



# **Five Year Strategy Plan 2015 - 2020**

Planning for a safer Cheshire 2015-20

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## Foreword

Ensuring residents and businesses throughout its area are protected by a first class fire and rescue service during the most severe cuts in public spending history is the biggest challenge Cheshire Fire Authority has ever faced. Its previous four year strategy set out clearly how the organisation needed to make fundamental changes in both its structure and to the effectiveness of frontline services if it was to continue delivering improvements in community safety despite having far less money.

That strategy enabled the Service to deliver savings of nearly £5 million over those four years, while still maintaining the overall downward trend in incidents and emergencies. For example, the number of accidental house fires in Cheshire during 2014-15 was 401 - a 15% reduction compared to 2010-11. The challenge over the next five years will be even harder as it becomes more difficult to maintain the improvements in community safety at the same time as the need to make savings increases.

This strategy therefore clarifies some of the stark choices facing the Authority over the next five years and outlines the approach and principles it will adopt to ensure it does not compromise on its commitment to protect local communities, reduce risk and maintain firefighters' safety. It will continue its approach of supporting the strategy with more detailed annual action plans which will be subject to detailed consultation with everyone affected by the proposals, particularly local communities.

The future may be daunting and challenging, but the organisation has a proven track record of enthusiasm, commitment and innovation which will ensure it can continue to focus on its overall vision of 'a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies.'

## Section 1

### Introduction

Cheshire Fire Authority is the publicly accountable body responsible for ensuring the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington are protected by an efficient and effective fire and rescue service. In the 17 years since the Authority was first set up it has been responsible for establishing Cheshire as one of the leading fire and rescue services in the country, with a track record for innovation and a commitment to invest in the safety of the communities it serves and the people it employs.

Wherever practical it looks to obtain independent assessment of its performance, services and management by independent peer review teams and by competing for external awards and funding. As well as ensuring the organisation is subject to robust external challenge, the Authority

tracks and monitors how satisfied local residents are with the fire and rescue service they pay for.

The views and opinions of those who use its prevention, protection and emergency response services are monitored constantly – and satisfaction has never been below 95%. In addition, robust general public surveys are carried out every two years and overall satisfaction in 2014 stood at 90%. This compares to 81% at the start of the previous four year strategy, while 97% of residents currently value the services the organisation provides.

The Service's excellent brand and reputation has been built up over time by the hard work and commitment of everyone involved in the organisation. The fact that its reputation has been maintained and even enhanced during the fundamental changes and challenges of the last four years is a tribute to the values and vision of the organisation and the dedication of its staff and volunteers and the support of Members and partners.

The Service's Emergency Response Programme to build four new fire stations, keep the same number of fire engines but significantly change the way many of them are staffed is due to be completed in 2017. But while this is a fundamental transformation of frontline services, further significant changes will be needed if the Authority is to ensure local communities are still protected by a first class fire and rescue service in the future.

This five year strategy has been deliberately scheduled to coincide with the life of the new fixed term Parliament as it is clear that key elements of the future of fire and other blue light services will be determined at a national level. The next section reviews the Service's progress and performance over the four years of the previous strategy.

There is then a brief overview of the challenges and risks the organisation faces before the strategy outlines the approach and principles the Authority will adopt in developing its response and setting its future direction. The final section outlines how the organisation intends to ensure staff, residents and partners can stay informed and involved in the delivery of the strategy. In particular, detailed proposals will continue to be set out in annual action plans as part of the Authority's statutory duty to carry out local integrated risk management planning.

## **Section 2**

### **Progress and Performance**

It is over a decade ago since the Government scrapped the national standards of fire cover and instead required each local fire and rescue service to outline how it identifies, manages and responds to the risks in its area.

While these local risk management arrangements are still a statutory responsibility for each fire and rescue authority, they provide more flexibility for individual services in deciding how best they should use their resources to protect the communities they serve. Cheshire has used this flexibility to radically transform the organisation into one with a very clear focus on protecting lives and improving the safety and health of local communities, particularly those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

The change of focus was formally recognised when the Service won the Business Transformation category at the 2014 Local Government Chronicle Awards. Judges highlighted the change from emergency response to prevention and protection work and how this had not only improved community safety but also helped partners in health, social care and beyond in reducing their costs.

The previous strategy made it clear, however, that further innovation and transformation would be needed in the future. It specified both what needed to be achieved over the next four years and the approach which would be adopted by the Authority: The scale of the current challenges and the profile of Cheshire's communities require the Authority to be bold and undertake a comprehensive risk analysis to ensure operational resources are deployed to best effect and that community safety work is targeted where it will have the most impact.

The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service of the future will need to be more flexible and able to provide a faster, more innovative and weighted response to the risks and opportunities it faces. It is inevitable that the changes will result in some job losses, however, the Authority's objective is to work with staff and trade unions to avoid compulsory redundancies. This section reviews what progress has been made against the Authority's three headline aims as well as setting out some of the key results and outcomes.

### Developing the organisation

- There has been significant progress in the last four years including:
- Flattening the senior management structure to reduce costs and improve accountability.
- Completing value for money reviews on all support areas of the organisation, streamlining processes and making £1.3 million in savings with limited redundancies.
- Attaining the Fire and Rescue Service of the Year award in 2011-12
- Becoming the first combined Fire Authority to achieve Excellence in the national fire and rescue service equality framework

Attaining Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index of the top 100 employers

for the last three years and being the highest emergency service in 2015

- Receiving a very positive report following an independent Operational Assurance peer assessment review

Winning the Inaugural Driving Efficiency through Technology award from the Local Government Chronicle

- Developing a special reserve fund to spread out the impact of funding cuts and avoid the need for firefighter redundancies
- Establishing an invest to save approach to environmental projects and setting a new carbon reduction target of a 40% cut by 2020 (compared to 2009-10)
- Launching a new Talent Management Framework to develop staff
- Establishing a Charter for Member Development and a Volunteer Accreditation Scheme.
- Protecting local communities
- Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) are the Service's flagship approach to community safety, combining the fitting of free smoke alarms with the provision of vital safety advice. The previous strategy committed to fundamentally changing the organisation's approach to HSAs so that it maximised the potential to save lives, particularly among those who are most vulnerable.
- That new approach is now fully embedded across the organisation and sees the Service combine a range of risk factors and data, including some from partners, to help it identify and target people and households most at risk. Instead of trying to visit as many households as possible and hit an annual target of 60,000 HSAs, recent targets have focussed on delivering 20 – 25,000 HSAs a year from a prioritised list. Further work and progress in protecting local communities has included:
  - Leading on moves which have seen the Government agree to bring in legislation requiring private housing landlords to fit smoke alarms in all their properties
  - Refining its risk analysis and targeting approach so that Cheshire now delivers more HSAs to over-65s than any other fire and rescue service in the country
  - Increasing the number of local data sharing agreements and leading on talks with the Government to get further national data to help in targeting those most at risk

- Becoming the first fire and rescue service to be commissioned to deliver road safety education in schools which resulted in the Service being presented with a Prince Michael International Road Safety Award
- Putting up to £160,000 towards the installation of sprinkler systems in high rise tower blocks, with housing associations in each of the four council areas in the process of signing up to the scheme
- Celebrating 20 years of delivering Princes Trust programmes across its area with over 3,000 young people aged between 16 and 25 successfully graduating
- Supporting joint safety partnership programmes across the Cheshire sub region, including seconding frontline staff.

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### Responding to emergencies

In its previous strategy the Authority committed to fundamentally reviewing the delivery of its frontline emergency response services, from the location of its fire stations to how and when they were crewed. Options considered included building accommodation on some stations so firefighters could live there and provide 24/7 emergency cover throughout their tour of duty and get more pay in return for the extra commitment. After detailed research that option was ruled out because of a range of personnel and legal issues and a more comprehensive review of future options was commissioned.

Following comprehensive consultation with communities, staff and partners, the Authority committed to a four-year Emergency Response Programme to invest in four new fire stations, improve average response times, keep the same number of fire engines, but make savings by changing crewing arrangements in some areas.

Progress to date has included:

- Obtaining planning approval for new fire stations at Alsager, Lymm, Penketh and Powey Lane, near the M56
- Leading the joint North West Fire Control centre project which now takes calls and mobilises fire engines across Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Manchester, saving the Service over £300,000 a year
- Adopting a new 10 minute response standard to all life risk incidents with an initial target of achieving the standard on 80% of occasions
- Recruiting a new team of “on-call” firefighters who live within five minutes of the station to operate the second fire engine at Runcorn
- Changing Macclesfield to the same duty system operating at Birchwood and Wilmslow where wholtime firefighters work 12 hour day shifts with the 12 hour night shift covered by “on-call” firefighters
- Changing work routines and investing in additional training and new equipment so that all fire engines can be safely crewed by four firefighters

- Improving the recruitment, training facilities and courses to deal with the Authority's major increase in on-call firefighters
- Ensuring the incident command competence of all operational managers.

### Results and outcomes

- The Service actively monitors the impact of both its day to day work and the progress of its longer term proposals and initiatives. Key performance indicators are reviewed corporately, at a local level and where possible the Service's performance is compared against similar fire and rescue services. Member challenge is provided through the Performance and Overview Committee.

Some of the most significant improvements in recent years are set out below:

- There were three deaths in house fires in 2014-15 with numbers remaining low and fluctuating between one and six in recent years
- Injuries from accidental house fires are down from 79 a decade ago to 28 last year – a 65% reduction
- The number of accidental house fires is down from 695 to 401 over the same period – a 42% reduction
- Fires in businesses went down to 191 in 2014-15 – 69% fewer than a decade ago
- In 2005-06 the Service attended 15,127 incidents overall – last year it was just 7,281
- There were 1,546 arson attacks on buildings and vehicles in 2005-06 compared to 242 last year - an 84% reduction
- The Service attended 885 road traffic collisions in 2005-06 compared to 351 last year
- Over the last five years the number of people killed and seriously injured on Cheshire's roads has reduced by 12%.

## Section 3

### Challenges and risks

Cheshire Fire Authority has clear responsibilities to deliver an efficient and effective fire and rescue service on behalf of the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. The Authority, first

established in 1998, is currently made up of 23 elected Members appointed by the councils of Cheshire East (8), Cheshire West and Chester (7), Halton (3) and Warrington (5).

May 2015 saw not only a General Election but also all-out local elections in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, as well as for a third of seats on Warrington and Halton Borough Councils. The results saw Labour taking overall control of Cheshire West and Chester and consequently increasing its majority on the Fire Authority by two seats. With some existing Members standing down at the elections, over a third of those on the Fire Authority in 2015-16 are new to the role.

The overall majority gained by the Conservative Party at Westminster means that a focus on increasing police and fire collaboration and improving governance will continue, as will moves to develop the role of Police and Crime Commissioners. An independent review into firefighter terms and conditions, which also included issues around governance and management of resources, was completed in February 2015. Publication of the report by Adrian Thomas was put on hold, however pending the General Election. It has built on the findings made by Sir Ken Knight and others before him and is likely to be used by the new Government as a blueprint for wider reform of the sector and the need for greater workforce and operational flexibility. In addition, a manifesto pledge to change the threshold for strikes in key services, including fire and rescue, is likely to be progressed.

### **Economic outlook and public spending**

While the economic outlook for the UK in 2015-16 is significantly more positive than in the previous four years, there are still major challenges for the economy as a whole and for public spending. In its manifesto, the Conservative Party committed to eliminating the UK structural deficit entirely by 2017-18 and thereafter running a budget surplus. While the proposals suggest that public spending will be slightly higher in 2020 than in 2000, overall public spending cuts and funding reductions will continue to be a key factor over the next five years.

A wide-ranging Comprehensive Spending Review will set out the future funding allocation for Departments, including the Department for Communities and Local Government, which oversees the work of the fire and rescue service. This will have to allow for ring-fencing and protection of the National Health Service budget (see graph).

Although fire and rescue only accounts for a very small proportion of the more than £700 billion of public spending, further and significant funding reductions are expected, while the Government will also maintain its controls and restrictions around local spending, such as Council Tax.

Given this austere funding picture, the Authority is continuing to model its five year medium term financial plan (MTFP) on ongoing annual reductions of 8%

in its Government funding and a maximum 1.9% annual increase in its Council Tax. To achieve a balanced budget this requires savings of £2 million a year up to 2020.

### **Integration of local services**

Over the last five years the reduction in central funding has led to the development of a range of collaborative projects and pilots, such as the Altogether Better programme in Cheshire West and Chester. The community budget models promote the idea that local agencies should invest in prevention, weed out duplication and work together to develop better and cheaper local public services. Cheshire and other fire and rescue services have a track record in prevention which is why they have been involved in many of the pilots across the country. The new Government has indicated its ongoing commitment to the approach and it seems certain this will continue and expand beyond 2015.

The Authority is determined to ensure it continues to play its full role under any future joint initiatives which is why it has taken lead responsibility for the Government-funded Cheshire-wide Transforming Community Safety programme (TCS). It is also signed up to the £5 million Government-funded Complex Dependencies programme and the sub-regional Health Programme, which will see work with local councils, health bodies and other agencies across its area in providing families and individuals with joined-up services and support.

### **Growth and sub-regional governance**

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are voluntary partnerships with locally-defined and often complex geographies and were launched by the Coalition Government to help drive economic growth. Cheshire is covered by two LEPs, with Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington in a principal LEP and Halton sitting within the Merseyside structure. It was only in mid-2014 that LEPs were promised significant Government funds to deliver local infrastructure projects and initiatives. In Cheshire, the sub-regional partnership, made up of the four local authorities, fire, police, probation, the Police and Crime Commissioner and health agencies has been working to integrate the work of the LEPs with broader public service reform priorities. In light of the outcome of the Scottish Referendum, the Government is committed to devolving further powers to cities, particularly in the North of England. If cities like Manchester and Liverpool become the focus for future economic growth then areas in between such as Cheshire run the risk of being sidelined - despite having some of the best performing local economies outside London and the South East.

### **A picture of Cheshire**

While Cheshire may be viewed stereotypically as an affluent, largely rural landscape, the reality is somewhat more complex. As a local authority area, Halton is ranked nationally as the 27th most deprived out of 326 areas.

Warrington and Cheshire West are ranked 153rd and 171st respectively, while Cheshire East lies further down at 226th.

There are also a number of pockets of deprivation throughout each of the four authorities, with 16 lower super output areas (LSOAs) in Cheshire East, 34 in Cheshire West and Chester, 39 in Halton and 20 in Warrington falling within the 20% most deprived areas of the country.

According to the 2011 census, the population of Cheshire is 1.028 million, with an average age of 40.4 years. By 2021, the population is forecast to rise by 52,000 to 1.08 million with growth expected to be concentrated in Cheshire East (+19,000) and Warrington (+18,000).

While a number of significant housing developments are planned, building standards and hard-wired smoke detectors generally mean that these properties and the individuals within them suffer fewer fires and incidents than the existing housing stock and more vulnerable individuals. Within the Authority's area there are over 183,000 people aged over-65 -nearly 18% of the total population. Nearly 50,000 of these are over 80 with Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester having the highest proportion. This number has been observed to be steadily growing year on year through the Service's NHS-provided data, with over-65s growing by approximately 28,000 and over-80s by nearly 11,000 since 2001.

Almost 130,000 households in Cheshire also contain one person living alone - nearly 30% of all households in the county. Combined with age-related factors this means around 13% of homes contain a person aged over-65 living alone, with Cheshire East having the highest proportion and one of the highest rates in the country.

Mortality data shows that rates of death in accidental fires increase with age and those who live alone die more often than those who co-habit. While the growth in the over 65 population in Cheshire is not as pronounced as some other areas of the country,

it still presents the most significant challenge for all local authorities in relation to the provision of effective public services. It also highlights the need for the Service to continually review and improve how it and its partners contact and protect those older people who are at significantly increased risk of injury and death from fire. In addition to the challenges of protecting an increasingly vulnerable population, there are a range of other specific risks and challenges facing the Service. These include balancing the requirements of the more rural area in the east with the extensive number of petrochemical-related industries along the River Mersey.

In total Cheshire has more of these top tier risk sites than any other fire and rescue service in the country. In addition, the Service also has to work with partners to minimise the fire risk to the heritage city of Chester which has a large number of unique sites dating back to the roman and medieval periods. Four major motorways traverse the area, along with an extensive road

network and the West Coast Mainline railway, linking the main urban areas of Merseyside and Greater Manchester with the South East. Cheshire is also covered by a number of key flight paths for the major regional airports in Liverpool and Manchester.

More people are killed and seriously injured in road traffic collisions than in fires in Cheshire. In the year 2014-15 there were 35 deaths on the road and 493 serious injuries, compared to three deaths in house fires and 28 injuries.

While the numbers of those killed and seriously injured on Cheshire's road have decreased by 12% over the past five years as a result of extensive partnership work, the figures remain unacceptably high and need to be tackled in a combined effort with the Service playing a full role.

### **Identifying and responding to risk**

The Service continues to develop a range of sophisticated tools, techniques and modelling programmes to help it monitor, assess and anticipate the impact of future changes in risk and activity levels. These are key to supporting the organisation's annual risk planning process and involve the use of both demographic information and previous fire and rescue incident information, data and trends.

This Community Risk Management (CRM) model allows the Service to focus its prevention and protection activities where they will have most impact and allows future emergency response options to be consistently reviewed and tailored to risk. With the existing comprehensive Emergency Response Programme due to be completed in 2017-18, the CRM model will be refined and used to highlight further potential changes to emergency response cover up to 2020.

The CRM model also monitors the Authority's 10 minute response standard to all life-risk incidents (house fires and road traffic collisions) against its current target of achieving it on 80% of occasions. Any future options to change the location of fire stations or crewing arrangements will be developed against this standard.

## **Section 4**

### **Response – vision and approach**

The challenges outlined in the previous section highlight that the Authority is at the most significant crossroads in its history. Not only does it have to find ways to continue providing an efficient and effective fire and rescue service while making savings of £2 million a year, it also has to be able to respond to unprecedented local, regional and national challenges to its future management, structure and governance.

While some potential national changes may be outside the Authority's immediate influence, this strategy outlines the principles and approach it will use to ensure it has the best chance of keeping control of its own destiny and of the services it provides to local communities.

It is confident that this strategy currently provides an effective platform to ensure the communities it serves can continue to receive the first class fire and rescue service they deserve. Should financial and other pressures increase even more than expected, however, then the Authority will consider asking residents to vote for an additional Council Tax increase if it feels that the alternatives would increase local risk levels unacceptably.

### **Vision and values**

Having a clear vision and sense of direction throughout the life of the previous strategy has contributed significantly to the progress made by the Authority in improving the safety of local communities and in developing its services and its people. As the organisation prepares for even greater challenges over the next five years, maintaining that clarity of purpose is even more important. Our vision remains the same:

- A Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies

Our mission also remains unchanged:

- To help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests
- To help translate that strategy into action we continue to review and develop three key aims, with each supported by specific objectives:

### **Protecting our communities and reducing local risks**

- Maintaining a detailed understanding of our communities and carrying out risk analysis and assessments to identify the people and property most at risk
- Delivering campaigns and projects to reduce antisocial behaviour and increase awareness of fire and road safety
- Ensuring fire safety legislation is implemented effectively.
- Responding promptly and effectively to emergencies
- Ensuring plans and resources are in place to provide a flexible, efficient and resilient response to emergency incidents

- Using intelligence and data to match resources to risk and demand
- Ensuring the safety of our people by providing them with the right equipment, training and skills.

### Developing an excellent organisation accountable to our communities

- Ensuring our workforce is competent and able to deliver our vision
- Informing and involving our communities and our staff in developing services and policies which are open, transparent and accountable
- Delivering value for money services which maximise community safety and minimise our impact on the environment.

### Core values

In approving its previous strategy the Authority also launched a new set of values and behaviours to define what is expected of everyone involved with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. While it is believed that they remain fit for purpose in the short term, they will be reviewed in light of any changes in national terms and conditions and alongside the outcomes of internal staff satisfaction surveys.

Putting customers first - Ensuring that our people and communities are at the heart of all that we do, striving to meet their differing needs and expectations

Promoting equality and diversity - Embracing diversity and finding ways to improve our services and the safety and prospects for individuals and communities

Working together - Working in partnership with others for the future of Cheshire and its citizens

Aiming for excellence - Constantly seeking ways to improve the things that we do and the way that we do them

Developing and Respecting our people - Valuing our people and constantly developing their diverse range of talents, learning from all that we do

Delivering our promises - Acting with integrity and taking personal responsibility for making the right thing happen.

### Facing up to the future

The Authority has delivered a service across all of its local communities for over 17 years – a service which has made people demonstrably safer, a

service which is accountable to local people and a service which has a national reputation well beyond local boundaries.

This strategy sets out the Authority's overall sense of direction for the next five years and how it intends to deliver on its three key aims. The challenges are significant and will require the organisation to adapt, change and work differently.

Through its senior officers and Members the Authority will ensure it plays an active part in any national debates into the future of the fire and rescue service in England. It will champion options which offer the best opportunity to provide a pro-active and sustainable Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service for the future.

Despite any debates over structures at local, regional and national levels, the Authority believes that all of its services which work directly with local communities can be best delivered using its current footprint and boundaries. This ensures it can develop even closer and more effective working relationships with its key partners in the police, local councils, health and social care who share common boundaries.

The Authority knows that developing its plans for a safer Cheshire in detail will require the involvement and commitment of everyone – residents, staff and partners. It is committed to ensuring that they will all be key voices in how services will be delivered in the future.

It is inevitable that the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service of 2020 will be a substantially different organisation with some job losses and other posts delivered jointly in collaboration with others. The significant personnel changes in recent years have been achieved with limited redundancies and the Authority will continue to work with staff and trade unions to minimise the impact of future changes.

Options for broader joint working which don't have an impact on the delivery of frontline services are outlined in the following paragraphs which look at how the organisation can be developed over the next five years.

### **Developing an excellent organisation**

The Service's management structure has been reviewed and amended several times in recent years, simplifying lines of responsibility and generating revenue savings of over £250,000 a year. It will continue to review every opportunity to make further management efficiencies in both operational and support areas of the organisation, provided there is sufficient resilience and capacity to meet future business needs.

As outlined in the previous strategy, a comprehensive three-year programme of value for money reviews has been completed across support areas of the organisation. These have streamlined business processes as well as removing a number of posts and reducing budgets to generate total savings of

£1.3 million. A further value for money review programme began in 2015-16 , focussing on further ways to streamline key business processes and with a target of generating a further £1 million in revenue savings. In addition, work is also underway to confirm the most cost effective way of delivering some of the organisation's biggest ICT systems and contracts.

Unlike reviews of frontline services, all opportunities for collaboration and shared services will be actively explored, regardless of whether that is at a local or regional level.

In particular, collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary is being actively explored and options which generate efficiencies without compromising key responsibilities will be presented to the Authority for approval. While this programme will focus initially on transactional services, other options involving professional services are also being explored. In addition, wider opportunities for shared premises and for extending current co-responding arrangements with North West Ambulance Service are being investigated.

The Authority is already recognised for its role in co-ordinating and managing the current sub-regional Transforming Community Safety Programme. It believes its acknowledged strengths of innovation and demand reduction make it ideally placed to manage and play a key role in similar joint public service projects in the future particularly those which reduce demand on health and social care providers.

While the organisation has well-established arrangements to monitor and challenge its performance at both officer and Member level, it is committed to ensuring regular and robust external challenge. It will continue to seek reaccreditation of its Excellence standard in the national equality and diversity framework. In addition, it will continue to develop its well established Equality Task Group which sees staff and a Member Champion monitor and challenge progress. The Authority will also ensure it is regularly reviewed through the external operational assurance and peer assessment process for fire and rescue services.

The Authority has recently adopted its new Environment and Sustainability Strategy 2014-2020 which sets out how it aims to achieve a carbon reduction target of 40% by 2020 against the base year 2009/10. It means that by 2020 the Authority's carbon footprint generation needs to be less than 1783 tonnes. Key to the strategy are measures to streamline and reduce the energy currently used while making more use of sustainable materials and renewable energy and reducing waste. The Authority will aim to continue an 'invest to save' approach which has already seen the installation of a biomass boiler at Service Headquarters. In addition, a successful bid to the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) has secured 75% funding for a £500,000 pilot project to use electric vehicles for part of its fleet.

## Protecting our communities

The transformation of the Service's Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme from a universal offer to one with almost surgical targeting of those most at risk has already been highlighted.

For the future the organisation is committed to working both locally and nationally with partners and Government to increase access to other key data sources targeting and undertaking campaigns to improve the safety of vulnerable individuals. The Service will also continue to review at least annually its approach to HSAs and explore new ways to ensure everything possible has been done to try to help those at the greatest risk of death or injury from fire. In 2013-14 it delivered the highest percentage of HSAs to over-65s of any fire and rescue service in England and it will continue to explore ways to improve the wider safety of this vulnerable group and reduce the demand on health and social care services.

The HSA programme will continue to be the organisation's main way of intervening to protect those most at risk and reduce the number of fires and other emergencies it has to attend. However, the Fire Authority has agreed to take its commitment to prevention and protection even further by setting up Cheshire's first dedicated safety and life skills centre – Safety Central. This unique £7 million development near the M6 / M56 interchange at Lymm involves the completion of an iconic building which integrates a fulltime working fire station with a state of the art training and safety facility.

The circular building will feature scenarios designed to raise awareness of a wide range of risks to young people, older people and those who provide care. Fire safety will always be at the heart of the project but all around will be the other key risks and challenges to achieving the Authority's vision of making Cheshire safer.

It demonstrates the organisation's core commitment to prevention and protection and by actively involving other agencies it provides the ideal foundation for demonstrating the energy and added value the Service can bring to reducing the future demand on public services such as health. In line with proposals in the NHS Five Year Forward View, the Service will look to be commissioned to deliver programmes which will improve the safety of vulnerable residents and reduce future demand.

The Service will produce a new community safety strategy setting out how it will change its prevention services to make best use of the approach and facilities provided by the centre. This will also review options to ensure more sustainable funding for its Prince's Trust programme, the key element of the Service's suite of youth engagement initiatives.

A separate charitable body is being established to manage and run the Centre which will help in maximising future funding opportunities and ensuring Cheshire's future generations have the best chance of staying safe. The Authority also believes it can further develop its prevention work to help

reduce the numbers of people killed and seriously injured on Cheshire's roads.

It intends to increase the use of data and intelligence to plan some of its driver engagement work with partners. In addition, the Authority intends to build on the success of its programme which delivers road safety education to young people on behalf of Cheshire East Council and explore opportunities to be commissioned by other partners. Greater use of data and intelligence will also be made in delivering campaigns aimed at reducing fires and incidents which put the biggest demand on the Service's emergency response resources. Opportunities to save money and make efficiencies by doing more joint communication and community safety campaigns with other services will also be explored.

## **Businesses**

The organisation's Fire Protection staff work with businesses to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under national fire safety legislation. The Authority has already made significant changes to how the teams operate but it believes there are further opportunities to modernise and ensure the most efficient and effective mix of roles and skills to meet future needs and responsibilities.

The review will take into account the potential impact of the Service participating in the Government's Primary Authority Scheme which allows businesses operating from different sites across the country to partner with a single fire authority to ensure there is consistency in fire safety auditing and enforcement.

Fire Prevention staff will also work to maintain the Authority's long term campaign to make the fitting of sprinkler systems a requirement in all new developments. In particular, there will be moves to extend the success of the Authority's initial £160,000 project to part fund system in high rise tower blocks across its area.

## **Responding promptly and effectively to emergencies**

A key element of the Authority's previous strategy was a commitment to a fundamental review of its frontline emergency response services. That was completed and work is now well underway on the subsequent programme which involves building four more fire stations, keeping the same number of fire engines, but making significant changes in how many of them are staffed.

The building programme itself is not due to be completed until 2017, however, an extensive range of supporting work is already underway, including the recruitment and training of new on-call firefighters and the agreement and implementation of new duty systems.

One of the new duty systems agreed is day crewing which operates in smaller urban areas such as Northwich, Winsford and Congleton. Here firefighters live in Authority-owned houses alongside the fire stations and are on duty in the day but respond from home through a pager in the evening. The Authority will look at options to extend this revised system to other areas subject to risk and activity levels and the availability of accommodation.

Following extensive negotiation with staff and trade union officials, the current 12 hour shift model will be extended to all wholetime stations from January 2016. This involves wholetime crews working two 12 hour days and two 12 hour nights followed by four days off, instead of the existing current two 9 hour days, two 15 hour nights and four days off. The new system aims to balance the need to improve productivity and provide an efficient and effective emergency response service to best protect local communities while also ensuring the health, safety and positive working conditions of firefighters. The Authority is committed to regularly reviewing and adapting its emergency response services to ensure they are in line with risk and activity levels and provide value for money.

Detailed work will be carried out to model expected risk and activity levels when all new stations are operational and the new duty systems are in place.

This new review will consider a range of issues to ensure emergency response arrangements remain fit for purpose in the future, including:

- changes in risk levels
- Incident trends and volumes
- Impact on existing response standards
- the sustainability of low activity stations
- matching resources to address the variations in demand between day and nighttime
- the type and number of fire engines and vehicles required for different types of incidents
- exploring different firefighting technologies and tactics.

In carrying out the review and developing future options, the Authority will take into account the level of frontline services it needs to ensure an effective response to major emergencies in its own area and in support of the national resilience programme.

The review will also fully evaluate the impact of changes proposed by Cheshire and neighbouring fire and rescue services to any stations close to boundaries. This will include the potential for enhancing local emergency response agreements and the use of new technology to mobilise the most appropriate resources.

The overall longer-term impact of recent rapid reductions in annual incident numbers starting to slow down and level off will also be taken into account – see graph.

The Service will also ensure it is able to fully play its part in supporting implementation of the national Emergency Services Mobile Communication Project.

### **North West Fire Control**

When the previous strategy was published the Government had just announced that it was cancelling the long-running national project to establish nine regional control centres to handle all fire and rescue 999 calls. The Authority then worked with colleagues in Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester to develop a locally-run solution with the help of a significant Government subsidy.

The new centre at the Lingley Mere Business Park in Warrington officially opened in May 2014 and is now responsible for handling all 999 calls and mobilising crews for the four services. It is managed by a company wholly owned by the four fire authorities, with a board of directors comprising two Members from each.

The new centre has allowed the Authority to make annual savings of £330,000 and offers the potential to explore further options to streamline or improve the efficiency of back office systems or processes as well as looking to handle emergency calls for other organisations.

## Section 5

### Performance and financial management

It is important that both the Authority and the communities it serves can monitor the impact of the changes outlined in this strategy over the next few years.

Every part of the organisation has its performance monitored and assessed using a range of targets, standards and measures. This ensures that all areas of the Service meet their own objectives and contribute towards the overall corporate priorities.

There are, however, a number of key indicators that reflect on the Service's performance as a whole such as deaths and injuries from fires, arson incidents, and the numbers of people killed and seriously injured in road traffic collisions.

Performance against each of these indicators is reported in the annual action plans and in the Authority's annual report which also includes details of the annual Statement of Accounts. The Authority will also report back on its longer term goals such as progress towards carbon reduction targets and publish details of its performance on its website –[www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk)

The following page summarises the Authority's five year Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This is based on information as available in June 2015 and will clearly be subject to change when figures for Government funding are confirmed in detail. Requests for copies of this publication in other languages or formats should be made to the Planning, Performance and Communications Department, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Tel. 01606 868700 (Language Line translation services are available) or email [feedback@cheshirefire.gov.uk](mailto:feedback@cheshirefire.gov.uk)

### Cheshire Fire Authority Financial Summary 2014/15 to 2019/20

This summary of the future financial requirements of the Authority is based on expectations that future reductions in its central funding will continue at the level experienced over the last few years. Other assumptions include:

- a 1.99% annual increase in the Authority's Council Tax precept in future years
- a 1.5% annual increase in staff pay
- a 2% provision each year for inflation.

The building of four new fire stations is a key part of the existing emergency response programme and is due for completion in 2017. Funding for that has

come from the Authority's capital spending programme, not its day to day revenue budget and includes a capital grant from the Government.

Previous Government grants and the development of some reserves means the Authority will be able to fund nearly all of the £15 million building programme directly, limiting the need to take out loans.

Requests for copies of this publication in other languages or formats should be made to the Corporate Communications Department, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service,

Tel. 01606 868700 (Language Line translation services are available) or email [feedback@cheshirefire.gov.uk](mailto:feedback@cheshirefire.gov.uk)

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