

Code of Corporate Governance 2009/10

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report introduces a new Code of Corporate Governance to the Fire Authority for consideration and adoption.

2 Recommendations

Members are asked to consider and formally adopt the draft Code of Corporate Governance 2009/10, attached as an appendix to this report.

3 Background

At its meeting on 26 April 2005 the Fire Authority adopted a Code of Corporate Governance, based on guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE). Each year since then the Code has been reviewed, updated and formally approved by the Fire Authority.

The CIPFA / SOLACE guidance itself has, however, been updated and changed significantly in the latest guidance, entitled "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – Framework". Whilst in essence good governance remains unchanged, the five dimensions in the original guidance have been replaced by six core principles, each of which is supported by sub-principles to provide a governance framework. The new guidance again identifies best practice for authorities to adopt when establishing their own local Code of Corporate Governance.

When producing the attached new draft Code of Corporate Governance for 2009/10, your officers have taken full account of the latest guidance.

The draft Code was also considered at the September meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee, which recommended that the Fire Authority adopt it without amendment. Since that time officers have made some minor corrections to ensure that the Code is accurate and up-to-date.

4 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5 Legal Comment

Although the Fire Authority is not legally required to have in place a Code of Corporate Governance, it is considered best practice to do so.

6 Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been assessed to ensure that any effect it might have would not result in discriminatory practice or differential impact upon specific groups. The initial Equality Impact Assessment is attached.

7 Appendix

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Draft Code of Corporate Governance 2009/10

8 Background Papers

CIPFA /SOLACE Guidance Note – Delivering Good Governance in Local Government - Framework

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information, Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment (attached)	*

Code of Corporate Governance

Introduction

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

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to the principles of effective corporate governance and has, therefore, produced and adopted a new Code of Corporate Governance. The new Code follows the latest guidance on corporate governance issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), entitled "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – Framework".

Whilst the fundamental principles of corporate governance – openness and inclusivity, integrity and accountability – remain unchanged, the five dimensions in the original CIPFA/SOLACE guidance have been replaced by six core principles, each of which is supported by sub-principles to provide a governance framework.

The six core principles are:

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

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

Principle1

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

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

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

Set out clearly, on the Service's website at www.shropshirefire.gov.uk, are:

Our vision

A Safer Shropshire

and

Our Mission

Saving life, protecting property and the environment and reducing risk within the community

Our Vision and Mission are most readily identifiable through our motto:



**Putting Shropshire's
Safety First**

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

Our Corporate Plan 2009/10 sets out the five key aims of the Fire Authority:

1. Reduce the risk to life and material loss from fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in the community
2. Protect life, property and the environment from fire and other emergencies
3. Secure the highest level of safety and welfare/wellbeing for all staff and Authority Members
4. Provide a sustainable service that demonstrates quality and best value in service provision
5. Provide a service committed to the highest levels of quality and diversity

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

Officers hold a series of strategic planning workshops annually to revisit the vision, mission, strategic aims, corporate objectives, core values and improvement priorities of the Service before making recommendations for change. These recommendations are then presented to the Fire Authority for discussion and approval.

Members also receive quarterly performance reports on progress against key improvement priorities, targets and performance indicators.

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

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

The Fire Authority is closely involved in the development and delivery of Shropshire's and Telford & Wrekin's Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Chief Fire Officer and Chair represent the Service / Authority at Local Strategic Partnership Board level.

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

An Annual Report is published every year, which sets out the improvements made by the Fire Authority during the previous year and any savings made as a result. It details progress made against improvement priorities and summarises financial performance. It includes an annual efficiency statement, showing the efficiencies made in the previous year and preceding years and information on performance against key standards and performance indicators is provided. The Annual Report also includes the results of any assessments carried out by the Audit Commission.

The Annual Report is circulated for comment to key stakeholder groups and is accessible via the Service's website:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/engine/managing-the-service/performance-management/annual-report.htm>

In addition to the Annual Report the Fire Authority also publishes the following related documents, which provide financial and performance information:

- Annual Audit Letter
- Medium Term Financial Plan
- Council Tax leaflet
- Statement of Accounts, including the Annual Governance statement

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

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

Quality of service is measured through a range of customer satisfaction surveys. A survey is sent out after every incident attended by the Service and the responses are collated and benchmarked against fire services nationally. Reports on the outcome are considered by Policy Group (the Service's senior management team) and any shortcomings identified are addressed.

The Service also employs a Quality and Skills Manager, who assesses the quality of our service delivery by both direct and indirect contact with our customers.

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

All directorates and sections produce an annual business plan. Progress towards achievement of priorities and targets identified in those plans is monitored regularly to ensure service delivery is on target. An established performance management process also exists, which provides quarterly reports to Policy Group and to Fire Authority Members on the Service's performance against local and national standards and performance indicators. Wherever failure or slippage in delivery is identified action is taken without delay to rectify the situation.

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

The Fire Authority has a clear, well-publicised complaints procedure, which requires complaints to be dealt with rigorously and promptly. Complaints, and improvement actions arising from them, are monitored by management and an annual report on complaints is taken to Members. A record of complaints is also available for scrutiny by Members at every meeting of the full Fire Authority.

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

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

The Authority tests whether it is providing value for money through:

- Its costs
- Services are appropriate for, and consistent with, achieving planned targets
- Comparative information from other fire and rescue services and suppliers
- Consultation with the public and stakeholders

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

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

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

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

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

- Management review
- Fire Authority policy
- On-going efficiencies
- Comparisons and benchmarking
- Growth and savings during the budget process
- Base budget reviews and Statement of Accounts
- Effective use of information technology
- Effective corporate procurement mechanisms
- Achieving economies through joint working
- Customer feedback
- Scrutiny
- Audit
- Performance management
- Organisational structure
- Key projects

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

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

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

Principle 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The general roles, rights and obligations of Members are contained in the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations and the Model Code of Conduct. The more specific roles of Members, Members with special responsibilities and of Member Champions are set out in the following Role Descriptions:

- Member
- Chair of the Fire Authority
- Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority
- Leader of the Main Opposition Group
- Chair of the Integrated Risk Management Planning Members' Working Group
- Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee
- Vice-Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee

- Director of West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Ltd
- Independent, Non-Elected Member of the Standards Committee
- Asset Management and Procurement Champion
- Civil Resilience Champion
- Equality and Diversity Champion
- Information, Communications and Technology Champion
- Learning and Development Champion
- Risk Management and Audit Champion
- Vulnerable Persons' Champion

Financial Regulations Standing Orders set out specific financial and other duties/functions of the Fire Authority, its committees, the Chief Fire Officer, Monitoring Officer and Treasurer. Delegations to specific officers are documented in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers. Job descriptions are in place for all senior officers, which clearly state their respective roles and responsibilities.

The Authority has service level agreements, detailing the roles and responsibilities of its Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Solicitor, and a Protocol for the Role of Monitoring Officer.

Details of allowances payable to Members of the Authority and non-elected, Independent Members of its Standards Committee are laid down in the Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances and in individual role descriptions.

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

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

Financial Regulations Standing Orders 2.1 and 2.2 set out the specific matters reserved for collective decision of the Authority. Delegations to specific officers are documented in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers, Financial Regulation Standing orders and Standing Orders relating to Contracts. Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation to Officers are monitored and updated to take into account relevant legislation and other developments as and when required and are reviewed at each Annual Meeting of the Authority.

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

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

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

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

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

The Authority does not have a leader but it does have a Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chief Fire Officer (together with the Service's Senior Management Team) holds a Chair's Briefing every two weeks with the Chair and Vice-Chair and meets with both informally far more regularly.

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

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

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

The Job Description of the Treasurer sets out clearly his role and responsibilities. The Scheme of Delegation to Officers and Standing Orders for the Regulation of Financial Matters and Financial Regulation also stipulate the responsibilities of the Treasurer.

In the absence of the Treasurer, the Principal Accountant, as deputy S151 officer, undertakes the responsibilities outlined above.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The remuneration, to which Members are entitled, is clearly laid down in the Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances. Although not required to do so, the Authority calls upon an Independent Remuneration Panel to carry out reviews of Members' allowances and the make recommendations to the Authority.

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

2.3.3. Ensure that effective mechanisms exist to monitor service delivery

The Authority has a number of statutory national indicators and local, self-imposed indicators, which it uses to measure performance. The statutory indicators are subject to audit by internal audit and an annual audit by the Audit Commission. From April 2005 the Fire Authority has also been required to produce a quarterly report to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, now replaced by Communities and Local Government, on its statutory indicators.

Most of the Indicators show a year-on-year improvement in performance, demonstrating their sustainability. Performance results are published on the Service's website:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/engine/managing-the-service/performance-management/key-performance-indicators.htm>

Performance measurement information is co-ordinated and administered through the Service's Programme Office, which together with the Assistant Chief Fire Officer validates the annual return required by Communities and Local Government.

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

Regular performance monitoring reports are considered by Policy Group (the Service's senior management team). These focus on priorities for the Fire Authority and are used in the formulation of action plans for the Service.

A performance monitoring report is taken to each quarterly meeting of the Authority's Audit and Performance Management Committee, which clearly identifies the progress, or lack of it, made against all indicators and Service objectives. The Committee may ask for further details of specific areas of good or poor performance to be reported to the full Authority.

Quality of service is measured through a range of customer satisfaction surveys. A survey is sent out after every incident attended by the Service and the responses are collated and benchmarked against fire services nationally. Reports on the outcome are considered by Policy Group and any shortcomings identified are addressed.

With effect from 1 April 2009, the Fire Authority (as with all public services) was audited against the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process. CAA is a new way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well the Fire Authority, and other public bodies work together to meet the needs of the community it serves. In December 2009, the results of CAA will be published via the Audit Commission's new Oneplace website.

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

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

Integrated Risk Management Planning

The Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process uses statistical analysis, aided by various software tools, including the Fire Service Emergency Cover software, to determine the type and level of predicted risk for all of the communities in Shropshire. The outcome of this risk assessment enables the Fire Authority to distribute its resources to the best effect and thus achieve its vision of

‘Putting Shropshire’s Safety First’

The information collected through the process is regularly updated and reviewed to ensure it is current and accurate and so reflects the changing needs of the community of Shropshire.

The IRMP and the associated Annual Action Plan are drawn up following widespread consultation with members of the public, stakeholder organisations and staff over a three-month period. Copies of these documents are provided to all who participated in the consultation process and are also available in local libraries and on the Services’ website:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/engine/managing-the-service/irmp.htm>

Safer Communities Core Strategy

The Safer Communities Core Strategy document links clearly with the Fire Authority’s vision, strategic aims and corporate objectives and outlines how the Fire Authority plans to deliver its key safer communities objectives over the next four years. The Strategy articulates the vision and ambitions for the Community Safety Service and what the key outcomes of the Service’s work will be, as indicated in the Authority’s IRMP. Business Plans and Action Plans for each team set out the means, by which its Service Objectives will be achieved.

The Strategy is a working document and, as such, can be adapted to accommodate change and thus meet the needs of the community.

Budget Consultation

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

Government Legislation

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

To this end the improvement plan, which emerged from the Fire Authority's Comprehensive Performance Assessment has been strategically reviewed and aligned, not only with the national Framework, but also with Best Value Performance Indicators and Regional Management Board issues.

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

Consultation and Communication

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

- Publications and leaflets, including the Council Tax Leaflet
- Press releases and close relationships with the local media
- The Fire Authority's website
- The West Midlands Regional Management Board website
- The Retained Service
- House-to-house visits
- Local fire safety campaigns
- Fire station open days
- Established links and regular meetings with local organisations and schools
- Local meetings throughout Shropshire to discuss the Authority's aims and priorities
- Public / stakeholders open budget consultation meetings
- Scrutiny Panels made up of a cross section of the community
- Attendance at local and regional exhibitions and shows
- Partnership working
- Best Value Customer Survey carried out every three years
- After Incident User Consultation Survey
- Involvement of the Fire Authority's Members
- Process for public participation in Fire Authority meetings

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

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

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

The Members' Handbook provides guidance in relation to the roles and responsibilities of Members, who are Directors of the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services Regional Control Centre Ltd. In addition, the Authority's Solicitor has prepared a briefing note for such Directors in relation to personal and prejudicial interests and predetermination.

Detailed information is also given in the Members' Handbook about the West Midlands Regional Management Board, including its mission, functions and obligations of its constituent fire authorities.

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

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

Principle 3

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

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

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

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

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

Core Values

Service to the Community

We value service to the community by:

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

People

We value all our employees by practising and promoting:

- Fairness and respect
- Recognition of merit
- Honesty, integrity and mutual trust
- Personal development
- Co-operative and inclusive working

Diversity

We value diversity in the Service and the community by:

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

Improvement

We value improvement at all levels of the Service by:

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

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

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

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

- Members' Model Code of Conduct
- Members' Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality
- Protocol on Member/Officer Relations
- Standards Committee Procedures
- Complaints Procedure
- Gender Equality Scheme
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Positive about Disabled People Statement
- Race Equality Scheme
- Equality of Opportunity and Fairness at Work
- Discipline
- Grievance
- Positive Action Statement
- Whistle Blowing
- Gifts and Hospitality for Officers
- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy
- Information, Communications and Technology
- Freedom of Information
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Standards of Dress and Appearance
- Smoking in the Work Place
- Alcohol and Employment
- Substance Misuse and Employment
- Standards in Display and Viewing of Material in the Workplace
- Ethical Procurement Policy

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

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

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

Both the Members' and Employee Codes of Conduct set out clearly that Members and employees of the Authority must not be influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in any matter relating to the Authority. Each member, including independent members of the Fire Authority's Standards Committee, must complete a Register of Interests, which is held at Brigade Headquarters and is open to public inspection. The Register is updated as necessary and at least annually.

'Declarations of Interest' appear as a standing item on the agenda for every meeting of the Authority and its committees. In addition an advice note on declaring interests in meetings is made available to all Members at every meeting. Details of all personal and prejudicial interests declared by Members are recorded in a register maintained by the Corporate Services Manager, so that they are easily accessible for inspection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Authority's Core Values are fundamental to all that it does. They appear on the website and are repeated in key documents, such as the Corporate Plan and Members' and Employee Handbooks. They are also included in Member and employee induction.

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

The Authority has achieved Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, which ensures that it mainstreams equality and diversity into all aspects of its business. The Self Assessment for Level 4 demonstrates that the Authority has in place plans and policies to comply with relevant legislation and guidance, associated targets for improvement and systems to monitor effectiveness and progress.

The Authority has a Member Champion, who is actively involved in promoting equality and diversity and who has contributed significantly to achievement of Level 4 of the Standard. The Member Champion sits on the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, which is made up of senior executives and managers. Reports on the work of the Group are taken to each meeting of the Authority's Human Resources Committee, which also receives an annual report on equality and diversity.

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

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

3.2.3. Develop and maintain an effective standards committee

The Authority has a well established Standards Committee and procedures in place to enable various sub-committees to deal with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct. Constituted in accordance with legislative requirements, the Committee meets three times per year and is advised by the Authority's Deputy Monitoring Officer.

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

The work of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and Standards Committee ensures that the core values of the Authority are at the heart of its decision making.

There are regular meetings between union representatives and senior management, and staff are consulted on policy changes and major service developments. Members' participation in consultation with staff has been held up by the Audit Commission as best practice and has resulted in excellent working relationships within the Authority.

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

Officers have developed a method of assessing partnerships to ensure that officers, Members and partners are clear in the aims and purpose of any partnership working and know their respective responsibilities and commitments. The assessment criteria include how the aims and objectives of each partnership contribute to the Authority's Corporate Equality Action Plan, its strategic aims and objectives and performance indicators. Partnership agreements formally set out the aims of the partnership, expectations, roles and reporting requirements.

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

The priority outcomes which are included in the Local Area Agreement reflect the vision (to improve significantly the quality of life for Shropshire people by working together) and priorities of the Shropshire Partnership's Community Strategy. The Community Strategy sets out how performance will be measured and monitored and includes general principles for managing performance.

The Shropshire Partnership is a strategic partnership, involving regional, public and local agencies and the voluntary and community sector. Partners work together to meet local needs and improve the quality of life in Shropshire. There is a membership of 27 key partners, including councils, local area partnerships and other organisations, together with a wider membership of over 50 other community bodies. The Shropshire Partnership has produced a Community Strategy 2006 - 10, which sets out priorities and actions to improve local and countryside services to meet Shropshire's needs. This strategy is integral to the Local Area Agreement 2006 - 2009 and key corporate plans.

Principle 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All meetings of the Authority and its committees are independently minuted by trained staff working to a common format. Minutes include a summary of any debate, motions, results of votes and decisions resolved. All committee minutes are available electronically via the website or intranet.

The Authority is committed to openness in all of its dealings and to this end has adopted a procedure for public participation at its meetings and those of its committees, which the public may attend. The procedure is set out in its Standing Orders for the Regulation of Proceedings and Business.

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

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

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

The Members' Handbook includes the Standards Board for England 'Guide for members' and the following fact sheets published by the Board:

- Personal and prejudicial interests
- Lobby groups and declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct
- Gifts and hospitality
- Predisposition, Predetermination or Bias, and the Code

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Customer satisfaction with complaints handling is monitored and reviewed regularly by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

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

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

The duties of the Authority's statutory officers, namely the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer are laid down in Financial Regulations Standing Orders and those of the first two officers in their job descriptions. These include the giving of relevant and timely advice. The responsibilities of the Authority's Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Solicitor are set out in service level agreements with Telford & Wrekin Council and again they encompass providing advice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Fire Authority has embedded a robust system for identifying and evaluating all significant risks, which is tied in with producing its Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and AGS Improvement Plan. The Service's senior management team proactively participates in the process, which involves the following steps:

- The Fire Authority defines its objectives;
- The risks to achieving those objectives are identified;
- The way those risks are controlled is identified;
- Assurances are obtained about the effectiveness of the key controls;
- Any weaknesses or gaps in the key controls are evaluated;
- An action plan is produced to address any gaps or weaknesses; and
- The Fire Authority produces a clear statement on its internal controls.

As part of this process all reports to the senior management team and to the Fire Authority must consider any significant risk implications. These are also a standing item on the agenda for each senior management team meeting. In addition the Fire Authority maintains and regularly reviews a Corporate Risk Register, which sets out and evaluates all significant risks identified. Each risk is assigned to a risk owner, with action plans put in place to ensure the risks are mitigated as far as possible.

Furthermore, regular assessment of risk is paramount to the successful outcome of significant programmes and projects within the Service. This is achieved through the effective implementation of PRINCE2 project management methodologies.

The Risk Management Group is responsible for ensuring that the Authority has an effective and efficient risk management process in place. It is made up of the Treasurer, Head of Performance and Risk, Corporate Services Manager and the Authority's Member Champion for Risk Management and Audit. The Group, which meets at least quarterly, reports to the Service's senior management team and the Member Champion presents an annual report on her work to the Authority. The officers involved in the Risk Management Group also attend regular meetings with the Authority's insurers where risk management issues are discussed.

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

Internal Audit undertakes a number of planned risk-based reviews of various elements of the systems and internal control procedures across a range of functions in the Authority. Each review contains an opinion on the internal controls in place and any unsatisfactory audit opinions result in recommendations for improvement, which are implemented by management. Copies of these reviews are sent to the Authority's Treasurer and discussed with the External Auditors. Internal Audit work is guided by, and reflects, professional best practice, in particular the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice on Local Government Internal Audit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Authority has appointed a Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer whose duties include ensuring the legality and fairness of decision making. The Monitoring Officer is the Head of Legal Services of Telford & Wrekin Council and his Deputy, the Group Solicitor (Standards and Regulatory).

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

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

Principle 5

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

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

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

There is a member induction and development review process. Particular attention is paid to training/developing members newly nominated to the Fire Authority, taking into account the development, which they have received from their own authority.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have received multiple re-accreditations against the Investors in People standard over the last 12 years and are committed to training and developing our staff. Staff appraisals occur at least once a year, when training needs are identified.

We have a Training and Development Centre, which organises and delivers a multitude of professional and personnel development courses and programmes.

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

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

There is a member induction and development review process. Particular attention is paid to training/developing members newly nominated to the Fire Authority taking into account the development, which they have received from their own authority.

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

One-to-one individual development reviews are offered to members to review and agree learning and development needs through means of a self-assessment questionnaire.

We have received multiple re-accreditations against the Investors in People standard over the last 12 years and are committed to training and developing our staff. Staff appraisals occur at least once a year, when training needs are identified.

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

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

Our commitment to member and staff training helps ensure that members and officers have the necessary skills to challenge effectively and improve existing policies and performance.

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

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

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

There is a member development review process in place. Particular attention is paid to training/developing members newly nominated to the Fire Authority, taking into account the development, which they have received from their own authority.

Members are offered a one-to-one development review, which includes a self assessment of their own needs. These needs are co-ordinated and training is offered to meet the highest level of need, balancing available budget against development need.

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

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

We have the following in place to facilitate effective engagement with, and participation from, all sections of the community:

- Involvement in Shropshire Partnerships Equalities Forum
- Equality and Diversity Schemes
- Corporate Equality Action Plan
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Gender Equality Scheme
- Race Equality Scheme
- Performance indicator targets, representative of the community at all levels by race, disability and gender
- Performance indicator target on implementation of Equality Standard for Local Government (Level 4)
- Management training plan, ensuring that all staff are enabled to mainstream equality and diversity
- Half-day diversity awareness sessions for new starters and refreshers
- Attendance of operational personnel at relevant 'Lets Talk' meetings
- Vulnerable Persons Advocates
- Participation in Shropshire Signpost

All posts have Job Descriptions and person specifications, detailing the essential and desirable abilities, qualifications and experience necessary to undertake the duties of any post. We positively welcome applications from all sections of the community.

We are accredited Investors in People and have been re-accredited with the Disability Two Ticks Symbol. We are members of Stonewall and diversity is one of our Core Values:

We value diversity in the Service and the community by:

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

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

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

We have a well-established training and development programme for management and operational training.

There is a member development review process in place. Particular attention is paid to training/developing members newly nominated to the Fire Authority, taking into account the development, which they have received from their own authority.

Members are offered a one-to-one development review, which includes a self-assessment of their own needs. These needs are co-ordinated and training is offered to meet the highest level of need balancing available budget against development need.

Principle 6

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

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

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

Our corporate planning and communication process sets out clearly to all what the Fire and Rescue Service offers and our annual plan reports on what we have delivered.

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

The Fire Authority is accountable to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

We have identified our key stakeholders and these are included in the Partnership register.

Through the Local Strategic Partnership we partner with a wide range of agencies and authorities, including representatives from the voluntary and community sector and the Government Office of the West Midlands

For some of these partners we have a mutual accountability as set out in the Local Area Agreement.

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

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

We have a Communications and Media Protocol and are developing a Corporate Communications Strategy, which provides guidance on all forms of internal and external communications.

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

All meetings of the Fire Authority and its Committees are held in public. The public will only be excluded where confidential information would be disclosed and only where the public interest in maintaining an exemption outweighs the public interest disclosing the information.

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

We have many ways of communicating with our citizens and stakeholders, such as:

- Publications and leaflets
- Shropshire Fire and Rescue website
- Attendance at Local Joint Committees, 'Lets Talk' meetings and Neighbourhood Action Groups
- Public/stakeholder open consultation meetings
- Integrated Risk Management Planning consultation meetings
- Council tax leaflet
- Budget consultation

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

We have a duty to consult on a range of Fire and Rescue Service issues, including Integrated Risk Management Planning and budget setting. We are also currently working with key partner organisations to develop a cohesive approach to consultation and community involvement for all members of the Shropshire Partnership.

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

The Performance Plan is published annually, and summarises current performance against Best Value Performance Indicators and targets.

A performance management system is in place with quarterly reports received by members and the Service's senior management team. We also have access to Shropshire Council's Performance Plus software, which enables officers to monitor progress of all Local Area Agreement targets, which we support.

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

Rules concerning confidentiality are clearly laid down in our constitution with a presumption that items will remain open to the public unless they meet specific confidentiality criteria.

We have an Information Officer, who is committed to ensuring the principles of Data Protection and Freedom of Information are followed.

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

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

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

Each year officers and members visit all staff and present our Integrated Risk Management Plan, which gives staff the opportunity to be consulted on, and contribute to, significant policy issues.

We undertake a staff survey every three years, covering a wide spectrum of issues from policy to working conditions and equality. We feed back the results to staff and take action on the findings.

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

We hold “Investors In People” (IIP) accreditation and had no significant issues identified at our last review.