

Preparation of Annual Service Plan and Statement of Assurance

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204.

1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of proposed arrangements to develop and publish the Fire Authority's annual Service Plan and the newly required Statement of Assurance in a format that satisfies Government expectations.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this report, particularly in respect of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework;
- b) Approve proposals for the preparation of a:
 - i 'Forward looking' Service Plan 2013/14; and
 - ii 'Backward looking' Annual Report 2012/13 (subtitled as the Annual Statement of Assurance); and
- c) Delegate responsibility to the relevant committees, working with officers, to oversee preparation of the above documents prior to final approval by the Fire Authority.

3 Background

In recent years the Fire Authority, largely through the Public Value process, has sought to simplify and streamline the content and publication of the annual Service Plan.

The Service Plan¹ acts as a 'forward looking' document, setting out the Authority's purpose, priorities, aims and performance measures for Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Plan is supplemented by a 'backward looking' Annual Report² that summarises the Authority's performance against the contents of the previous year's Plan.

During 2012 the Government published a new Fire and Rescue Service National Framework³, a Framework that has implications for the Authority's previous approach to the development and publication of both the Service Plan and Annual Report.

4 Fire and Rescue Service National Framework

National Frameworks for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have been in existence since 2004 and cover a broad range of activities and responsibilities, including resilience, prevention, protection and response. The emphasis is to promote local accountability, while focusing on issues where there is a clear national interest, for example national resilience.

The current Framework sets out the high-level expectations, priorities and objectives for all FRAs over the next few years, and how the Government will work in partnership with them and other stakeholders. The Framework does not prescribe operational matters but expects FRAs to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, and put in place arrangements to mitigate these risks. This may be through adjusting existing provision, more effective collaboration and partnership working, or building new capability. It adds that FRAs need to be prepared for incidents of such scale or complexity that local resources may be overwhelmed, even when taking into account mutual-aid agreements.

The Fire Authority's '2020 Strategy' (to be considered at agenda item 15) addresses preparations to review and adjust the existing Integrated Risk Management Plan to take account of these additional requirements.

Despite the Government handing over greater control to FRAs, the Framework indicates that the Government will retain strategic responsibility for national resilience and will continue to fund existing national resilience capabilities.

The Framework, however, makes it clear that the leadership role of FRAs is critical in handling any national-level emergency, and that national resilience must be drawn from the local capability, expertise and knowledge within fire and rescue services.

¹ <http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/page/files/2012-03-15-service-plan-web.pdf>

² <http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/page/files/Annual-Report-2011-12.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england>

With FRAs ultimately accountable to their local communities, the Framework also states that all FRAs need to be transparent about decisions and actions taken, and engage with communities so that local people can scrutinise and influence service delivery. They should also ensure that local communities can access information to compare the performance of their FRA with others. To this end, the Government has stated that robust mechanisms should be in place to provide independent assurance to communities and to the Government. The Framework details (paragraph 3.2) important measures, which will ensure that FRAs provide assurance and local scrutiny arrangements.

5 Providing Community Assurance

Mindful of the Fire Authority's statutory obligations in respect of meeting the Framework's requirements, officers propose the restructure of both the existing Service Plan and Annual Report to reflect the Government's expectations. The forward looking Service Plan will be presented in such a manner that it addresses each of the Framework's 18 mandatory 'must do' requirements. The Service Plan will also be directly aligned to the Government's requirements⁴ for the backward looking Annual Statement of Assurance (to be known locally as the "Annual Report"). The intention is to publish two broadly similar looking documents that, in future years, will provide direct read-across, with one setting out what the Fire Authority intends to do, and the other recording what the Authority has actually achieved.

Whilst the structure of these two documents will address Government requirements, it is proposed that the style and content is deliberately aimed at a readership within the local community and presented in plain English (as opposed to being written in a style and language exclusively for auditors, as has happened in the past with Best Value publications). The aspiration is that both documents would be to a standard equivalent to the 'Crystal Mark' awarded by the Plain English Campaign.⁵

The outcome of these proposals would provide a set of linked documents that aim to raise awareness and provide assurance within the community of the role, challenges, priorities and performance of the Fire Authority and its provided fire and rescue service.

6 Structure and Content

The appended Table 1 sets out the proposed table of contents for both the Service Plan and Annual Report (columns 1 and 3). Also included within Table 1 are the results of a cross-referencing / mapping exercise to the National Framework (column 2) and guidance regarding Statements of Assurance (column 4). The cross-referencing exercise shows the relationship of the table of contents of each document to the Government's expectations.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/guidance-on-statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england>

⁵ <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/crystal-mark.html>

A description of the indicative contents within each document section is provided within column 5.

It should be stressed that both documents will act as summary documents, with references / hyperlinks provided to signpost the reader to more detailed sources of reference (e.g. Service and Government websites / pages etc.).

Both documents would be readily available via the Service's website, with the intention that neither would be published in hard-copy format (unless specifically requested). In addition, a summary (A3 size) single page Service Plan will be published and circulated to stations / departments as in previous years.⁶

7 Next Steps

Subject to Member approval and delegation to the respective committees, the next steps will be to:

- a) Prepare the draft contents of the Service Plan 2013/14 for consideration by the Fire Authority's Strategy and Resources Committee on 14 March 2013;
- b) Present the final draft of the Service Plan 2013/14 for approval by the Fire Authority on 24 April 2013;
- c) Prepare the draft contents of the Annual Report 2012/13 (Annual Statement of Assurance) for consideration by the Fire Authority's Audit and Performance Committee on 5 September 2013; and
- d) Present the final draft of the Annual Report 2012/13 (Annual Statement of Assurance) for approval by the Fire Authority on 25 September 2013. This proposal is on the understanding that the Annual Statement of Accounts 2012/13 has been approved at or around this time.

8 Financial Implications

There are no additional financial implications to the Fire Authority associated with the preparation and publication of the proposed documents. The development of these documents to satisfy Government requirements will, however, place an additional administrative burden upon officers.

9 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 in the Framework (as discussed above).

⁶ <http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/sites/alpha.shropshirefire.gov.uk/files/page/files/2012-03-15-service-plan-web.pdf>

10 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

11 Appendix

Table 1 – Draft Table of Contents: Service Plan and Annual Report (Cross Referencing / Mapping Exercise)

12 Background Papers

Department for Communities and Local Government (2012)

Fire and Rescue Service National Framework⁷

Guidance on the statements of assurance for fire authorities in England⁸

⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/2039159.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/guidance-on-statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england>

Table 1. Draft Table of Contents: Service Plan and Annual Report (Cross Referencing / Mapping Exercise)

Draft Table of Contents for forward looking Annual Service Plan	Relevance to Fire and Rescue Service National Framework ¹	Draft Table of Contents for backward looking Annual Report / Statement of Assurance	Relevance to guidance regarding Annual Report / Annual Statement of Assurance ²	Commentary regarding example contents. Where appropriate, each section will include 'signposting' via references or hyperlinks to sources of reference, the Service's website, Government website or more detailed documents etc.
1. Foreword by the Chair of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority	2.5	1. Foreword by the Chair of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority		Forward and summary overview by Chair.
2. Introduction by the Chief Fire Officer	2.4	2. Introduction by the Chief Fire Officer		Introduction to purpose and structure of document by CFO.
3. The communities we serve		3. The communities we serve		
a. Our community	1.9	a. Our community		Summary description of those served by the Fire Authority, their demographics, location, ethnicity, visitors, students, an ageing population etc.
b. Our natural environment	1.9	b. Our natural environment		Summary description of the local natural environment in which the Service operates.
c. Our built environment	1.9	c. Our built environment		Summary description of the built environment, including public, commercial, business, transport and military sites etc.
d. Our heritage	1.9	d. Our heritage		Summary description of the areas heritage and culture that the Fire Authority endeavours to protect.
4. The risks we face		4. The risks we face		
a. Social risk	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 2.3	a. Social risk		Summary description of where the greatest risks reside within the community (e.g. an ageing population dispersed within the rural communities), terrorism, areas of poverty and risks arising from anti-social behaviour and crime etc. Including a predication of future trends/likely events.
b. Environmental risk	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 2.3	b. Environmental risk		Summary description of prevalent environmental risks to which Service responds (e.g. flooding, mine shafts, water rescue, heathland fires, large animal rescues). Including a predication of future trends/likely events.
c. Economic risk	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 2.3	c. Economic risk		Summary description of areas of economy (e.g. within the commercial / business sector) and the financial consequences of the loss of business in the event of fire. Including a predication of future trends/likely events.
d. Risks beyond our borders	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 1.15, 1.17, 1.26, 1.29, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.4	d. Risks beyond our borders	27, 28	Summary description of the types of foreseeable risk the Service might be called upon to respond to attend in support of addressing national and cross-border responsibilities. Including a predication of future trends/likely events. Details of mutual aid, inter/intra-operability, and engagement with Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board (identifying any capability gaps).
5. Overview of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service		5. Overview of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service		
a. Overview of our structure	1.11, 2.4	a. Overview of our structure	18	Summary description of the Service, illustrated through an organisational chart identifying key managers and departments. Responsibility and accountability of Chief Fire Officer.
b. Our people	1.11, 1.14	b. Our people	18, 29	Summary description of staff makeup, numbers, ratios, what they do, how they reflect society. Summary description of Representative Bodies and their role. Statement of contracts involving the transfer of staff (where applicable, e.g. TUPE). Summary description of training and development of staff.
c. Our resources	1.11, 1.14, 2.3	c. Our resources		Summary description of the Fire Authority's physical resources such fire stations, fire appliances and equipment/uniform etc. Details regarding the Service's environmental footprint (ISO 14001:2004)
d. Our values	2.4	d. Our values	18	Clear and unambiguous statement regarding the Service's core values and commitment to equality and diversity.
e. Our services to the community	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 1.15, 1.17, 2.3, 2.5, 3.4	e. Our services to the community	18, 27, 30	Summary overview of our arrangements and activities in respect of prevention, protection and response (what 'we' do). Summary description of how we consult the community on our plans (e.g. IRMP).

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

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/guidance-on-statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england>

Draft Table of Contents for forward looking Annual Service Plan	Relevance to Fire and Rescue Service National Framework ¹	Draft Table of Contents for backward looking Annual Report / Statement of Assurance	Relevance to guidance regarding Annual Report / Annual Statement of Assurance ²	Commentary regarding example contents. Where appropriate, each section will include 'signposting' via references or hyperlinks to sources of reference, the Service's website, Government website or more detailed documents etc.
6. Governance arrangements		6. Governance arrangements		
a. Your Fire and Rescue Authority	2.5	a. Your Fire and Rescue Authority	18	Introduction to the Fire Authority, its Members, composition, committees, meeting dates etc. Description of Officer/Member arrangements and responsibilities. How the community can attend meetings and access agendas and reports etc.
b. Our legal responsibilities	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 1.15, 1.17, 1.26, 1.29, 1.31, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.2, 3.4	b. Our legal responsibilities	11, 15, 18, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32	Summary description of key relevant legislation which governs the responsibilities of the Fire Authority, and those Acts which the Fire Authority enforces. Details of mutual aid, inter/intra-operability, and engagement with Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board (identifying any capability gaps).
c. The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework	All sections of National Framework relevant	c. The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework		Summary description of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework and Government's priorities for the nation's fire and rescue services (identifying any capability gaps).
d. Management of Risk	1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 1.15, 1.17, 1.26, 1.29, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.4	d. Management of Risk	11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21	Summary description of the prudential management of financial and corporate risk. Summary details of annual governance statement and system/statement of internal control (identifying any capability gaps).
7. Our Purpose		7. Our Purpose		
a. Our Vision & Purpose	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14	a. Our Vision & Purpose	18	Clear and unambiguous statement regarding the Fire Authority's Vision and Purpose.
b. Our Aims and Objectives	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 2.3	b. Our Aims and Objectives	18	Clear and unambiguous statement regarding the Fire Authority's aims and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service.
c. Our Challenges and Priorities for 2013/14	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.14, 2.3, 3.2	c. Our Challenges and Priorities during 2012/13	18, 21, 25, 27	Summary description of the key challenges and priorities facing/faced by the Fire Authority and the strategies to protect, prevent and respond (be these to address community and/or the impact of austerity) identifying any capability gaps. The 'priorities' would reflect a summary of the Fire Authority's initiatives as set out within the Integrated Risk Management Plan.
d. Our collaborative arrangements	1.3, 1.10, 1.14, 1.26, 1.29, 1.31, 1.33, 1.38, 3.4	d. Our collaborative arrangements	18, 21, 27, 28	Summary description of initiatives being taken/already taken in partnership with other organisations. Details of mutual aid, inter/intra-operability, and engagement with Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board (identifying any capability gaps).
e. How we secure business continuity	1.3, 1.10, 1.11, 1.15, 1.17, 1.26, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.4	e. How we secured business continuity	28	Summary description of the Fire Authority's plans to deal with all reasonably foreseeable eventualities that may/have occurred, that impact upon business continuity. Details of engagement with Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board (identifying any capability gaps). Summary details of annual governance statement and system/statement of internal control.
8. Our Performance		8. Our Performance		
a. Our measures of success	1.11, 2.3, 2.4, 2.8, 3.2	a. How we performed during 2012/13	18, 21, 29	A description of the Fire Authority's key performance indicators and targets against which the Service is measured and the Chief Fire Officer is held accountable. Where applicable, a summary of comparable benchmarking data with other organisations (both fire and non-fire).
		b. What others have said about our performance	15, 18, 21, 25, 29, 33	A summary of auditors' reports and findings (including Operational Performance Assessment, Statement of Accounts, Annual Governance Statement, Quality and Diversity Audits, Environmental Audits, Peer Reviews etc.).
		c. Lessons learnt	20, 21, 25, 29, 31, 33	Actions taken by the Fire Authority arising from performance outcomes, auditors' findings, local/national/international incidents, national/coroners inquiries etc. Details of reviews identifying any capability gaps. Lessons arising from system/statement of internal control.
9. Financial Performance		9. Financial Performance (Statement of Accounts)		
a. Our Budget for 2013/14	3.2	a. Our Budget for 2012/13	11, 12, 14	Summary details regarding Capital and Revenue Expenditure, Balance Sheet and financial performance.
b. Where our money comes from	3.2	b. Where our money came from	11, 12, 14	Summary breakdown of sources of income including cost per household and where applicable, a summary of comparable benchmarking data.

Draft Table of Contents for forward looking Annual Service Plan	Relevance to Fire and Rescue Service National Framework ¹	Draft Table of Contents for backward looking Annual Report / Statement of Assurance	Relevance to guidance regarding Annual Report / Annual Statement of Assurance ²	Commentary regarding example contents. Where appropriate, each section will include 'signposting' via references or hyperlinks to sources of reference, the Service's website, Government website or more detailed documents etc.
c. What your money is spent on	1.10, 1.11, 2.3, 3.2	c. What your money was spent on	11, 12, 14, 23, 24	Summary breakdown of areas of expenditure and where applicable, a summary of comparable benchmarking data. Publication of summary details of Annual Pay Policy Statement.
d. How we provide value for money	1.38, 2.8, 3.2	d. How we provided value for money	11, 12, 14, 23	Summary description of the actions the Fire Authority has taken to be prudent with the 'public purse' and achieved value for money. A summary of comparable benchmarking data (including precept/grant levels, etc.).
e. Our long-term financial challenges and commitments	2.4, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2	e. Auditors findings	11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 25, 31, 33	Summary description of the Fire Authority's medium/long term financial challenges and commitments. A summary of auditors' reports and findings (including a précis of the Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement etc.).
10. Our Future Plans		10. Our Future Plans		
a. Our future challenges	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.29, 1.31, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.2, 3.4	a. Our future challenges	21, 25, 28, 29, 31, 33	Summary description of the key challenges and potential scenarios facing the Fire Authority/Service and Community (e.g. - political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors). Details of engagement with Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board (identifying any capability gaps).
b. Our future commitments	1.3, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11, 1.15, 1.17, 1.29, 1.31, 1.33, 1.38, 2.3, 3.2, 3.4	b. Our future commitments	12, 21, 25, 27, 28, 31, 33	A summary description of the Fire Authority's commitments to address the identified challenges and scenarios. The 'commitments' would reflect a summary of the Fire Authority's initiatives as set out within the Integrated Risk Management Plan. Also included would be a summary of any major capital investment programmes.
11. Our Community Engagement		11. Our Community Engagement		
a. How you can become involved	1.9, 1.38, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2	a. How you can become involved	18, 22, 27, 31	Information regarding how the local community/businesses can become involved in consultation events (e.g. Precept setting, IRMP proposals etc.), attend Fire Authority/Committee meetings, request a community fire safety visit etc. How the community can comment on the Service Plan and/or Statement of Assurance.
b. Access to information	1.9, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 3.2	b. Access to information	18, 22, 23, 27, 31	Details regarding the Fire Authority's arrangements in respect of access to data/information, transparency, 'open-government' etc.
c. How to make a compliment or a complaint	1.9, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8	c. How to make a compliment or a complaint	18, 22	Summary details regarding how to offer a compliment or lodge a complaint.