



# **Making Cheshire Safer**

Proposals for 2015-16

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## Introduction

Cheshire Fire Authority is the public body with the duty of ensuring local communities are protected by an effective fire and rescue service.

To ensure it can still meet that responsibility while facing major cuts in its funding, the Authority developed a four year Emergency Response Programme to fundamentally transform how its frontline emergency response service will be delivered in the future.

Those proposals were approved after the organisation's biggest ever consultation exercise and are reviewed annually to make sure they remain fit for purpose. Annual action plans are then produced which set out in more detail the projects and work scheduled in the following financial year.

This plan is the third to be produced in support of the Programme and sets out the work and proposals scheduled for the 2015-16 financial year.

This approach also fulfils the Authority's statutory responsibility to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) reflecting up to date risk information and outlining how resources will be used cost effectively to reduce the potential risks facing local communities

Thanks to the hard work of staff, volunteers and partners, the numbers of fires and injuries continues to fall – the charts opposite show the latest trends.

It is clear, however, that the challenges of maintaining those improvements in the future are going to get much harder, particularly as the Authority will have to make savings of around £2 million a year for the foreseeable future.

A key priority, therefore, is to the development of a new five year strategy which will help the Authority realise its vision of “a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies.”

Local communities and partners are urged to help the Authority develop its services so it can continue to protect Cheshire now and in the future - for consultation contact details on page 28.

## Our approach to risk

### Identifying key risks

The Fire Authority has a responsibility to provide an efficient and effective service that protects the communities and infrastructure of Cheshire.

For over a decade, each fire authority has been required to produce a local plan setting out how it assesses local risks to life and use its resources to protect the communities it serves. Known as Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), these are still regarded as essential to effective local planning, even though national guidance on what they should contain has recently been removed.

The Government's key expectations on fire authorities are set out in a document called the National Framework. This emphasises the need for authorities to engage and involve local communities, particularly in developing their prevention, protection, response and resilience activities. The Framework's specific priorities are for fire and rescue authorities to:

- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face, make provision for prevention and protection activities and respond to incidents appropriately
- work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service
- be accountable to communities for the service they provide.

In early 2015 an addition to the Framework about firefighter fitness was issued and the Service is currently ensuring compliance.

Cheshire Fire Authority has always maintained a detailed understanding of the local, sub-regional, national and international factors that could have an impact on how it can deliver its services in the future. It does this by producing an annual comprehensive and forward-looking analysis of the most important political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal issues likely to have an impact on the Authority. In addition, the Service also carries out a detailed analysis of past incidents and activity levels to identify trends and issues. This helps to influence the development of the organisation's future emergency response service and to make sure that existing proposals remain fit for purpose.

The overall analysis is set out in the PESTELO document – (Political, Economic, Social, Technical, Environment, Legal and Organisational review) - available on the Authority's website - [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk) . As well as the Service's own data, the document also draws upon population and demographic information taken from the most recent 2011 Census, as well as a range of data and information obtained from partners.

## National and local issues

In the next few years fire authorities, along with all local government bodies will continue to face challenges around structures and funding and will have to adapt to what is almost certainly an ongoing programme of austerity measures, beyond the General Election in May 2015. By 2017-18 fire authorities will have seen central grant funding reduced by approximately 40%.

The next major spending review is planned for 2015, covering the years 2016-2020 and is likely to see further efficiencies demanded from the public sector, including fire and rescue, regardless of which political party forms the Government.

This puts even more importance on Cheshire's ability to achieve efficiencies across the organisation, particularly those identified from the comprehensive review of its emergency response services during 2012-13. An updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) setting out the anticipated £8m million plus savings needed by 2018-19 is included in section 5.

Following the major review of the fire and rescue service in 2012 by former Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, Sir Ken Knight, the Government announced an independent review of firefighters' terms and conditions.

The review considered a broad range of issues, including crewing arrangements, the use of on-call firefighters, the fair recruitment and remuneration of chief fire officers and opportunities for collaboration and integration with other blue light services.

The initial findings of the review have now been presented to the Fire Minister and it is clear that the outcomes will heavily influence the strategic direction of fire and rescue services and shape how future Governments might approach the sector.

The next few years will also see continued changes in how public services are delivered, including an increase in those provided jointly by local agencies, such as local councils, the police, fire and health bodies. This includes experts from different agencies working together in joint teams to tackle collective issues such as anti-social behaviour, the effects of poor mental health and alcohol misuse and addressing barriers to closer working.

Many of these new models have emerged through community budget pilots such as Altogether Better in Cheshire West and Chester and the Cheshire-wide Transforming Community Safety programme – led by Cheshire Fire Authority.

Several local partners are also undergoing significant change or have recently re-structured. Police and Crime Commissioners and changes to health

structures continue to present opportunities and challenges for the Authority, including existing arrangements for sharing data on vulnerable people.

The Fire Authority intends to influence these national and local issues and participate in the debates to ensure any changes do not compromise the provision of an effective fire and rescue service for communities across Cheshire.

## **New developments**

Over the next few years Cheshire will receive significant investment aimed at encouraging economic growth. The Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and local councils are supporting and implementing a range of developments, including major housing, industrial and infrastructure projects across the area.

This includes major investment and regeneration in Crewe, related to the High Speed 2 rail hub, the second Mersey Crossing in Halton, Europe's biggest development at Omega in Warrington and developments in Chester, Alderley Park and Daresbury.

The LEP's objective is to create a £35 billion economy by 2030 with the prospect of further national funding towards the recently announced 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda.

In terms of residential development, current unitary authority plans indicate there could be over 70,000 new dwellings across the whole of Cheshire by 2030.

With an increase in the number of dwellings and development sites there might be an expectation that dwelling fires and other incidents will also increase.

Analysis has shown, however, that although the number of dwellings has steadily grown since 2001, dwelling fires have reduced in England - see graph opposite.

New homes also tend to have the lowest rate of fires (0.7 per 1,000 per year) as more fires occur in areas of high density social housing (3.3 per 1,000 per year). (Source: DCLG fire statistics)

Despite the limited potential increase in house fires as a result of new housing developments across Cheshire, the Authority will continue to review in detail the potential impact on any of its plans to change its emergency response service in the future.

### **Targeting those most at risk**

The Community Risk Management (CRM) model is the Service's way of monitoring risk levels so that it can target its resources effectively in the most appropriate areas.

The CRM diagram above highlights how data and information is used to support the delivery of the organisation's fire prevention, community protection and emergency response activity.

The strategic cycle, delivered annually through the Authority's IRMPs, prioritises key issues identified through a variety of internal and external intelligence including:

- specialist computer modelling software
- Geographic Information Systems
- demographic data
- historical fire and rescue incident information and trends.

This allows the Service to focus its prevention and protection activities where they will have most impact and ensures the Fire Authority can review future emergency response options.

The tactical cycle highlighted in the CRM model involves the monitoring of intelligence and performance at least quarterly. This checks that the Service's activity is still being delivered according to local risk issues and ensures community safety action can be targeted effectively.

This use of intelligence informs a range of different Service activities such as its key Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme, youth engagement, arson reduction and road safety initiatives - helping staff to understand who, where and when to target for the best results.

The risk analysis processes and methodologies are also reviewed on an annual basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose and reflect good practice.

## **Response standards**

The CRM model also highlights the new performance indicator which the Authority introduced at the beginning of the 2013-14 financial year following extensive public consultation.

This is a blanket 10 minute response standard to all life-risk incidents (dwelling fires and road traffic collisions) on 80% of occasions. The Service's performance in 2013-14 was 88%, with full implementation of the four year emergency response programme expected to see this figure improve further.

Use of the CRM model ensures that areas with the longest response times are prioritised for prevention and protection activity.

## **Targeting our Community Safety work**

The Fire Authority is committed to undertaking a minimum of 25,000 targeted Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) in 2015-16 in the most vulnerable households. This is based upon a targeting methodology which centres on

enriching our existing data on vulnerable people, with data that the NHS and local authorities share with the Authority, by including;

- Personal risk,
- Lone persons risk,
- Geo-demographic risk and
- Operational response times.

Research shows that personal fire-risk increases with age and the methodology uses weightings to ensure that these factors are balanced. The Authority has access to further intelligence which helps identify other groups who might also fall into the high risk category. This data comes from sources such as local authority social care and means those with the overall highest risk score can be prioritised for an HSA.

Low risk households are targeted through other routes, such as local and national campaigns as well as online approaches through the Authority's website – [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/5mins](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/5mins) .

## **Enforcing Fire Safety work**

The Authority also uses the same risk-based and intelligence-led approach to the regulation of businesses, commercial and other non-domestic premises. This is achieved through a business safety team, routine enforcement, fire investigation and arson reduction.

The Service also works closely with key partners to protect communities and businesses from fire. These include Housing Associations, HM Prison Service, the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership, United Kingdom Border Agency, Care Quality Commission and others.

Premises with a history of good fire safety practices benefit from extended periods between audits, such as every three years. Those with poor management standards receive closer attention, such as annual checks.

The Authority's focus is always on helping businesses to fulfil their fire safety responsibilities in the first instance. Its approach of having a dedicated business outreach safety team which reaches out to engage with local firms was cited as best practice in a recent Review of Enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 carried out by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

If firms fail to respond to issues or concerns which have been raised with them, then the Service will resort to court action. Several prosecutions have already resulted in fines running into many thousands of pounds.

Following an initial pilot, the Government has now launched a scheme which allows businesses operating from different sites across the country to partner with a single local fire authority to ensure there is consistency in fire safety

auditing and enforcement. Called the Primary Authority Scheme, this could see fire authorities providing assured advice for regional or national businesses, outside their own area.

The Fire Authority supported the initial pilot and will look to work with appropriate businesses where there are mutual benefits in streamlining processes and improving safety.

## **Response and resilience**

The National Framework also requires each fire and rescue authority to identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its communities, including those which may cross local borders or escalate into national emergencies.

The Fire Authority aims to achieve this through collaborative arrangements with neighbouring fire and rescue services and national agencies, with other local emergency responders and through the Cheshire Resilience Forum – the local body set up to coordinate the plans and activities of emergency responders.

The Framework also requires the Authority to produce an annual statement of assurance to formally demonstrate how it is meeting its statutory responsibilities. The Authority is committed to open and transparent communication and uses its website – [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk) – as a key way of providing residents and partners with this statement and other information to help them scrutinise the effectiveness of its financial, governance and operational arrangements.

## **Projects and proposals**

The previous section highlighted some of the risks and issues the Fire Authority will have to face over the next financial year and beyond.

This section sets out the how the organisation is already responding to some of those challenges and some of its future proposals for ensuring communities across Cheshire can continue to be protected by an effective fire and rescue service.

The Authority's projects and proposals are presented under the following three headings:

- Developing the organisation
- Protecting local communities
- Responding to emergencies.

## **Developing the organisation**

The Authority actively looks for opportunities to challenge and compare its

performance with others and it was among the first to take part in a revised system for assessing the effectiveness of local fire and rescue services.

The Operational Assessment and Peer Review of Cheshire in 2012 saw an independent six-strong team of senior representatives from other fire and rescue services and local councils in a four day visit to scrutinise performance and future plans.

Their report praised the way in which the Service operated and specified a number of challenges which needed to be addressed. An action plan highlighting how the Service intended to respond to the issues was monitored by the Fire Authority and has now been completed.

As part of the Authority's commitment to continuous improvement, it now intends to schedule a second independent peer review to be carried out in 2015-16.

Other external accreditation saw Cheshire become one of the first fire authorities in the country to gain the 'Excellent' accreditation under the national Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework. That independent review was completed in late 2011 and the organisation is now intending to renew its accreditation under the new revised framework in 2015-16.

As a major local employer, the Authority is committed to ensuring its workforce is representative of the communities it serves. It is a long-time supporter of the 'two ticks' positive about disability symbol programme awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of staff with disabilities.

It also takes part in the annual Stonewall Workplace Equality Index - seen as the key way of assessing workplace culture and in particular how positive employers are towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff.

Over the last few years the Service has improved its ranking and in the latest index for 2015 it was ranked as the top emergency service in the country. The Service's position of 31st also meant that it won an award as the top public sector employer in the North West, while there was also a role model award for its lead LGBT representative.

To provide a robust assessment of staff satisfaction the organisation carries out biannual surveys, however, the 2013 survey was initially postponed due to the impact of the national industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union. It has now been rescheduled and the resulting action plan will be drawn up, implemented and monitored by the Fire Authority during 2015-16.

## **Value for money**

Around three-quarters of the Service's current £42.7 million annual budget goes on staff costs, with most of that on firefighters and fire officers. Reducing future staff costs is therefore essential if the organisation is to meet the

expected £2 million a year savings required over the next four years.

The Authority's four-year Emergency Response Programme is making a significant contribution to the savings target by ensuring the most efficient and cost-effective use of its fire stations, fire engines and staffing systems in the future. An update on the programme's projects planned for 2015-16 is set out in the 'Responding to Emergencies' section.

To ensure all other areas of the organisation are working efficiently and in line with the Service's future needs, a comprehensive three-year programme of value for money (VFM) reviews has now been completed. This has resulted in ongoing savings of £1.3 million, changes to a number of business processes, the restructuring of all support departments and a reduction of over 25 posts.

During 2015-16 a further round of VFM reviews will begin, focusing on all areas of the Service not covered in the Emergency Response Programme. The outcomes will be implemented in 2017-18 and have a target of achieving further savings totalling £1 million.

Other work to make savings in the future includes a collaboration project with other blue light services in - particularly Cheshire Police - while the Service is also chairing the Cheshire Public Services Reform Board.

Despite the VFM programme producing significant efficiencies and cutting a number of jobs, it also highlighted the continued need for the organisation to plan and invest in its future workforce.

As a result, a new Talent Management Strategy has been developed. This includes a "Step into Work" programme which incorporates and extends the Service's current range of youth engagement initiatives.

It includes the launch of trainee and apprenticeship programmes in 2015-16 and the development of a 'talent pool' of those who have successfully completed some of the Service's youth engagement programmes. They will then be given the same opportunity as existing staff to apply for a specified range of roles.

During 2015-16 a business case will also be developed to consider the launch of a firefighter apprentice programme.

## **The environment**

As part of its environmental commitment, the Authority has set a carbon reduction target of achieving a 40% reduction by 2020 (compared to its 2009-10 consumption.)

To help it achieve its target a wide range of initiatives are planned from small, local recycling schemes to significant investment in major energy-saving projects.

The new fire stations which are being built have been subject to energy efficiency and low carbon feasibility reviews to ensure the most sustainable methods and technologies are incorporated and the impact on local biodiversity minimised.

Energy efficiency measures included in the designs include solar photo voltaic panels and ground source heat pumps – not only improving the efficiency of the buildings but also generating future income.

Other projects aimed at reducing the organisation's carbon footprint include:

- A £300,000 project replacing the ageing oil-fired heating system at Service Headquarters with a new bio-mass facility
- Establishing electric car charging points at key fire stations to support the potential switch of some support vehicles to electric
- Installing more efficient lighting and heating system at premises with high energy usage.

### **Planning for the future**

The previous section highlighted the major changes and challenges facing both Cheshire and fire and rescue authorities in general over the next few years. This includes the general and local elections in May 2015 and conflicting national political debate over how emergency services should be managed in the future.

In addition, it is clear that implementing the outcomes of the national independent review of firefighters' terms and conditions of service will have a significant impact at a local level.

It is essential, therefore, that Cheshire Fire Authority has a longer term strategy for how it aims to protect the communities it serves. At the start of 2015-16 it will produce a new five year strategy, coinciding with the new five year fixed term Parliament.

This will reflect the Authority's recent progress, consider the views of communities, staff and partners and outline the approach and principles which will be used in planning for a safer Cheshire towards 2020.

In addition, the Service will set up a working group of staff and representative bodies to consider future changes to its frontline service once the Emergency Response Programme has been fully implemented.

### **Protecting local communities**

The Service's high-profile work to prevent emergencies and protect local communities has been a key factor behind new figures which show that the number of fires in Cheshire has reached the lowest level ever recorded.

During 2013-14 the total number of primary fires – those involving homes, businesses, cars, injuries and incidents where more than five fire engines

were used – fell to 1,135, 43 fewer than last year and a reduction of nearly 30% compared to five years ago.

There were three fire deaths during the year compared to four in 2012-2013, while the number of fire-related injuries was down to 44 from 52 the previous year. Of those 44 injuries only five were classed as being severe. Despite this, the Service recognises that maintaining these improvements in future is going to be extremely challenging, particularly with the increased risk associated with the ageing population.

The Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme - which gives householders vital safety advice and free smoke alarms if needed – will continue to be its key approach for reducing local risk and improving safety.

As outlined in the previous section, the programme is now targeted specifically at those most at risk and the Service will continue to review and refine the methodology to maximise its effectiveness. This includes continuing to take a leading role in developing local, regional and national data sharing agreements which will enhance information about those at risk.

For 2015-16 the Service has a target of completing a minimum of 25,000 HSAs in the most vulnerable households, with at least 65% of those to be done in the highest risk category - over-65s.

After detailed evaluation, outline proposals to launch a paid-for HSA service for low risk households are not being pursued. However, the Service's online self assessment system for those families and households at lower risk - [www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/5mins](http://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/5mins) - is being streamlined and revamped.

## Campaigns

Despite the effectiveness of the HSA programme, it is recognised that on its own it cannot deliver the Authority's longer-term vision of a "a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies."

Achieving that next major step forward will need measures to fundamentally change people's approach and response to fire safety. That requires changes in legislation and changes in people's behaviour.

High profile campaigns – locally and nationally – are key to both aspects. On the legal front the Service played the leading role behind new legislation which is being brought in under the Energy Act requiring private landlords to fit long life smoke alarms in all their properties. The move is expected to save over 26 lives a year nationally and follows over two years of campaigning by the Service and a range of key partners.

The Service is also supporting the national fire and rescue service bid to make the fitting of sprinkler systems a requirement in all new domestic buildings in England. In Cheshire the Authority has earmarked £160,000 to work with local housing associations on retro-fitting systems into local high-rise blocks of

flats. Work on the first of the schemes is now underway with others scheduled into 2015-16.

Other local campaign work will highlight the risks of kitchen fires – which continue to be the cause of over 50% of all house fires in Cheshire. A high-profile “Dirty Grills Kill” campaign has been launched which aims to change people’s behaviour around cooking safety, while a £5,000 grant from the Electrical Safety Council has helped to kit out an existing outreach vehicle to promote wider kitchen safety messages.

Achieving sustained changes to people’s behaviour and attitude towards risk requires a longer term approach. That’s why the Authority remains committed to its comprehensive programme of youth engagement from ‘Primary Respect’ courses for pupils in Years 5 and 6 through to Prince’s Trust programmes for older teenagers and young adults. In addition, the Authority has also backed a project which will see a group of Cheshire Fire Cadets raising over £65,000 to travel to Nepal in 2015 and build a school in the Himalayas.

Other work with young people has seen the Service commissioned to deliver programmes on behalf of others, including the delivery of road safety education in schools.

That long-term commitment to prevention and improving community safety takes a major step forward in 2015-16, however, as the Service begins detailed planning for the launch of Cheshire’s first dedicated safety centre.

The innovative building is integrated with the new fire station planned for Lymm, near the M6 / M56 interchange, and will feature scenarios designed to raise awareness of a wide range of risks. While young people are the main audience, priority will also be given to older people and those who provide care as they are the other most at risk group.

Although the centre is not due to formally open until later in 2016-17, work to develop and finalise the management, partnership and funding arrangements will be a key priority for the next financial year. In addition, 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.

## Partnerships

Other key underlying factors which increase the risk of fires and other emergencies - such as alcohol misuse- are in areas outside the direct influence of the Service. It therefore works with a range of other partners and is now the lead agency for a Government-funded sub-regional Transforming Community Safety programme.

This involves agencies working together on the following five projects:

- Reducing Harm Through Alcohol
- Anti-Social Behaviour

- Domestic Abuse
- Reducing Reoffending
- System Change, Performance and Governance.

The programme will ensure agencies co-ordinate their work to improve services in these areas.

### **False alarms**

Automatic fire alarm systems (AFAs) can be an important way of alerting staff and visitors to businesses and other large premises about potential fires and the need to evacuate. Unfortunately, they can often result in false alarms, and historically up to 40% of all incidents attended by some fire crews in Cheshire have been down to problems with AFAs.

Over the past two years the Service has made changes to the way it handles these calls and these have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of false alarms attended. Following the launch of the new North West Fire Control in May 2014, Cheshire is leading on a bid to have a single, consistent policy used by all four of the Services served by the control centre.

### **Enforcing fire regulations**

While the Authority has a responsibility to enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, its initial focus is always on working with businesses to help them fulfil their responsibilities.

Its dedicated business outreach safety team goes out to discuss issues with local firms and often organises special impact events at 'hot spot' locations to highlight specific issues, such as arson.

When firms or owners fail to respond to the concerns which have been raised with them, then the Service resorts to court action, with successful prosecutions over the last two years leading to fines and costs totalling many thousands of pounds.

During 2015-16 the Service's fire protection staff will review any approaches they receive under the new 'primary authority scheme' which was highlighted in the previous section. Any proposals which provide improvements in streamlining processes and improving safety will be presented to the Fire Authority for approval.

### **Responding to emergencies**

The next financial year is the third in the four year Emergency Response Programme, with work on building the new stations scheduled to move into top gear. In addition to the on site works, a range of associated initiatives will also need to be carried out including recruiting and training new staff and implementing new duty systems.

As highlighted in the previous section, the Service carries out an annual review of risk and activity to see if there are any issues which need addressing. More detailed work is done in those station areas where the Emergency Response Programme plans to remove or change how the second fire engine is crewed.

The latest review has highlighted that there have been continuing reductions in risk and activity levels and the plans remain fit for purpose and in line with the Authority's objectives and financial challenges.

While there continue to be a small number of life risk incidents in the Neston area which are not attended within 10 minutes, the Fire Authority intends to keep outline proposals for a new on-call station there on hold. In the meantime it has formalised arrangements which see crews from Merseyside's nearby

Heswall station respond to incidents in Neston, while the new station at Powey Lane near the M56 is also expected to provide additional support.

Set out below is an update on the position with each of the new stations:

- Alsager – work started on site in October 2014 with the building due to be completed in July 2015, although it will not be fully operational until the recruits have been fully trained
- Penketh – work is due to start on site in September 2015 with the building finished in July 2016 and the wholetime fire engine operational from August 2016
- Lymm – work is scheduled to start on site in August 2015 with completion in September 2016 and the station operational from October 2016.
- Powey Lane, M56 - work is due to start on site in September 2015 with the building finished in July 2016 and the wholetime fire engine operational from August 2016.

The draft timetable on page 26 provides more detail about all aspects of the emergency response programme. Given the size and complexity of the changes and developments, the timetable is kept under regular review and future changes will be communicated to local communities, partners and staff.

The most significant change since the draft timetable in last year's IRMP is that the new station and safety centre at Lymm has moved into the 2016-17 financial year, as have the associated projects involving the stations at Knutsford and Stockton Heath.

The Authority continues to receive occasional approaches from developers for some of its existing stations. These are reviewed in terms of the implications for emergency response times and future revenue savings.

## Crewing and shift systems

Over the last 18 months considerable work has gone into exploring what will be the most appropriate shift systems in the future as the Authority's Emergency Response Programme is fully implemented.

The objective has been to agree systems which 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.

Previous work has seen the introduction of a 'nucleus crewing' agreement at Birchwood, Wilmslow and Macclesfield. This involves firefighters working 12 hour day shifts covering the period of peak activity, with on-call staff living within five minutes of the station covering the 12 hour night shift.

The latest work has reviewed options for future shift arrangements on existing wholetime stations. This has included research into shift systems operated by other fire and emergency services, guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and local working groups involving firefighters and trade union representatives.

While eight hour shifts are the optimum in terms of minimising the firefighter fatigue, the Service recognises the significant effect this change would have for staff working the current wholetime duty system.

It therefore intends to extend the 12 hour shift model to all wholetime stations during the 2015-16 financial year. This would see wholetime crews working two 12 hour days and two 12 hour nights followed by four days off, instead of the current two 9 hour days, two 15 hour nights and four days off.

The Service has reached a local agreement on changes to its 'day crewing' system which operates in smaller urban areas. This sees firefighters living in Authority owned houses alongside the stations and providing cover as normal during the day but responding from home through a pager at night.

Again there was extensive consultation with staff and trade union officials, with a number of options considered, including some put forward by staff. The new duty system is scheduled to be implemented in 2015-16.

As implementation of the Emergency Response Programme continues, the Authority will also be looking at what will be the most effective and efficient management arrangements in the future. This will include both the day to day management of the 28 fire stations and the system of providing effective and flexible 24/7 management of emergencies.

## On-call recruitment

One of the key outcomes from the Emergency Response Programme was the Fire Authority's decision to make greater use of part time or 'on-call' firefighter

posts. This follows the continuing reduction in the number of incidents attended by the Service and the need to better match emergency response resources to risk and activity levels.

Successful on-call recruitment campaigns have already been completed in Runcorn and Macclesfield but these will expand over the next 12 months as preparations for the station changes get underway.

In addition, as on-call staff start to make up a larger proportion of the workforce, there will need to be regular recruitment to maintain the numbers required. To support this a new recruitment pod has been launched.

This contains all the equipment needed to carry out the key physical selection tests used as part of the assessment process. It can be taken out to community venues or local fire stations and give people the chance to see if they have got what it takes to become an on-call firefighter.

### Review of emergency vehicles

The Service regularly reviews the development of its fleet of emergency vehicles to ensure they continue to meet current and anticipated emergency response requirements.

This has included removing some under-used vehicles and refurbishing others to provide a more efficient and effective service. The new dedicated mobile Incident Command Unit is now available for use at major incidents following a comprehensive refit.

The former community roadshow vehicle has been completely transformed into a hi-tech hub which ensures incident commanders have the latest information when making risk-critical decisions.

Key features include satellite broadband communications, specialist cameras which can relay live pictures to the unit from the heart of an incident and a dedicated multi-agency briefing area where decisions can be automatically recorded and tracked.

During 2015-16 the Service will be looking to replace at least two of its three aerial appliances which allow crews to work at height. It will also be preparing to move some of its more specialist units to the new fire station scheduled to be built at Powey Lane near the M56.

This will involve transferring the Foam and Environmental Protection Units from Ellesmere Port, the Incident Response Unit from Chester and the High Volume Pump from Congleton.

The Service is also reviewing the use of its fleet of support vehicles, including the vans used by station staff and advocates. Following a review by the Energy Savings Trust, the Service intends to use national grants to fund electric charging points at key locations and evaluate the replacement of

some vehicles with electric ones.

## Emergency Services Network

The Emergency Services Network (ESN) is a multi billion pound national project to implement a new communications network for all three emergency services.

The project will replace an existing contract which is due to end in 2016 with a new integrated scheme which will improve interoperability between the three blue light services. The objective is to ensure the new service is smarter, faster and cheaper than the current arrangements.

Once the new contract is in place the scheme will be implemented regionally in phases. During 2015-16 the Service will need to agree a local implementation plan and to confirm the ongoing costs compared to the current arrangements.

## North West Fire Control

One of the biggest changes in the organisation's history saw its emergency control service transfer to the new joint North West Fire Control in Warrington in May 2014.

The new centre at the Lingley Mere Business Park in Warrington is now responsible for handling all 999 calls and mobilising crews and fire engines on behalf of the fire and rescue services in Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

The centre was originally built as part of a previous national programme and the Government has provided a £36.7 million subsidy to help the North West project make best use of the building. A new mobilising system has been installed with key features including:

- Automatic Vehicle Location – so control operators can see exactly where the fire engines are and send the nearest one to an emergency, even if it is already on the road
- Mobile Phone Caller Identification – pinpointing where a call is being made from, without the caller needing to explain, thus speeding up the time to mobilise a fire engine
- Better mapping and information systems – speeding up the time taken to locate an incident and sending more information to data screens on board the fire engines.

Just under 60 staff work at the new centre and they are expected to handle around 100,000 calls in 2014-15 – compared to the 140,000 taken by the four services five years ago.

The new centre has helped the Service make savings of £330,000 a year, with total savings for the four fire and rescue services of nearly £20 million

over the next 12 years. It is managed by a company wholly owned by the four fire authorities, with a board of directors comprising two Members from each.

Work is underway to identify further opportunities for collaboration between the four services following the completion of the control centre project.

## **Projects and proposals 2015-16 – summary**

### **Developing the organisation**

- Publish a new five year strategy outlining the approach and principles which will be used by the Authority in planning for a safer Cheshire towards 2020
- Launch a further value for money review on all areas of the Service not covered in the emergency response programme with the aim of achieving savings totalling £1 million
- Organise a second independent Operational Assessment and Peer Review of the organisation and seek reaccreditation under the national Fire and Rescue Service Equality framework
- Launch schemes for apprentices and trainees and produce a business case for the introduction of a firefighter apprentice scheme
- Complete a feasibility study into switching some of the Service's fleet of support vehicles to electric
- Support the development of a blue light services collaboration project in Cheshire

### **Protecting local communities**

- Establish the management, partnership and funding arrangements for the Lymm Safety Centre project
- Produce a new community safety strategy setting out how its prevention services will be delivered in future and integrate with the Centre.
- Review any opportunities for streamlining processes and improving safety under the Government's new 'primary authority scheme'

### **Responding to emergencies**

- Continue to implement the Authority's emergency response programme including opening the new on-call fire station at Alsager
- Start recruiting for on-call staff at Crewe and Ellesmere Port
- Implement new duty systems at Congleton, Winsford and Northwich
- Extend the 12 hour shift model to all wholetime stations and review future options for the management of stations and flexible 24/7 emergency cover
- Launch a comprehensive programme to review all aspects of how frontline emergency response services can be delivered in the future in support of the Authority's new five year strategy.

## Draft Timetable

The Fire Authority has set out the draft timetable below for the implementation of the emergency response programme. It reflects current anticipated activity over the next three financial years. Given the scale and complexity of the projects, the programme is regularly reviewed and updated.

### 2015–2016

1. Complete the building of a new on-call fire station at Alsager
2. Start recruiting for on-call staff at Crewe and Ellesmere Port
3. Implement new crewing arrangements at Congleton, Winsford and Northwich
4. Extend the 12 hour shift model to all wholetime stations
5. Develop options for future station management and 24/7 management of emergency incidents.

### 2016–2017

1. New on-call fire station at Alsager becomes fully operational
2. New fire station at Penketh – “go live” using the second fire engine from Warrington
3. Remove the second fire engine from Widnes
4. “Go live” for new fire station at Powey Lane, near M56 – using the second fire engine from Chester. Transfer the Foam and Environmental Protection Units at Ellesmere Port, the Incident Response Unit from Chester and the High Volume Pump from Congleton to the new station
5. New fire station at Lymm – “go live”
6. Launch of new safety centre at Lymm
7. Transfer Technical Rescue Unit from Knutsford to Lymm and Incident Response Unit from Winsford to Lymm
8. Transfer the hydraulic platform from Stockton Heath to Warrington
9. Introduce on-call model for Stockton Heath and Knutsford

### 2017–2018

1. Introduce new crewing arrangement for second fire engine at Crewe
2. Introduce new crewing arrangement for second fire engine at Ellesmere Port
3. On-call crew at Penketh become fully operational

## Consultation and engagement

In 2012 the Authority carried out its most comprehensive consultation to date in recognition of the major changes set out in its emergency response review proposals. The three month consultation was overseen by the Consultation Institute and Cheshire subsequently became the first fire and rescue service in the country to be successfully accredited through its Compliance Assessment scheme.

The outcomes from the consultation were used by the Authority in confirming which of the options it intended to pursue and this action plan sets out current progress and an updated timetable.

The plan also contains a number of new proposals for developing the organisation, protecting local communities and responding to emergencies. While these are not as far reaching as those set out in last year's plan, the Authority remains committed to ensuring residents, businesses, partners and staff have the opportunity to give their views.

As a result it ran a formal 12 week consultation and engagement programme from September 29 to December 31, 2014. The outcomes were included in a full consultation report presented at the Fire Authority's meeting on February 11, 2015 when Members set the organisation's budget for 2015-16.

The programme involved face to face briefings and presentations for key stakeholders, as well as a series of community consultation roadshows for residents and senior management roadshows for staff. There were also opportunities to comment and feedback through the Service's website, Intranet and social media channels.

The contact details for further information and to take part in future consultations are as follows:

e-mail: [consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk](mailto:consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk)

tel. 01606 868408

post: Consultation and  
Engagement Officer  
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Sadler Road,  
Winsford,  
Cheshire  
CW7 2FQ

## Financial update

As part of its budget management the Fire Authority produces a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which looks four years ahead. This overview is regularly updated and uses research and external intelligence to make a number of informed assumptions about future pay, inflation, Government grants and Council Tax levels.

By April 2015 the Authority will have made efficiency savings of nearly £7.5 million over the previous five financial years to offset changes and reductions in Government funding. The bulk of the initial savings came from reductions in corporate budgets and support service departments.

More recently the Emergency Response Programme previously outlined in the Plan has started to deliver significant savings, while the value for money reviews of support areas has produced ongoing revenue savings of £1.3 million.

This Plan has also highlighted that fire and rescue services can expect ongoing reductions in their central funding for some years to come and certainly after the 2015 general election.

The current MTFP on the opposite page is based on expectations that future reductions in the Authority's 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% allowance each year for inflation.

The building of four new fire stations is a key part of the emergency response plans but that money will 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 much of the £15 million building programme directly, limiting the need to take out loans.

The Authority believes that the expectations in the MTFP together with the proposals set out in this annual action plan will enable it to deliver its objectives of continuing to protect the public while aiming to avoid the closure of stations and compulsory redundancies of firefighters.

## Performance management

Strategic monitoring of the organisation's performance is carried out by the Fire Authority, including quarterly reports to the Performance and Overview

Committee. More detailed scrutiny is carried out by an internal performance management group and through the Service's unitary council performance groups which involve both local councillors and staff.

A mixture of nationally accepted fire and rescue service performance indicators together with local targets are used to track progress and monitor trends. Dedicated staff ensure risk, planning and performance data is collated, checked, interpreted, reported and scrutinised effectively.

### Summary performance 2014-15

This section provides the latest information on some of the headline indicators used by the Authority to monitor progress in achieving its vision of 'a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies.'

Annual and longer term targets are set and a key principle of our approach is aiming for continuous improvement to achieve the best outcomes for our communities. The trend analysis shown here is based on five years' worth of data and illustrates the impact over time of our efforts to drive down the numbers of fires, deaths and injuries.

As at 28th February 2015, there had been four fire deaths, three as a result of accidental dwelling fires and one in a car fire. The numbers are in line with previous years, although annual changes are volatile given the low numbers relative to a population of over one million.

The number of fire-related injuries recorded across Cheshire is in line with last year's performance. Future projections suggest a positive downwards trend for this indicator, although slightly over the stretch target established in 2009-10.

### Primary fires

The number of primary fires recorded remains low, with year on year decreases recorded. This has been helped by reductions in deliberate fire activity and the downward trend in accidental dwelling fires, which appears to be continuing after the record low last year. Accidental fires in the home are projected to be on target and although the figure is slightly higher than last year, it maintains the overall five year downward trend. Delivery against planned prevention and protection activities is on track with strong performance at the end of the third quarter for the completion of Home Safety Assessments and all the planned road safety events, youth programmes and fire safety audits.

Continued arson prevention work and other external factors have ensured that the indicators relating to deliberate fires are performing strongly against target, currently positively under target by 30%. It must be noted that the Police have also reported a decrease in Anti Social Behaviour, possibly linked to the reduction of young people taking part in outdoor activities.

Although performance is projected to be slightly higher than the challenging target set for this year, there is still likely to be a 14% decrease in incident volumes of this type compared to five years ago. A dedicated team of staff work closely with local businesses, aiming to provide guidance and advice to limit the occurrence and impact of these incidents.

### **Response**

The pass rate for the 10 minute response standard stands at 82% at the end of February 2015 against the target of 80%. Average on-call availability continues to improve and it is 74% with the assistance of the new staffing system, Gartan and recruitment of on-call staff.

### **Corporate**

Sickness continues to decrease, with performance positively under target by 25%. The number of duty days lost to accidents has decreased so far this year, with none recorded during quarter 3.

### **Unitary Area Performance**

The Service monitors the performance of its frontline services at a local level, with quarterly meetings to look in detail at fires, road traffic collisions and other incidents. Over the page is a breakdown of this performance in each of the four unitary council areas which make up the Fire Authority.