying areas of further co-operation. The self-assessment, produced on behalf of the Fire Authority, is presented at Appendix A.

In the autumn of 2012 a LGA led OpA peer review team visited both SFRS and HWFRS to undertake two independent four-day reviews. The review team included senior FRS officers, an elected FRA Member, a West Mercia Police officer and a professional chief executive from the private sector. The team's activities were co-ordinated by an LGA facilitator.

² http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8ef22584-8a86-47c2-b67d-4bd999ae4801&groupId=10171

6 OpA Findings

The findings of the OpA Review Team are presented at B, but in summary, the review team stated that:

SFRS has achieved a lot. In the areas the peer team examined, overall performance has been good. The Service has developed a clear and concise vision which shapes its direction. Staff provided very positive feedback on working for the Service. The Service has made particularly good progress in managing revenue budget reductions to cope with the national funding reductions for Fire and Rescue Services.

In these turbulent times, this well run Service is managing uncertainty well, delivering improvement and seeking ways of delivering future services in different ways.

SFRS can also point to a number of innovations which are worthy achievements, including; joint working with organisations like Age UK and Severnside Housing, 20:20 scenario planning and innovative arrangements to support trainers in conjunction with Telford College. The Service produced a self-assessment which appears to have a mature awareness of the achievements and challenges of the Service.

(OpA Peer Challenge Report October 2012, Pages 4 & 5)

7 Improvement through Collaboration

The OpA review process has identified several areas within both SFRS and HWFRS that have the potential to form the basis of a strategic alliance to promote further collaborative working. The areas, as illustrated within Figure 1 below, represent six strategic thematic areas that may benefit from a partnership approach thus leading to:

- a) Enhanced public safety
- b) Improved fire fighter protection
- c) Robust operational resilience
- d) Shared expertise and knowledge
- e) Increased capacity
- f) Reduction of duplication of effort
- g) Promotion of intra/inter-operability
- h) Harmonisation of policy and procedure
- i) Creation of efficiency savings through joint procurement
- j) Delivery of quality public services

A more detailed description of the strategic areas set out opposite is provided at Appendix C.

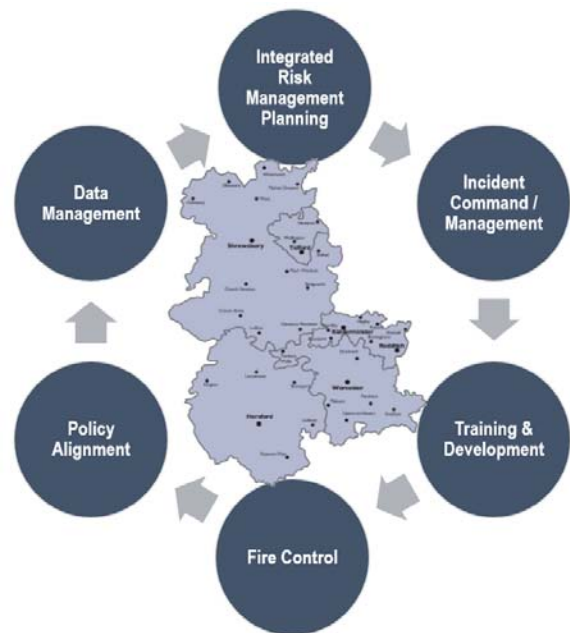


Figure 1: Strategic Areas of Collaboration

8 Next Steps

Subject to Member approval, the next steps will be to:

- a) Incorporate findings from the self-assessment, together with the OpA Review Team's findings, within the Fire Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance (to be published later this year), and
- b) Formally enter into detailed discussions with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (HWFRA) to establish a strategic alliance, aimed at delivering the strategic key areas, set out in paragraph 7.

It is anticipated that the OpA driven 'strategic alliance' will be managed via a joint FRA Member / Officer led programme of work. Internally, any actions / activities arising will be incorporated within the Service's established Service Transformation Programme.

9 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications to the Fire Authority associated with the OpA process. Any financial implications necessary to support the implementation of the proposed OpA programme of work, should a strategic alliance be formed with HWFRA, will be reported in due course.

10 Legal Comment

Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provides the statutory authority for the Fire Service National Framework and requires FRAs to have regard to the Framework in carrying out their functions.

Members should have due regard to the new Framework and, in particular, paragraph 3.2, as discussed in section 3 above.

11 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

12 Appendices

Appendix A

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority OpA Self-Assessment 2012

Appendix B

Local Government Association / Chief Fire Officers Association Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report October 2012

Appendix C

OpA Thematic Areas of Collaboration

13 Background Papers

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012)
Fire and Rescue Service National Framework³

Local Government Association / Chief Fire Officers Association
OpA Toolkit⁴

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/2039159.pdf>

⁴ http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8ef22584-8a86-47c2-b67d-4bd999ae4801&groupId=10171



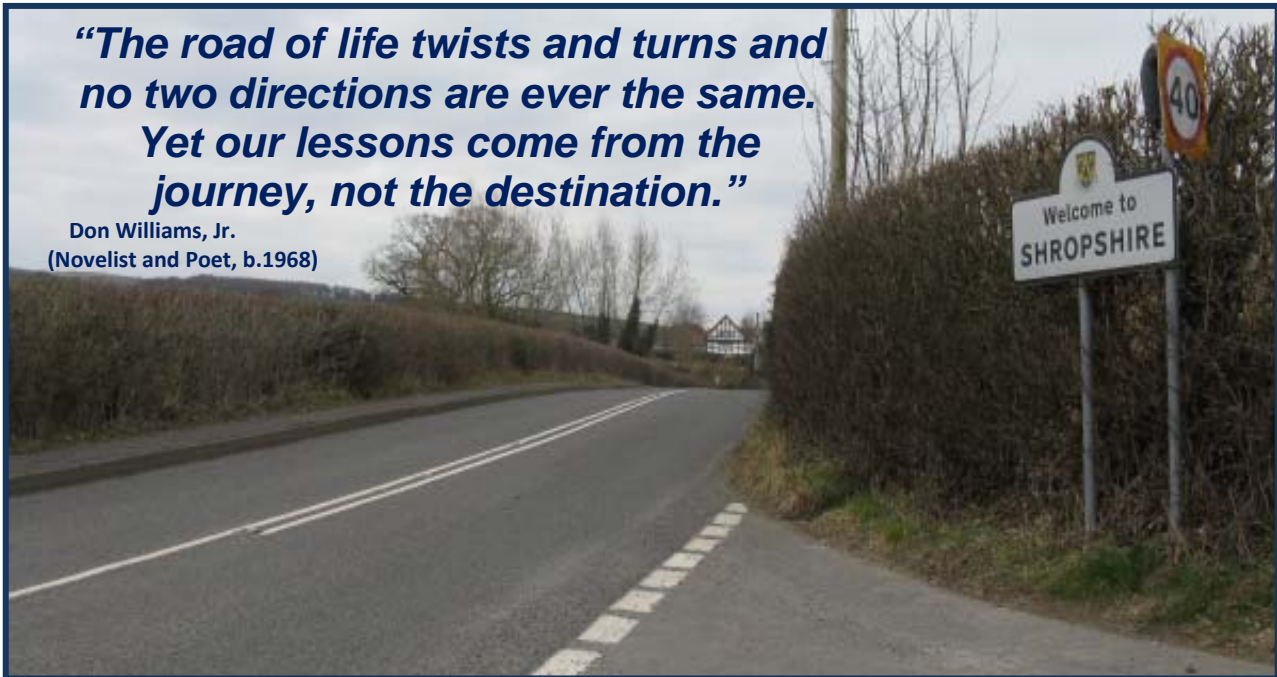
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

Operational Performance Assessment Self-Assessment 2012

(Version 1 – Final)

*“The road of life twists and turns and
no two directions are ever the same.
Yet our lessons come from the
journey, not the destination.”*

Don Williams, Jr.
(Novelist and Poet, b.1968)



Putting Shropshire's Safety First
www.shropshirefire.gov.uk

Document History



Document Author(s)

Name	Title	Contact Details
Steve Worrall	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service Brigade Headquarters St Michael's Street Shrewsbury SY1 2HJ Shropshire, UK Phone: +44 (0) 1743 260204 Mobile: +44 (0) 7967 465813 Email: steve.worrall@shropshirefire.gov.uk

Revision History

Revision date	Previous revision date	Summary of Changes	Changes marked

Approvals

Name	Signature	Title	Date of Issue	Version
Paul Raymond		Chief Fire Officer	23 rd August 2012	0.3 Draft
Paul Raymond		Chief Fire Officer	14 th September 2012	1 Final

Distribution

Name/Title	Date of Issue	Version
➤ LGA/CFOA Peer Review Team ➤ Chair of Fire Authority ➤ Service Management Team	23 rd August 2012	0.3 Draft
➤ LGA/CFOA Peer Review Team ➤ Chair of Fire Authority ➤ Service Management Team	14 th September 2012	1 Final

Copyright

©2012 Copyright Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be produced in any material form (including photocopying or storing in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright holder except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London, England W1P 9HE.

Table of Contents

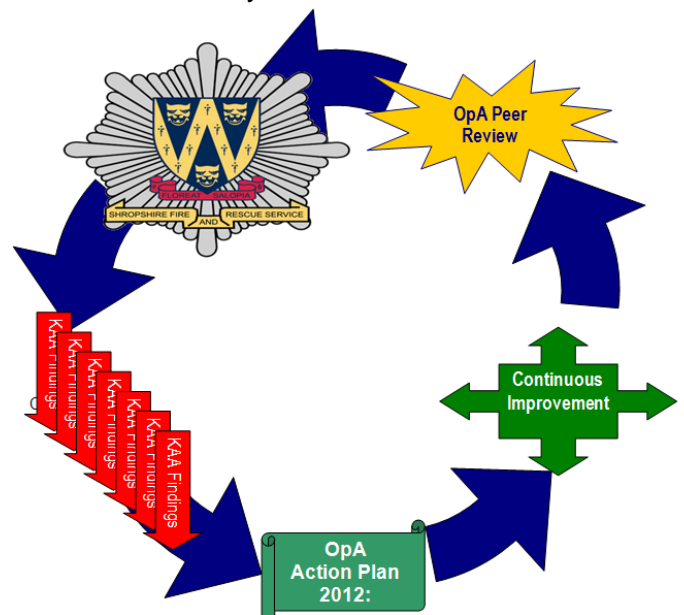
	Page
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Our County	5
3. Our Fire and Rescue Service	5
4. Risks within the Community	6
5. Our performance	7
6. Summary findings of Self-Assessment.....	8
• Response (Priority 1).....	9
• Community Risk Management (Priority 2)	9
• Training and Development (Priority 3).....	10
• Protection (equal Priority 4)	10
• Prevention (equal Priority 4)	11
• Health and Safety (Priority 6).....	11
• Call Management and Incident Support (Priority 7).....	12
 Appendices	 13
Appendix A: Operational Performance Assessment Action Plan 2012	14
Appendix B: SWFRA Service Plan 2012/13.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1. Introduction

This self-assessment document presents a reflection of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority's (SWFRA) performance in respect of operational matters and more importantly offers a 'living' roadmap of action, largely in collaboration with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (HWFRA), to secure continuous improvement in service delivery.

Many years ago, someone commented, "When all is said and done, usually more is said than done" (Lou Holtz). In reality, this comment could be attributed to many self-assessments produced today within the public sector. Self-assessments are often backward looking and backslapping and offer little future direction and intent for the organisation under scrutiny.

The findings presented within this document represent a joint approach to *Operational Assessment* undertaken by both Fire Authorities using the CFOA/LGA OpA Toolkit.¹ The joint approach is a continuous process (or *journey*) and as such, the contents of this document should be viewed as a *snapshot* within the process and not the destination. Appended to this document is the *Operational Performance Assessment Action Plan 2012* (appendix A) that sets out the priorities for action in respect of the key issues identified through the self-assessment process (the process shown opposite).



A range of actions necessary to promote continuous improvement within the Service have emerged, these vary from departmental/tactical *quick win* improvements, some of which have or are being addressed in collaboration with HWFRA, through to long-term strategic corporate initiatives. The strategic initiatives, as set out in the appended Action Plan, are summarized as six crosscutting thematic areas:

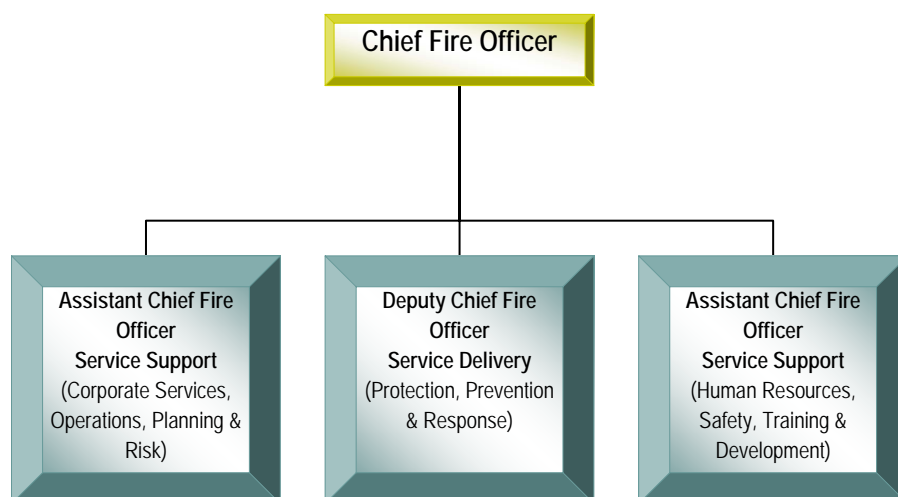
- **Incident Command/Management**
- **Integrated Risk Management Planning**
- **Training & Development**
- **Data Management**
- **Policy Alignment**
- **Fire Control**

The outcome of the peer review will help refine, shape and forge these areas within the *Action Plan* into a strategic collaborative plan to be agreed by the SWFRA in December 2012. The *Action Plan* will seek to combine resources, expertise and best practice (drawn upon both locally and nationally) to harmonise arrangements between the two Fire and Rescue Services securing improvements to the communities of West Mercia through achieving economies of scale. It will also assist in contributing as an integral element of the Fire Authority's wider corporate priorities for 2013 and beyond.

¹ http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8ef22584-8a86-47c2-b67d-4bd999ae4801&groupId=10171

The Service is led by Chief Fire Officer Paul Raymond and is structured as shown opposite.

The Service operates with an annual budget of approximately £21m, receiving one third of its budget through central government grant and the remaining two-thirds through local council taxes.



During 2011/12 the Service responded to 4,544 emergency calls.

4. Risks within the Community

Shropshire is a truly beautiful county that can boast the Shropshire Hills which are designated an area of outstanding natural beauty, the Ironbridge Gorge (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve (one of the most important and best preserved bogs in Britain), its own lake district and an abundance of historic towns and castles. Such beauty attracts many visitors, many of whom take up residence and stay (Shropshire is the fifth most popular county to retire to). Equally, Shropshire and particularly Telford offers a dynamic environment for new hi-tech industries and the entrepreneurialism and innovation that were the core of the first Industrial Revolution is still alive and flourishing today. Telford has inward investment from across the globe, with one third of businesses being international. In recent years, Telford had the highest concentration of Japanese/Taiwanese businesses outside of Asia.

This diversity of natural and historic beauty coupled with modern industry presents many challenges for the Service to protect from fire. However, these challenges within the built and natural environment will always be secondary to that of the protection of life. And sadly, during 2011/12, the county witnessed its highest number of fire related deaths for generations, with 11 deaths compared to the yearly average of just two.

The community of Shropshire is as diverse as the natural and built environment. Whilst perceived as a relatively affluent *'Anglo-Saxon, middle-class and middle-England'* county it still remains a county with issues, particularly in respect of social deprivation, poverty and even the spectre of terrorism. However, perhaps contrary to perception, the fire deaths experienced are not specifically related to poverty, deprivation or terrorism but are moreover focused on the elderly, living alone, more often than not in a rural community. And it is this section of society that presents the greatest challenge to the Service to protect from fire, particularly in future years. Shropshire has a relatively high concentration of people in the older age groups. In 2010, about 50% of the county's residents were aged 45 or over, compared to only 41.8% nationally. During the next 25 years, those aged 65-84 are forecast

to increase by 70% and those over 85 by a massive by 195%. In South Shropshire by 2029, almost 42% of the population will be over 65.

The existing challenges of providing quality value for money public services in a sparsely populated rural county will only increase as the ageing 'at risk group' grows exponentially in future years, a future that SWFRA plans to prepare for in partnership with HWFRA.

5. Our performance

During 2010, the Fire Authority embarked upon a comprehensive review of the Service aimed at realigning it to the needs of the community with the aim of creating *public value*. The outcome was a radical simplification of the purpose and aims of the Service, removing much of the jargon and to some extent the less relevant performance indicators that formed part of the previous Best Value regime. The purpose of the Service is now simply defined as:

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



With the aims and measures are set out within a single page yearly Service Plan (see Appendix B). The Fire Authority's aims and measures for 2012/13 are:

Aims	Public Value Measures:
1. To be there where and when you need us in an emergency with a professional and well equipped team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 1a. The first fire engine will arrive at an emergency incident with at least 4 firefighters within 15 minutes on 85% of occasions ★ 1b. The first fire engine will arrive with a minimum competent crew on 100% of occasions
2. To reduce the number of fires in our community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 2a. Accidental fires will be reduced to not more than 586 fires during 2012/13 ★ 2b. Fire crimes will be reduced to not more than 1058 fires during 2012/13
3. To reduce the number of fire related deaths and serious injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 3a. Fire related deaths and serious injuries in the community will be reduced to not more than 30 during 2012/13 ★ 3b. Injuries sustained to staff through firefighting will be reduced to not more than 24 injuries during 2012/13
4. To deliver an effective fire and rescue service at a cost that is acceptable to our community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 4a. The achievement of a minimum four star rating ('Good') in our customer satisfaction on not less than 75% of occasions ★ 4b. The achievement of a minimum four star rating ('Good') for service that represents Value for Money on not less than 75% of occasions

These aims and measures are monitored on a monthly basis through eight strategic performance groups and the Service Management Team, with summary performance reviewed by the Fire Authority on a quarterly basis.² Performance for the first quarter (April-June) of 2012 recorded performance exceeding the targets set for 7 out of the 8 Fire Authority Public Value measures.

Currently, there are no mandatory national performance indicators or audit regime against which Fire Authorities are expected to report to their communities (albeit this may change during 2013). The recently published DCLG Fire Statistics 2011/12³ do offer a range of measures that offer some limited value for benchmarking purposes. In previous years, Fire Authorities were subjected to the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime. Important analysis⁴ undertaken by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) of all CPA results over a three-year period (as published by the Commission) ranked SWFRA (along with Kent Fire Authority) as the top performing in the country. The FBU's report also went on to state: '*Of the 'Audit Commission's top 16' fire and rescue authorities, only five have done anything other than 'be big,' and are therefore worthy of further note.*'⁵ SWFRA and HWFRA were two of those cited as '*worthy of further note.*'

6. Summary findings of Self-Assessment

Preparation of this self-assessment has been akin to the road of life with twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet for both SWFRA and HWFRA the lessons have arisen from the journey of collaboration, and not the destination – the peer review. For several months during 2012, resources from both organisations have met on a regular basis to review, discuss and debate each Service's performance against the criteria set out within the CFOA/LGA OpA Toolkit. The outcome of this exercise has been a genuine '*top-down*' and '*bottom-up*' driven desire to cooperate, find solutions and share resources and expertise to common problems. Throughout the journey an abundance of collaborative localised '*quick-wins*' have been identified and actioned, with more strategic issues forming part of the appended *Action Plan* (see appendix A).

Set out below is a summary of the key findings for each of the seven Key Areas of Assessment (KAA) that form the CFOA/LGA OpA Toolkit. The findings are listed in order of importance that the Fire Authority believe attention should be devoted by the peer review team to secure maximum benefits from the OpA review process. The order of importance does not represent the corporate priorities of either the Fire Authority or Service, merely those areas where it is considered the greatest benefit from a review by '*critical friends*' will add value. To avoid repetition of action within the KAAs, the key actions arising from the self-assessment have been aligned into six crosscutting thematic areas for improvement (see appendix A).

² <http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-the-service/fra/meetings/Audit-and-Performance-Management>

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/monitorq1q42012?view=Standard>

⁴ <http://www.fbu.me.uk/newspress/publications/pdf/6119FBUAuditReport.pdf>

⁵ *Ibid* page 34.

Response (Priority 1)

The Service operates from 23 fire stations throughout the County of Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. A new Headquarters building is located in Shrewsbury alongside the fire station. The Service operates with defined response and competence standards that are articulated in the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) and the Service Plan.

A station audit and standards process has been introduced ensuring that firefighter competence, equipment management and safe systems of work are implemented throughout all emergency response activities. A performance management system through Area Command ensures that the organisation delivers a well-trained and fully equipped crew of firefighters to 85% of all emergency incidents within 15 minutes.

Service managers regularly attend LRF, LJC's bronze level tasking and ASB groups; these are fundamental to effective consultation ensuring the Service develops, maintains and improves its emergency response arrangements. In consultation with regional fire and rescue services agreed and established mutual aid arrangements in accordance with section 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 have been developed.

The Service has a well-structured audit and review process in place where response standards and community safety priorities advise the quality assurance process.

The self-assessment has identified as areas for improvement the approach to debriefs conducted following operational incidents (together with availability of qualified staff) and management of the emerging decline in retained duty staff availability and recruitment.

Community Risk Management (Priority 2)

The Fire Authority's IRMP process was established in 2004 and underpins the Service's efforts to reduce the risk experienced by the communities of Shropshire. With responsibility for developing the Strategic IRMP sitting with the Fire Authority, Members have taken an extremely active role in leading on the process, including having personal involvement in the consultation with staff and stakeholders – something that few, if any, other fire authorities actually achieve. During the years leading up to the financial crisis the focus for change was very much on driving efficiency in the Service looking for ways to ensure its limited resources were used in the most effective way. In addressing the austerity measures, the focus of IRMP has more recently shifted towards trying to achieve a balanced budget whilst also continuing to deliver the excellent service the community have come to expect. Using the Public Value principles, the Fire Authority has managed to plan for nearly £3 million worth of cuts, from its £21 million budget, by 2014/15.

The Service currently considers its Community Risk Management processes to be well "established" and embedded within Shropshire. However, the self-assessment has highlighted a number of areas for improvement, many of which will be undertaken in collaboration with HWFRA. The development of a stand-alone Policy document, which clearly outlines the purpose and underlying principles of IRMP, will help to ensure that staff, the public and other stakeholders understand how the use of 'Public Value' and, more recently, 'Scenario Planning' is helping to develop IRMP plans as far ahead as 2020. Although well defined 'Response Standards' exist, the opportunity to develop and introduce

Prevention and Protection standards will provide greater clarity in managing public expectations into the future.

Training and Development (Priority 3)

The Service provides training and development from its main Training and Development Centre at Telford Central Fire Station and satellite stations throughout the county. The Service has partially completed an analysis of its training facilities and is currently in the process of reviewing its training and development requirements following the HSE consolidation report and a subsequent action plan to ensure the competence, health safety and welfare of all personnel. The OpA self-assessment has served to reaffirm the need to progress, as an area for further improvement (in collaboration with HWFRA), officer and incident command training and assessment with the incorporation of local and cross border risks.

Delivery plans are being produced as part of the HSE consolidation action plan to review and update the assessment of Incident Commanders at all levels in the Service. In collaboration with HWFRA, opportunities exist, and have commenced in part, to develop joint training policies, undertake combined training for operational officers and prevention/protection/fire control staff, conduct training staff audits and introduce Service wide individual personal development records.

Protection (equal Priority 4)

The Service has a dedicated team devoted to supporting business whilst also enforcing the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. The Protection Team uses the software product CFRMIS to identify a Risk Based Inspection Programme which generates the majority audit and enforcement activity amongst 18,000 business premises. Recent management changes (personnel) have provided an opportunity to review all areas of Protection, from team structure and management roles, staff roles, quality and skills and the use and management of data. The *light touch* review has helped to identify several gaps in performance and generated a considerable number of management actions to support the Service's aim of continual improvement. As a result, the Protection team is witnessing gradual improvements across the board.

Delivery of Protection services is set down in legislation and follows a set process. Qualifying of auditing officers to a standard recognised and accepted by the business sector in line with National Occupational Standards will lead to a more professional delivery of Protection activity. The Service will continue to develop mutually beneficial relationships with partners, including HWFRA; for example, both Services will meet regularly at practitioner level to facilitate development of staff based on experiential shared learning. The Service considers itself established in the field of Protection and the improvements highlighted will move the Service towards "advanced" status within the next twelve months.

Prevention (equal Priority 4)

The Service has two distinct teams operating within the Prevention arena. The Home Safety Team (widely known as CFS) works closely with operational crews to deliver a programme of Home Fire Safety Visits across the county. The Service utilises wholetime and retained duty crews to deliver initiatives locally, often employing skilled advocates in the more remote areas, particularly at homes more than 15 minutes travel distance from the nearest fire station. Specialists within the team deliver a range of initiatives in partnership with other agencies to vulnerable groups and individuals in our communities. The Service is particularly proud of its reinvigorated fire setter intervention scheme, now called 'iLearn' that provides support to families with young children at particular risk. The Service's Risk Reduction Team targets communities most at risk from deliberate fires working closely with Police Community Support Officers on joint patrols.

Prevention is currently well 'established' and embedded within Shropshire, but highlighted are a number of areas for significant improvement over the coming months that will move the Service to a more 'advanced' rating. Effectively targeting Prevention activities has been a significant challenge for a number of years and often resulting in a blanket approach to ensure that the Service reaches as many vulnerable people as possible. The Service is working hard to develop new data sharing agreements to support overarching aim of Precision Prevention. In particular, and working with Shropshire Primary Care Trust who hold data on over 45,000 elderly, potentially at high-risk people. This data will support the Service in targeting activity at the most vulnerable in society, allowing finite resources to be used most effectively. The Risk Reduction Team will continue to work with partners old and new to enhance the Service's presence in communities, providing support and guidance to homeowners, business, and other agencies, resulting in further reductions in deliberate fire setting.

Health and Safety (Priority 6)

The Service operates within clearly defined Health and Safety policies to support plans and strategies based on HSG65 taking into account all relevant statutory provisions including Health and Safety legislation and guidance. Training is currently being undertaken to these standards but is not formalised and or accredited at all levels within the Service. The Service understands the need for risk assessment and how important that those who create risk should properly manage that risk, to the benefit of both the Service and those who work for it or under its control. However, the Service recognises that areas for further improvement exist.

The self-assessment has confirmed the need for closer liaison between Health and Safety and Operations departments to maintain and distribute information as legislation and procedures change. It is also proposed to increase communication and collaboration within the regional fire and rescue services on matters of significant interest to sustain uniformity of safe practices and procedures. Working in collaboration with HWFRA it is proposed to share critical information, Toolbox talks, policy and approaches to IOSH and NEBOSH training and the creation of a common generic risk assessment process.

Call Management and Incident Support (Priority 7)

The Service operates a dedicated 24x7 Fire Control located at Brigade Headquarters, Shrewsbury. Following the demise of the national FiReControl Project, the Fire Authority took the decision to invest in a new Command and Control (C&C) System and introduced retained duty system (RDS) Control Operators for additional resilience. As with most new technology, the transition to the new C&C has been problematic, albeit plans are in place to address outstanding integration issues. The RDS staff have proved to be extremely successful in providing additional capacity during spate conditions and in covering staffing shortfalls.

The Fire Authority has entered into a formal agreement via a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MoU) with HWFRA to secure a single resilient C&C infrastructure operated from two locations (Shrewsbury and Worcester) for resilience. The MoU is part-funded through the DCLG Fire Control Grant. In delivering the objectives of the MoU, the key areas for improvement involve the sharing of data/information/procedures and the development, testing and implementation of robust contingency plans by both Services to secure business continuity during the transition period to a single C&C solution.

Appendices

Appendix A: Operational Performance Assessment Action Plan 2012

Appendix B: SWFRA Service Plan 2012/13

Summary of Thematic Areas for Action to improve Service Delivery (arising from Operational Performance Assessment 2012)	This action supports the following SWFRA Aims:	This action is addressed via: ⁶ STP, MoU, 2020	Collaborative action between HWFRS & SFRS (Yes or No)	Priority (High, Medium or Low)	Lead Officer(s)	Comments (Summary of expected outcome/benefits)	Outcomes delivery of the action(s) will deliver outcomes in the following key areas:						
							Risk Management:	Prevention:	Protection:	Response:	Health & Safety:	Training & Development:	Call Management & Incident Support:
1. Theme: Incident Command/Management Description: a collaborative review of Incident Command/Management arrangements leading to enhanced command resilience, competence, inter/intra-operability, debriefing, monitoring and peer audit.	1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a	STP MoU 2020	Yes	High	Kev Faulkner	Through collaboration, the outcome will result in seamless cross-border working, improved inter-agency command arrangements and increased officer capacity and resilience through mutual shared command/specialist officer functions.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Theme: Integrated Risk Management Planning Description: the development of a collaborative approach to IRMP necessary to address requirements of the FRS National Framework including the review/development of community focused Response, Protection and Prevention targets and standards.	1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a,	STP 2020	Yes	High	Andy Johnson	Sharing knowledge, expertise and resource, the outcome will result in a common agreed approach to IRMP, seamless cross-border working, improved inter-agency command arrangements and increased officer capacity and resilience through mutual shared command/specialist officer functions.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Theme: Training & Development Description: a coordinated collaborative approach to training and formal accreditation/peer review (where appropriate) to enhance service delivery in Incident Command, Cross-Border/Inter-Agency working, Business Fire Safety and Health & Safety.	1b, 2a, 2b, 3b, 4a	Dept Business Plan	Yes	High	Andy Perry	The delivery of a collaborative training policy and joint training (where appropriate), leading to uniformity of approach and service delivery efficiencies. The outcome will also include formal accreditation/peer review (where appropriate) to provide community assurance.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Theme: Data Management Description: the effective, efficient and secure use of data to aid resilience and reliability both at incidents and corporately. The actions required will also address policy, user training and data integration (software/hardware and data sharing between agencies).	1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b	STP	Yes	Medium	Sally Edwards	The outcome will enable the seamless, secure and timely transmission of data on agreed standardised resilient software/hardware. This will aid inter/intra-operability and in particular operational intelligence between fire and rescue services and partner agencies.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Description: Improvements in the quality of our data from CFRMIS, IRS and the Command and Control System, and the ability to combine that information to provide a holistic approach to all aspects of the Service.	1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b	STP	No	Medium	Sally Edwards	Accurate and timely information that is available and accessible from all areas of the organisation and can be used to target the Service's resources at those most in need in the community.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5. Theme: Policy Alignment Description: a coordinated collaborative approach to generic service issues such as RDS Recruitment, Health and Safety, Equality & Diversity (process and assessments), Risk Assessments, Personal Development Records and Brigade Orders (Protection).	2a, 2b, 3a, 3b	Dept Business Plan	Yes	Low	Bob Cooper & Andy Perry	As an outcome of partnership working and critical friend challenge, both Services will adopt recognised best practice and common operating procedures in a variety of policy areas where economies of scale and service improvements are identified.	✓			✓	✓		
6. Theme: Fire Control Description: Utilising the agreed 'Memorandum of Understanding' arrangements, secure an efficient, effective, robust and resilient command and control infrastructure for the West Mercia area.	1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b	STP MoU	Yes	Low	John Harrison	Working in partnership through the agreed 'MoU' project, both Services will share a single, resilient command and control infrastructure operated from two locations. The outcome will enable seamless despatch and management of resources anywhere within the 'West Mercia' area.	✓			✓	✓		✓

⁶ Key to abbreviations: 'STP' – Service Transformation Programme, 'MoU' – SWFRA & HWFRA Memorandum of Understanding (Joint Fire Control Project), '2020' – SFRS IRMP programme 2012-13,



Service Plan 2012/13



Service Plan 2012/13 - Overview

The purpose of this Service Plan is to guide and inform staff of the direction Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority is pursuing for the Service during the coming year. The Plan is reflective of the changing environment, particularly economically, in which the organisation now operates. To this end, the Service's priorities have been refined and simplified to four Aims, enabled through eight Public Value Measures. The Service Plan underpins delivery of the Fire Authority's Medium Term Corporate Plan.

Within each Department's Business Plans for 2012/13 will be a range of measures, objectives and priorities necessary to deliver the Plan. Underpinning all our activities remain our Core Values. But most importantly, our success rests in us all working well together across the whole organisation, as **ONE TEAM**, with **ONE VISION**, to deliver **ONE SERVICE** that the communities expect from us.

Cllr Stuart West - Chairman
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

Paul Raymond - Chief Fire Officer

Our vision remains 'Putting Shropshire's Safety First.' Our mission to achieve this is to save and protect life, property and the environment from fire and other emergencies. We will fundamentally achieve this mission through two strands:

- **Professional Response** where we will strive to deliver a trained and well equipped crew of firefighters to any incident in a time that is acceptable to the public; and
- **Precision Prevention** where we will target our finite resources to those in our communities who are at greater risk.

These two strands are linked within our 'DNA' Service structure and organisational culture. The DNA supports:

- **Local leadership**, with managers across the Service taking greater responsibility for their teams and providing local community leadership.
- **Public Engagement**, with the Service involving, providing assurance and listening to communities to determine public satisfaction.
- **Teamwork**, working well together across the whole organisation, as one team, with one vision, to deliver one service.
- **Innovation**, looking at problems and finding innovative ways to simplify the way we work, reducing bureaucracy and duplication of effort.
- **Flexibility**, as a workforce, flexible in how, where and when we work.
- **Personal Development**, being competent in our roles, and where necessary, the ability to take up new roles.



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

Our Major Service Improvement Projects for 2012/13

- Issue of new firefighting clothing to operational personnel
- Upgrade of Breathing Apparatus sets, complete with new tactical fire-ground radios
- Consolidation of new Command & Control system and station end equipment
- Improvements in the collection and use of performance data



Our Aims:

- To be there when you need us in an emergency with a professional and well equipped team**
- To reduce the number of fires in our community**
- To reduce the number of fire related deaths and serious injuries**
- To deliver an effective fire and rescue service at a cost that is acceptable to our community**

Public Value Measures:

- The first fire engine will arrive at an emergency incident with at least 4 firefighters within 15 minutes on 85% of occasions
- The first fire engine will arrive with a competent crew on 100% of occasions
- Accidental fires will be reduced to not more than 586 fires during 2012/13
- Fire crimes will be reduced to not more than 1058 fires during 2012/13
- Fire related deaths and serious injuries in the community will be reduced to not more than 35 during 2012/13
- Injuries sustained to staff through firefighting will be reduced to not more than 24 injuries during 2012/13
- The achievement of a minimum four star rating ('Good') in our customer satisfaction on not less than 75% of occasions
- The achievement of a minimum four star rating ('Good') for service that represents Value for Money on not less than 75% of occasions



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report

October 2012

Report Contents

1.	Executive summary	2
2.	Introduction	3
3.	The peer challenge team	4
4.	The journey so far	4

Key Areas of Focus

5.	Incident command management (Response)	6
6.	Integrated risk management planning (Community risk management)	
7.	Training and development	8
8.	Data management	10
9.	Policy alignment (Response and health and safety)	11
10.	Fire control (Call management and incident support)	12

The Future Organisation

11.	Collaboration	13
12.	Organisational capacity	14
13.	Culture	15
14.	Leadership	16
15.	Conclusion and contact information	17

1. Executive Summary

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service continues to make sound progress and demonstrated an effective Fire and Rescue Service in the areas the peer challenge explored. This is particularly notable in the current financial climate as the Service continues to deal with significant budget reductions whilst maintaining its core duties and response to incidents.

The Service shows a consistent level of good performance on response – attending 89% of incidents within 15 minutes. Over the last eighteen months there has also been a reduction in the number of accidental fires, fire crimes and consistently high customer satisfaction ratings. Shropshire Fire and Rescue can also point to a number of innovations which are worthy achievements, including; joint working with organisations like Age UK and Severnside Housing, 20:20 scenario planning and innovative arrangements to support trainers in conjunction with Telford College.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has expressed a clear desire to explore opportunities to work more collaboratively with other Fire and Rescue Services. To demonstrate this clear desire, more extensive collaboration in the future should be founded on a clear and expressed collective ambition from the collaborating organisations. Throughout the Service there is recognition that the future funding climate, with diminishing resources, is likely to notably strengthen the case for greater collaboration. There is also a general understanding at the operational level that collaboration with other Services is practical and sensible.

The Service will need to translate this desire into practical collaborative working and this could be channelled through working with Hereford & Worcester FRS on a strategic alliance business case.

The Service has a strong platform for future change and this platform is supported by a clear medium term financial plan. There are good relationships with staff and Representative Bodies and there is a high level of trust in the current senior officers and Fire Authority Members.

Effective ICT should be a significant enabler for the Service. However, at present, this is not the case. There is a need for a more comprehensive and joined up approach to how ICT can be used to stream line processes, improve management information and give better access to data across the Service.

Alongside this, the Service will need to assess whether it has got the right level of skills and capacity to deliver on the challenges they are likely to face in the future.

The future organisation may need to adapt to the changing demands placed on it and it is likely the Service will have to deal with a higher level of ambiguity, lower overall resources, be more collaborative and transform itself accordingly. However, from the evidence found by the team Shropshire FRS appears very well placed to deal with the uncertainty of the future.

2. Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Associations (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service in October 2012. Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement. It is a key component of the LGA's 'Taking the Lead' offer (www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 22-25 October 2012 and consisted of a range of on-site activity including interviews, focus groups and visits to four fire stations.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, officers, front line firefighters and partner agencies. During the time in Shropshire the peer team were well looked after and everyone the team met were fully engaged with the process, open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to the team in advance, including Shropshire's summary Operational Assessment self-assessment and key supporting documentation. The peer challenge did not aim to re-run the Operational Assessment, but instead focused on areas identified in discussion with the Service. The overall scope of the peer challenge was to:

Review the findings of Shropshire's Operational Self-assessment to determine if the Service's culture and ability to manage change is appropriate to successfully deliver the Operational Assessment Action Plan in collaboration with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a discussion of the findings was delivered to the Services' senior officers.

This report provides detailed information on the key focus areas agreed with the Service, based around the six key themes of the operational assessment action plan which relate closely to the toolkit areas:

- Incident command management (Response)
- Integrated risk management planning (Community risk management)
- Training and development
- Data management
- Policy alignment (Response and health and safety)
- Fire control (Call management and incident support)

The purpose of the peer challenge was to complement the Authority's Operational Assessment self-assessment by providing external challenge to help support improvement and to reflect how the Service is performing across the areas of focus.

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process. They help Services with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

3. The peer challenge team was:

- Mark Yates, Chief Fire Officer, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Andrew Backhouse, North Yorkshire Fire Authority
- Jane Sherlock, Director of People & Organisational Development, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
- Tom Harding, Inspector, West Mercia Police
- Jon Pryce, Area Commander, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
- Dr Geoffrey Davies, Chair, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
- Neil Shaw, Programme Manager, Local Government Association
- Jonna Stevens, Advisor, Local Government Association

4. The journey so far

Whilst the peer challenge is not an inspection, it is important to understand the context the Service operates within as it tackles its future challenge. Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service has achieved a lot. In the areas the peer team examined, overall performance has been good. The Service has developed a clear and concise vision which shapes its direction. Staff provided very positive feedback on working for the Service.

The Service has made particularly good progress in managing revenue budget reductions to cope with the national funding reductions for Fire and Rescue Services. In these turbulent times, this well run Service is managing uncertainty well, delivering improvement and seeking ways of delivering future services in different ways.

The Service continues to demonstrate improvement since its previous Operational Assessment. Despite the geographical challenges of the county, there is a consistent level of good performance on response. This was recognised in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment and the trend of reducing fire incidents continues. Over 89% of incidents are responded to within 15 minutes. Over the last eighteen months there has also been a reduction in the number of accidental fires, fire crimes and consistently high customer satisfaction ratings. The reduced performance measures the Service uses provide a more focused concentration on the organisation's performance.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue can also point to a number of innovations which are worthy achievements, including; joint working with organisations like Age UK and Severnside Housing, 20:20 scenario planning and innovative arrangements to support trainers in conjunction with Telford College.

The Service produced a self assessment which appears to have a mature awareness of the achievements and challenges of the Service. The self assessment contains considerable details on a range of operational achievements.

5. Incident command management

Strengths

- **Active participant in the Local Resilience Forum**
- **A well embedded culture of effective incident command at all levels**

Incident command management is an important part of the Service's work on response. The Service is an active participant in the Local Resilience Forum and works closely with Shropshire Council's Emergency Planning service. There has been some collaboration regionally with the incident command function.

The structure of support for retained stations is sound and provides a good level of support for this duty system. This forms the core of Shropshire's operational delivery and therefore from the evidence the team identified it is apparent that the operational response function is equipped to deliver a good level of service to the communities of Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.

Shropshire has established mutual aid and support in collaboration with other Fire and Rescue Services locally. Collaboration exists with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service on the incident command function. However, this is still developing.

Areas to explore

- **Improve inter-operability to enhance command resilience**
- **Debrief process could be made more robust**
- **Develop systems to improve the recording of incident command competency**

The Service recognises the need to improve their approach to inter-operability with category 1 and 2 responders including the need to enhance command resilience with all bordering Fire and Rescue Services. This is a challenge for all Fire and Rescue Services but Shropshire FRS has already agreed with partner agencies that they will explore how this can be further improved and are due to report back on this in early 2013.

The debrief process could be more robust, including the use of trigger points to prompt formal debriefs. Establishing a more robust debrief process, involving all relevant departments, will provide tangible outcomes which should be captured and shared across the operational response arena.

Although the retained staff indicated a significant improvement in the level of support they receive from the Service in recent years a few minor concerns were raised about the continuity for retained supervisory officers.

Although there is evidence of collaborative training with Hereford and Worcester and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Services, there is an opportunity for Shropshire to expand this, notably with regard to incident command training for officers at all levels.

6. Integrated risk management planning

Strengths

- **Well established IRMP and public consultation process**
- **Range of data to underpin analysis of risk**
- **20:20 scenario planning is innovative – notable practice**

The integrated risk management process is the focal point for the Service's work on community risk management. The Service has a well-established Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process. This is the foundation for the Service's approach to meeting the needs of the county's most vulnerable communities. IRMP planning includes consultation with local communities and groups and takes account of the changing national financial situation.

In 2010 the Service published a Public Value Review which is linked to the IRMP and aims to express the value of the Service's activities to local people. The Service uses a range of data to underpin its analysis of risk.

The 20:20 scenario planning is an innovative approach to engaging staff. Around 80 of these events are being undertaken across the county to gain dynamic feedback on local risks. This is an example of notable practice which other Fire and Rescue Services can learn from. This seems to form a sound foundation for the effective delivery of future IRMP requirements identified in the recently published national framework.

Areas to explore

- **Check the currency of the Public Value Review 2010**
- **Collaborative IRMP**
- **Better use of more sophisticated partner datasets**

As the national financial situation for the Fire Service has changed considerably in the last two years, there may be a need to check the currency of the Public Value Review work and the expectations of the public groups involved. In the context of the available resources the Service may, in the future, need to strike the right balance between being driven by the outcomes from public and staff consultation and evidence based risk data. .

There are several potential areas to consider and evaluate for greater cross-border planning of managing risk. The Service currently liaises with Hereford & Worcester FRS in undertaking their IRMP processes but this may need to be formalised to ensure the maximum sharing of information to improve consistency across the two Services. It is understood that the two Services are considering the benefits of developing a West Mercia strategic IRMP and the challenge team believe this is an excellent way forward.

Although data management issues are explored in detail later in this report, the lack of an integrated system for IRMP data may weaken the process.

The Service currently enjoys very good performance in relation to RDS staff availability which is very much to the credit of the systems the Service currently has in place. However, some crews did express a mild concern in their abilities to sustain this as the economic situation meant they had to travel further afield in the main employment. In the future the Service may wish to consider more flexible contracts for retained staff to improve potential recruitment and retention. This is likely to create a more flexible workforce which should be better suited to meeting future Service needs.

Within the context of the Service's identified need to improve ICT it uses its data sets well. However, the better use of more sophisticated partner agency datasets may provide a sharper focus including more detailed risk data which is available from housing associations, the NHS and Shropshire Council social care services.

7. Training and development

Strengths

- **Telford Training Centre is highly regarded**
- **The standard of training is considered to be high**
- **Business Fire Safety Awareness Sessions – notable practice**
- **Use of Associate Trainers meeting staff training needs**

There is a well-established training plan for core operational competencies and the Telford Training Centre is highly regarded by staff for providing a good environment for firefighters to develop and maintain their operational competence. Operational staff believe the standard of training is such that they feel competent and confident to carry out their various roles. The operational workforce believe Service managers have listened to them and have refocused efforts on Operational Assurance and firefighter technical training.

In the arena of business fire safety the Service runs Business Awareness Sessions with local business owners prior to fire safety inspection programmes. This is notable practice and demonstrates a more rounded engagement with the business community, making fire protection work more proactive. Whilst other Services may have an approach to working with local businesses, Shropshire's approach is something other Services are likely to be able to learn from.

The Service has innovative arrangements to support trainers in conjunction with Telford College which includes trainers being offered accredited training at the college and receiving feedback from college tutors on their training delivery.

The Service uses a number of Associate Trainers to enhance the capacity, skills and capability of the training function. Associate Trainers are also able to respond promptly to local training needs on request and provide support for retained stations where necessary. This is well regarded by operational staff.

Level 1 commanders have training and assessment whilst Level 2 commanders currently appear to only have assessment. Of note and to the credit of the Service is the joint training which is undertaken with representative bodies on issues such as grievance, discipline and alcohol and drug testing.

Areas to explore

- **Opportunity to explore the benefits of greater collaboration on training policy and the delivery of training more systematically**

There appears to be an opportunity to explore the benefits of greater collaboration on training policy and the delivery of training. This is not currently being embraced systematically and whilst cross-border training is undertaken with other Fire and Rescue Services, such as joint training and command briefings which exist between Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester Officer Command Groups, there are opportunities to make this more systematic.

There is no integrated ICT system which links together training competencies, HR and health and safety. The performance appraisal system, training recording and the approach to training needs analysis are paper based which makes management information reporting cumbersome and there are opportunities for significant efficiencies and process improvement in this area.

The Service has already recognised that the incident debrief process needs to be made more robust, including using the debrief information to inform future training. The use of information gathered from visits to known risk premises does not appear to play a significant role in driving training alongside feedback and debriefs from crews.

As the Service has recognised, one future improvement would be external accreditation of training. The further improvement of the quality assurance process may include introducing a peer review regime. Overall, developing a better approach to capturing and sharing best practice from outside the organisation would strengthen the Service's view of itself as a learning organisation.

8. Data management

Strengths

- **Series of bespoke stand alone systems**
- **Pragmatic approach to make the best use of the data and ICT resources available**

There is a focus on making the Service data/intelligence driven. The Service functions with a series of bespoke stand-alone systems focused on meeting specific functional needs such as CFRMIS, Trace and Command and Control. A pragmatic approach has been taken to make the best use of the data and ICT resources available at this time.

There is a recognition that the Service needs to integrate its data and management information. A review is currently underway to establish a strategic model. There are plans in place for a phased implementation of Sharepoint and electronic document management.

Areas to explore

- **ICT is not being used effectively as an enabler**
- **Service needs to reassure itself it has sufficient IT resource to meet day-to-day operations and support transformation**

ICT is not being used effectively as an enabler and there is a consistent view across the Service that the current ICT provision, in terms of some of the ICT infrastructure, applications and support, is not meeting the needs of the Service. At the moment ICT is fragmented and is not well integrated. Staff at all levels accept that there is a need for a more comprehensive and joined up approach to how ICT can be used to stream line processes, improve management information and give better access to data across the service.

As previously mentioned, the Service has good performance with regard to RDS staff availability. However, the reliance on a paper based system for availability and attendance may not be sustainable into the future as demographics change and may not give the most up-to-date and accurate picture. An ICT solution is likely to improve data quality, integrity, storage, security and overall efficiency and feedback from staff identified that a retained staff availability system would be welcome. Senior managers are live to this issue as part of implementing a more global ICT strategy but this was not well known by staff.

The global ICT strategy is ambitious and if implemented will be a significant step forward but the Service needs to reassure itself that it has sufficient ICT resource (equipment and people) to meet day-to-day operations and to support the Service's transformation. The magnitude of the challenge in this area is significant. Whilst this will need detailed exploration by the Service, this is likely to include functions such as; HR, training, payroll, staff availability, asset management, health and safety.

The future improvement to IT will require bold decisions. Developing an effective solution to this should explore a range of options, including maximising the benefits through collaborating with other Services. The challenge of introducing a single ICT solution to meet all ICT needs will be one suitability, feasibility and timeliness.

9. Policy alignment

Strengths

- **Some policy sharing between Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester**
- **Examples of sharing other Services' policies**

Policy alignment is at the heart of the Service's underpinning processes for response and health and safety. There has been some policy sharing between Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester FRS which has helped to inform niche operational activities such as Local Resilience Forum and Inter-agency Liaison Officers.

There are examples of the Service sharing other Fire Service's policies regionally. For example, Business Fire Safety, regional Assessment and Development Centres and work in progress on incident command.

A number of policies have robust Equality Impact Assessments.

Areas to explore

- **Opportunities to collaborate to be considered early in the development of new policies and the procurement of significant services/equipment**
- **A co-ordinated agreement on a 'strategic alliance' between the two Services**

The foundations for future alignment of policy and processes across Fire & Rescue Services will rely on opportunities to collaborate and this needs to be considered early in the development of new policies, the procurement of significant services/equipment and key business processes.

The amalgamation of policies related to Fire Control alignment need to be driven in a timely fashion as the project rolls forward. There is an opportunity for more extensive alignment of policies between Services and the work around Fire Control could act as a catalyst for this process. It will be important to review and align many areas of operational policy prior to the combined fire control facility going live in the future.

The bigger picture is the need for the development of a co-ordinated agreement on a 'strategic alliance' between the two Services. This could clearly outline how the two Service could collaborate more closely and the associated benefits. The spirit of which will need to be embedded throughout each organisation at all levels.

10. Fire control

Strengths

- **Focussed on producing a more seamless and joined up way of working**

Shropshire and Hereford & Worcester FRSs have recently entered into a collaborative agreement to explore different ways of delivering services, including the delivery, and use of, a joint Command and Control system to mobilise response services. This is at the heart of Shropshire's work on call management and incident support.

The system has been in place in Shropshire since early 2012 with Hereford & Worcester coming online in September 2012. The overall process is going well despite some understandable initial 'teething' problems. These have been acknowledged by management.

This work between the two Services is designed to produce a more seamless and joined up way of working, ensuring that capacity is delivered across the two counties on an equitable basis ensuring resources are deployed to the point of service need.

The retained control staffing model for fire control is innovative and appears successful. This has allowed the Service to fill capacity needs in times of spare conditions and times of staff shortage.

Areas to explore

- **Learning the lessons for future collaborative and change projects**
- **Ensure the benefits that are intended are delivered and monitored from the project**

One of the major challenges with the Fire Control project will be to ensure the organisation learns the relevant lessons for future collaborative and change projects and it is understood that a lessons learnt log is being used. However, the main thrust of the work on Fire Control will be to ensure the benefits that are intended are delivered and monitored through to completion.

Preliminary work has commenced in some areas to align systems and policies with Hereford & Worcester FRS. The Service is aware that significant further work is required in this area to support a single joined up functional system.

The future organisation

The first part of this report has focused on the six themes Shropshire FRS identified in their action plan following their own OpA self-assessment. The remainder of this report focuses on the peer team's view of the wider challenges facing the Service in the future. Findings from the six themes helped in identifying a series of cross-cutting strategic issues.

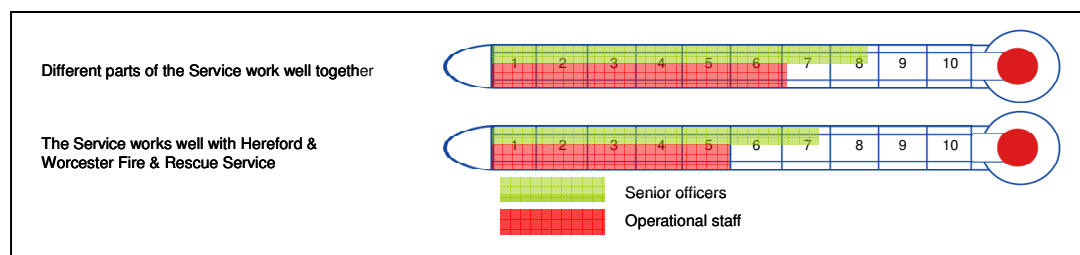
11. Collaboration

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has expressed a clear desire to explore opportunities to work more collaboratively with other Fire and Rescue Services. A number of specific collaborative arrangements already exist, with other Fire and Rescue Services. This is complemented by a range of activities which are already delivered in partnership or are contracted with a very wide range of organisations including small-scale private sector companies, voluntary organisations and larger-scale arrangements with other public and private sector organisations.

The Service recognises that any more extensive collaboration on developing common policies or service delivery must be founded on a clear collective ambition from the collaborative partners. Collaboration can take place in many different forms from small-scale alignment of policies to enable a common approach to specific service issues, through to more extensive sharing of service functions.

The peer team identified a wide range of views on the issue of collaboration. Table 1, below, gives an overall feel for attitudes towards how well the Service not only works with Hereford & Worcester FRS, but also how well it works internally across different functions (this is based on feedback from 62 members of staff across the Service).

Table 1



The two common threads from these discussions were firstly the recognition that the future funding climate is likely to notably strengthen the case for greater collaboration. Secondly, a general understanding at the operational level that collaboration with other Services was practical and sensible.

However, further work is needed to translate this into practical collaborative working.

At the strategic level, the Service would benefit from developing the existing Memorandum of Understanding with Hereford & Worcester FRS into a strategic alliance proposal/business case. This will include exploring opportunities for greater collaboration founded on improving the quality of services for local people within the counties.

A number of opportunities for greater alignment of policies have already been identified, for example, in relation to health and safety and training and these provide a platform for further collaboration.

The approach to developing a proposal for a strategic alliance will be important and it needs to include open and transparent discussion between political leaders and senior officers. The process should clearly outline the anticipated benefits from greater collaboration and how any risks are to be managed. This should result in a clear roadmap for the future with buy-in from both the political and officer levels.

12. Organisational capacity

The Service is supported by a clear medium term financial plan, including a capital reserve. The Service has an informed understanding of the current and likely future financial challenges and has clear plans for the different likely future reductions and is actively managing these risks.

There are good relationships with all the Representative Bodies which, if maintained will help the organisation's capability to manage future change. There is also a structured approach to contract management which will also need to be maintained as the predicted economic climate worsens.

All of these areas of organisational awareness provide the Service with a strong platform for the future.

However, the future financial climate is far from certain. Like all public sector organisations the Service will need to manage the changing financial landscape as it becomes clearer over the next few years.

Effective ICT should be a significant enabler for the Service. However, at present, this is not the case and there is a consistent view across the Service, including the management team, that the current ICT provision, in terms of some of the ICT infrastructure, applications and support, is not meeting the needs of the Service. At the moment ICT is fragmented and appears not to be well integrated. There is a need for a more comprehensive and joined up approach to how ICT can be used to stream line processes, improve management information and give better access to data across the service.

The Chief Fire Officer has stated that the right ICT platform has now been developed and the Service has clear plans to better integrate the systems in the future.

As with all organisations the Service has to consider whether it has the right people with the right capabilities to deliver what is required in the future. As a small Fire and Rescue Service Shropshire has centres of expertise vested in a key individuals and this creates a risk. The future plans around greater collaboration are likely to both have an impact on these individuals and also potentially create capacity to help them. It will be important for the Service to consider the capacity, skills and cost as part of this work for the future.

One option to assist the Service make the most of its future capacity would be to explore the benefit of more extensive and innovative work with partner agencies. Consideration of more extensive commissioning or extensive delivery of services with other organisations in the voluntary sector such as Age UK, the Red Cross or other 'blue light' services. The Service has considered the use of a volunteer scheme such as those operated in many Fire and Rescue Services to enhance capacity, but have decided to use volunteers managed by other agencies.

The Service's capacity and ability to manage transformation will be crucial. This will include effective partnership agreements, with a sound understanding of the purpose and benefits to be gained from each partnership.

The Service already has a range of outsourced functions, activities and contracts. These should be monitored going forward to ensure they are still fit for purpose and provide value for money.

13. Culture

To assist the peer team's understanding of the organisation's culture, the team undertook an exercise with 62 officers and members in the Service. This helped compliment other evidence gathered by the team.

One of the virtues of the Service, discussed by senior officers, frontline staff and members, is its 'smallness'. The size of the organisation has created a tightly knit group of staff who manage the demands on their functions in a pragmatic way and have managerial access to each other at all levels. Communication is very good across the service with staff at all levels across the county generally having a good understanding of what is going on in the Service.

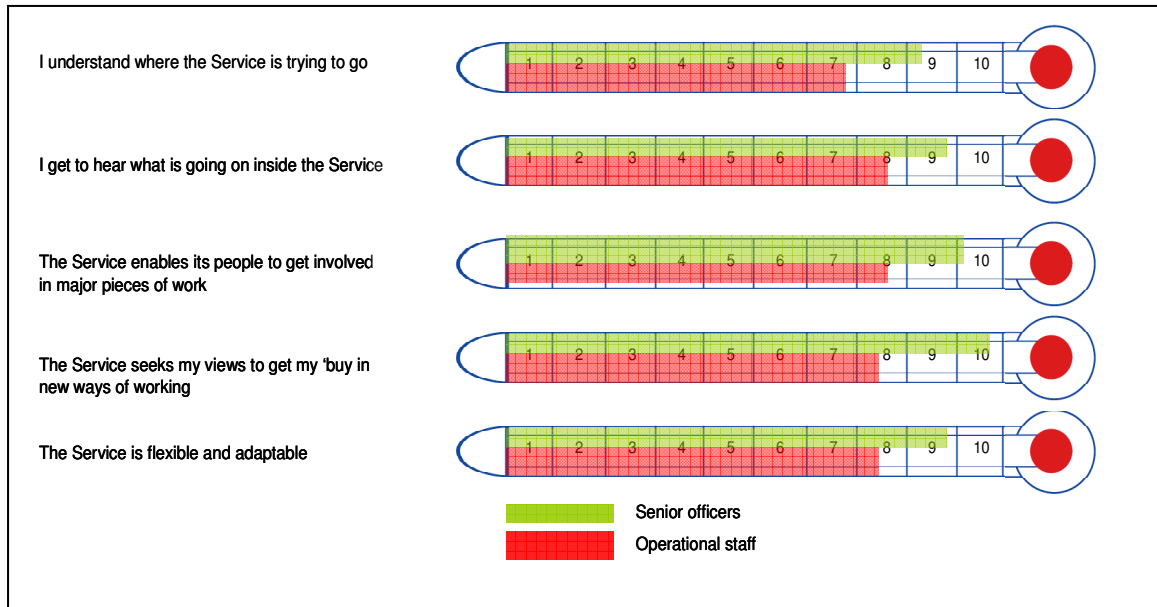
Officers throughout the Service perceive that a major strength in their 'smallness' is the organisation's flexibility and adaptability. There is a clear passion for Shropshire FRS and a high proportion of staff at all levels think it is a 'good place to work'. Table, 2, overleaf, provides an overview of attitudes on a range of cultural issues.

There is a recognition that this culture has enabled Shropshire FRS to make notable achievements. However, the future organisation may have to develop new relationships and having an open minded, pragmatic approach to

collaboration will ensure that it can deal with an uncertain future whilst continuing to reap the benefits of its ‘smallness’.

The culture exercise identified that staff at all levels recognise that the Service should strive to become even more flexible, adaptive and getting more staff involved in major pieces of work will assist this process..

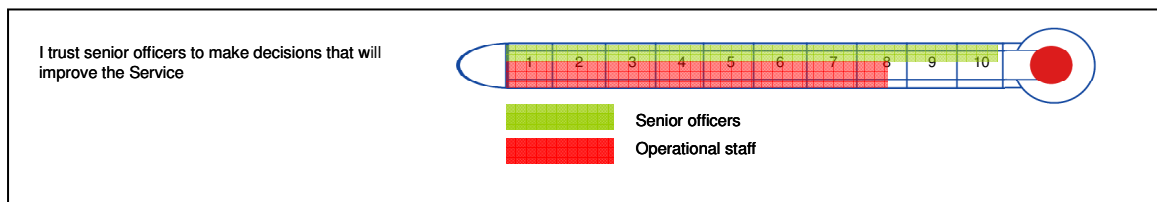
Table 2



14. Leadership

Members of the Fire Authority work collaboratively across political party lines for the benefit of all Shropshire’s communities. There is a well-established Senior Management Team (SMT) and good relationship exists between Members and SMT. The Chief Fire Officer and SMT are well regarded by members and staff and a high level of trust is evident between senior officers and staff, illustrated by the table, below.

Table



The Service is perceived by partner agencies as supportive and responsive. Considerable focus has been placed on developing the key business plan – the Service Plan - with a succinct ‘purpose’ and strategic aims. This has been supported by a streamlining of the measures of success to understand progress on these strategic issues.

The primary leadership challenge in the future will be ensuring the Service is making sufficient preparation for succession planning for senior officers.

Senior officers have dedicated considerable energy to consulting with staff on any significant changes to the Service. However, as would be expected this 'selling' of change did not always appear to be recognised by all staff.

The 'selling' leadership style is a key strength and is likely to be productive in the future in terms of transformation of the Service. Senior leaders and leaders at a tactical level may wish to consider how to reinforce this and continue to 'sell' change. If the predicted difficult future emerges this style may take considerable managerial time to reinforce key messages to ensure the shaping of specific outcomes fit the strategic 'big picture' and ensure the organisation is adaptable to future changes.

Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers. It is clear that Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service continues to make progress, despite the budget reductions it has already had to manage.

The peer team believe that by harnessing this enthusiasm and commitment Shropshire can embrace plans for the future, managing the risks and challenges along with way.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge please contact:

Neil Shaw – Programme Manager
Local Government Association
E-mail – neil.shaw@local.gov.uk

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge

Operational Assessment Thematic Areas of Collaboration

Operational Assessment Thematic Area	Expected Outcomes
<p>Theme: Incident Command / Management Description: a collaborative review of Incident Command / Management arrangements leading to enhanced command resilience, competence, inter / intra-operability, debriefing, monitoring and peer audit.</p>	Through collaboration, the outcome will result in seamless cross-border working, improved inter-agency command arrangements and increased officer capacity and resilience through mutual shared command / specialist officer functions.
<p>Theme: Integrated Risk Management Planning Description: the development of a collaborative approach to IRMP necessary to address requirements of the FRS National Framework, including the review / development of community focused Response, Protection and Prevention targets and standards.</p>	Sharing knowledge, expertise and resource, the outcome will result in a common agreed approach to IRMP, seamless cross-border working, improved inter-agency command arrangements and increased officer capacity and resilience through mutual shared command / specialist officer functions.
<p>Theme: Training and Development Description: a co-ordinated collaborative approach to training and formal accreditation / peer review (where appropriate) to enhance service delivery in Incident Command, Cross-Border / Inter-Agency working, Business Fire Safety and Health and Safety.</p>	The delivery of a collaborative training policy and joint training (where appropriate), leading to uniformity of approach and service delivery efficiencies. The outcome will also include formal accreditation / peer review (where appropriate) to provide community assurance.
<p>Theme: Data Management Description: the effective, efficient and secure use of data to aid resilience and reliability both at incidents and corporately. The actions required will also address policy, user training and data integration (software / hardware and data sharing between agencies).</p>	The outcome will enable the seamless, secure and timely transmission of data on agreed standardised resilient software / hardware. This will aid inter / intra-operability and, in particular, operational intelligence between fire and rescue services and partner agencies.
<p>Description: Improvements in the quality of data from CFRMIS, IRS and the Command and Control System, and the ability to 'join up' that to provide a holistic approach to all aspects of the Service.</p>	Accurate and timely information that is available and accessible from all areas of the organisation and can be used to target the Service's resources at those most in need in the community.
<p>Theme: Policy Alignment Description: a co-ordinated collaborative approach to generic service issues, such as Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity (process and assessments), Risk Assessments, Personal Development Records and Brigade Orders (Protection).</p>	As an outcome of partnership working and critical friend challenge, both Services will adopt recognised best practice and common operating procedures in a variety of policy areas where economies of scale and service improvements are identified.
<p>Theme: Fire Control Description: Utilising the agreed '<i>Memorandum of Understanding</i>' (MoU) arrangements, secure an efficient, effective, robust and resilient command and control infrastructure for the West Mercia area.</p>	Working in partnership through the agreed 'MoU' project, both Services will share a single, resilient command and control infrastructure operated from two locations. The outcome will enable seamless despatch and management of resources anywhere within the 'West Mercia' area.