



Making Cheshire Safer

Proposals for 2016-17

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Introduction

Cheshire Fire Authority is the public body responsible for ensuring local communities are protected by an effective fire and rescue service. It comprises 23 elected members from Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington councils.

Continuing to deliver that service despite major funding cuts and national moves to fundamentally change how local public services are delivered represents the most significant challenge in the Authority's history.

To ensure it can respond to these challenges effectively it has published a new medium term strategy "Planning for a safer Cheshire" setting out the principles and approach it intends to follow in the period up to 2020.

That five year plan recognises that there will have to be fundamental changes across all aspects of the organisation if it is to be able to continue protecting and improving the safety of the communities it serves.

Many of those changes are significant and complex and will take time to develop, consult on and implement. To ensure it remains on track to deliver the necessary changes, the Authority will continue to produce annual action plans like this, setting out in more detail the work scheduled for the next financial year.

Combined with the five year strategy, this approach 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

This draft plan sets out the work and proposals scheduled for the 2016-17 financial year with the key focus being completion of the Authority's emergency response programme. This involves building four new fire stations, improving response times, keeping virtually the same number of fire engines but making savings by significantly changing how many of them are staffed.

The other key issue for 2016-17 will be a comprehensive public consultation programme on a range of further options to improve the efficiency of prevention, protection, response and support services.

The priority, however, will remain on helping the Authority realise its vision of "a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies."

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.

Each fire authority is required to produce a local plan setting out how it assesses local risks to life and uses its resources, including working closely with neighbouring areas, 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 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.

More recently an additional requirement about firefighter fitness was added and the Authority has made extra resources available to ensure it fully complies.

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 . As well as the Service's own data, the document also draws upon population and demographic information taken from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the most recent 2011 Census, as well as a range of data and information obtained from partners.

National and local issues

Over the next five years, fire authorities, along with all local government bodies, will continue to face challenges around structures and funding and will have to adapt to an ongoing programme of austerity implemented by the Conservative Government after the General Election in May 2015.

A wide-ranging Comprehensive Spending Review, which will set the future funding allocations for all Government Departments and cover the years 2016-2020, was announced in July 2015 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Launching the review, the Chancellor signalled that non-protected Government Departments, would face significant reductions in their funding. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) - which oversees the work of fire and rescue services – is one of those not protected and is facing cuts of between 25% and 40%, equivalent to £20 billion.

This puts even more importance on Cheshire's ability to achieve efficiencies across the organisation. An updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) setting out the £8m million plus savings needed by 2018-19 is included in section 5.

An independent review into firefighter terms and conditions, which included issues around governance and management of resources, was completed by Adrian Thomas in February 2015. This review built upon the findings made by Sir Ken Knight and others before him.

Publication was put on hold, pending the outcomes of the General Election. However it is likely to be used by the new Government as a blueprint for wider reform of the sector and to encourage greater workforce and operational flexibility, including delivering further savings.

A number of policies being pursued by the Government, such as the push for greater devolution and the development of a Northern Powerhouse have the potential to impact the fire and rescue service.

This is demonstrated by devolution deals recently agreed, most notably in Greater Manchester where a deal will see the installation of a Mayor with powers over health, skills, transport, regeneration, policing – and the fire and rescue service.

This development has implications for fire governance in other areas that are negotiating city and county deals, such as Cornwall, the North East and West Midlands. Most significant for Cheshire will be the outcome of negotiations

around the Merseyside Combined Authority, which might raise questions about the position and status of Halton Borough Council, which sits within the Merseyside authority area while receiving police and fire and rescue services from Cheshire.

The new Government is also likely to focus its attention on encouraging much greater police and fire collaboration and improving the interoperability and governance of the emergency services.

Cheshire Fire Authority has sought to shape this agenda by actively exploring options to collaborate with Cheshire Constabulary, to generate efficiencies and work better together, without compromising key responsibilities.

The next few years will also see a wider focus on the way all public services are delivered, including those provided jointly by local and national agencies in the areas of health, wellbeing and social care.

This includes experts from different agencies sharing data, working together in joint teams to tackle vulnerable individuals and collective issues such as anti-social behaviour, the effects of poor mental health and alcohol misuse, as well as addressing barriers to closer working.

The fire and rescue service has a strong track record in prevention and demand reduction, which is why the Service has played a key role in a number of local pilots, including leading the Transforming Community Safety programme, involvement in the £5m programme to tackle Complex Dependency and building stronger links between health, public health and social care.

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

The raft of Bills announced in the 2015 Queen's Speech confirmed that economic growth remains a major priority, with a focus on large infrastructure projects and significantly increased house building. The Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and local councils, including Halton, are responsible for implementing these major projects locally.

This includes targeted development and major investment and regeneration in Crewe, Warrington and Chester/Deeside and supporting major projects such as 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.

Plans under consideration would see the sub-regional economy double in size by 2040, and deliver 131,000 new jobs and 92,000 new homes. This is more than previous unitary authority plans for over 70,000 new residential dwellings. Updated 2011 Census projections from the ONS placed Cheshire's population at mid 2014 at 1,039,171, with 218,077 (21%) aged 65 or over.

With an increase in the number of people, dwellings and development sites there might be an expectation that dwelling fires and other incidents will also increase. However, analysis has shown, 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).

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 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.

The Service was the first in the country to be given health data to help develop a picture of those most at risk which supports our targeting methodology. 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 2014-15 was 83%, 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 has previously committed to undertaking a minimum of 25,000 targeted Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) a year 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 - based on age and sex
- Lone persons risk
- Social, economic and location factors
- Operational response times.

Research shows that fire-risk increases with age and the methodology uses weightings to ensure that these factors are balanced. The Authority also receives high-risk referrals including oxygen users, domestic abuse victims and social care clients.

The Service also recognises the value of this data to its partners and that our approach of identifying people at risk of fire can also identify people at risk of other issues such as winter mortality, falls and loneliness. The Service is committed to collaborating closely with partners to deliver a better service to these people, addressing a wider array of risks than just fire.

Lower risk households are targeted through other routes, such as local and national campaigns as well as online approaches through the Authority's website. Kitchen fire safety has been identified as a key demand-reduction issue and demographic data is used to identify the types of people who experience the most cooking and kitchen fires. This data is used with life-style information to ensure the Service target the right locations (such as supermarkets). Our staff also keep track of where emergencies occur and identify hotspots to make sure that we visit all areas of demand across, Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

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, the Health and Safety Executive, 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 engages 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 at a last resort commence court action. Several prosecutions have already resulted in fines running into many thousands of pounds.

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.

To achieve this the Fire Authority has a number of collaborative arrangements with neighbouring fire and rescue services and other national agencies in place and coordinates its approach with local emergency responders and through the Cheshire Resilience Forum – the local body set up to coordinate the plans and activities of emergency responders.

These arrangements enable the Service to operate seamlessly with others, as demonstrated during major incidents, including water and motorway emergencies along the border with Merseyside and Greater Manchester and the recent major explosion, fire and rescue operation at the wood flour mill in Bosley.

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 – 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.

Primary Authority Scheme

The national Primary Authority Scheme 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 practices.

The Government's Enterprise Bill, due for publication in the autumn, will contain proposals to simplify elements of the scheme, including who can participate. A consultation period will commence in the coming months and having supported the initial pilot, the Authority will make representations to ensure the scheme continues to provide mutual benefits in streamlining processes and improving safety.

Projects and proposals

This section of the Plan highlights how the Authority is already responding to some of the challenges previously highlighted, as well as setting out some of its future proposals for protecting the communities it serves.

So there is clarity on how the organisation intends to provide an efficient and effective fire and rescue service in the future, its draft projects and proposals are set out 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 was among the first in the country to successfully go through the national Operational Assessment and Peer Review process in 2012.

The scheme involves an independent team of senior representatives from other fire and rescue services and local councils carrying out an in depth scrutiny of performance and future plans. Action plans are then produced setting out how any issues raised by the team will be addressed.

The Service will be undertaking its second Operational Assessment and Peer Review in 2016 under the programme's latest revised format. The subsequent action plan will be monitored by the Fire Authority during 2016-17 and beyond to ensure that, as with the first review, all key points have been tackled.

As a major local employer, the Authority is committed to ensuring its workforce is representative of the communities it serves and that staff are dealt with fairly throughout their career with the Service. To demonstrate this commitment the organisation supports initiatives like the 'two ticks' positive about disability programme while also subjecting itself to high profile assessment and accreditation schemes including:

- the annual Stonewall Workplace Equality Index - a key assessment of workplace culture and how positive employers are towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff. In 2015 the Service was ranked 31st overall and the top emergency service in the country as well as being the top public sector employer in the North West. In 2014 the Service's Chief Fire Officer Paul Hancock was also presented with Stonewall's prestigious title of North West Senior Champion.
- the National Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework - Cheshire become one of the first fire authorities in the country to gain the 'Excellent' accreditation under the scheme and will be going through the process again in 2016.

The Service is also committed to listening and responding to staff and has carried out regular independent surveys of staff satisfaction for nearly a decade. The results of these are always published and made available to staff and detailed action plans are developed to address specific issues and concerns. Progress is then reported and monitored by Members of the Fire Authority.

The latest staff satisfaction survey was carried out in July 2015 and saw 69% of staff taking part – the highest figure ever recorded. An overall ‘score’ for employee engagement is now the recognised way for judging how well an organisation is motivating, inspiring and engaging its staff as it allows performance to be compared with others.

The Service’s 2015 employee engagement score is 74% - slightly above the average for similar organisations. And it is the same as or above the benchmark on seven of the nine key themes explored in the survey, with the highest score being 80% on workplace culture.

When the headline results from the latest survey are compared to those from the previous one in 2011, however, there are reductions in satisfaction levels in a number of areas. The national Fire Brigades Union strikes, local changes to shift systems and the loss of posts as the organisation looks to save money are all likely to have influenced the decline, however, the issues will be explored in detail during focus group discussions with staff.

Implementing the resulting action plan will be a key priority for the organisation in 2016-17.

Value for money

Given that major annual cuts to the money the Authority receives from the Government are due to continue up to 2020, the organisation recognises that ensuring value for money is a major and continuing priority.

Nearly 75% of the Service’s current annual budget is made up of staff costs, the majority on firefighters and fire officers. This led to the production of the Authority’s current Emergency Response Programme to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective use of its fire stations, fire engines and staffing systems.

The programme runs until 2017-18 and is making a significant contribution to the savings required. However, options for further efficiencies in frontline services will still be needed. These will be the subject of a major public consultation from September 2016.

Similarly, while an original three-year programme of value for money (VFM) reviews of all support areas of the organisation brought annual savings of £1.3 million, more efficiencies are still required.

During 2015-16 the first phase of the new organisational review programme was launched with an initial target of delivering a further £1 million in savings by the start of the 2017-18 financial year.

While initial work has seen much of those savings identified already, there is now pressure to make even greater efficiencies. This follows the recent Government statements highlighted in the previous section about major additional public sector funding reductions over the next few years.

Ways of reorganising existing internal support arrangements are being explored but the extent of the savings required is such that more significant and wholesale change will be required.

The main element of this will be a blue light collaboration project with the two other emergency services responsible for protecting the communities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington. In particular, during 2016-17 the Authority will be developing plans with Cheshire Constabulary which could see many of each organisation's support services delivered by a single team in the future.

A detailed work programme has been developed with the ultimate aspiration of the Service moving from its current Headquarters to share accommodation and facilities at the Constabulary's nearby Headquarters in Winsford.

The move is designed to make significant savings by using common systems and processes and combining the majority of support service areas. Bids will be made to secure specific Government funds to cover the costs of developing and implementing the proposals.

Detailed agreements will be drawn up to ensure there is clarity about the level of support the Authority can expect under any new arrangements and to provide a consistent, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and selection.

The Authority is clear, however, that there is no intention of a complete merger. Each organisation will keep its own identity, frontline emergency response services and governance arrangements.

Workforce development

While the organisation will be going through significant change over the next few years and reducing posts in a number of areas, the Authority recognises the need to invest in its current and future workforce.

To support national changes in firefighter fitness tests the Service recently established a new post of fitness advisor as well as investing in the provision of key training equipment at all fire stations. While the role is mainly there to support firefighters through the assessment test, a range of advice and support is provided to any employee.

The Service also works pro-actively with staff and its Occupational Health contractors on absence management and this has been a key factor in staff sickness levels reaching record lows. In the last financial year there was an average of just 4.18 days or shifts lost per person compared to 5.01 the previous year.

In addition, only 66 working days were lost due to injuries suffered at work in 2014-15 – nearly half the previous year's figure of 128 days.

As part of its workforce planning, the Service recognises the potential for future skills gaps in its operational staff and is therefore planning to launch a new two year apprentice firefighter scheme in 2016-17.

The project intends to recruit eight apprentices in the first year and if the scheme proves successful it would then run every two years.

The environment

The Authority has an existing carbon reduction target of 40% by 2020 (compared to its 2009-10 consumption). This is equivalent to a cut of 1,189 tonnes.

Significant progress has been made over the last few years and to date the Authority has achieved a carbon reduction of 1071 tonnes. While this means that only 118 tonnes now need to be saved to meet the 2020 target, the completion of the four new fire stations over the same period creates a significant challenge, even though energy efficiency has been a feature of their design.

A major HQ boiler replacement programme has proved particularly successful. Since the biomass boiler was installed, it has cost less to heat the premises than has been received in payments from the Government's Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) payment scheme.

A key environmental initiative continuing into 2016-17 will see the completion of a commitment by the Authority to pilot the use of electric vehicles in its fleet.

A successful application to the Office of Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) has resulted in a 75% grant towards the cost of leasing 12 electric vehicles for two years and installing 10 dual charging posts at key fire stations. Total cost of the project is expected to be around £110,000, with the Authority only having to contribute approximately £27,000.

The success of the pilot will be evaluated, however, four charging posts for electric vehicles have already been installed at the Service's Headquarters and there will be charging available at each of the new fire stations currently being built.

In addition, the new premises will already be supporting the Service's environment and sustainability commitments by including features such as solar photovoltaic panels and ground source heat pumps while also ensuring the impact on local biodiversity is minimised.

Planning for the future

A summary of some of the headline challenges facing the Authority at local, regional and national level was included in the previous section. Recognising the significance and scale of those issues, the Authority agreed to develop a longer term strategy setting out how it aimed to protect the communities it serves.

Following community and partner consultation during 2014-15, the new five year strategy "Planning for a Safer Cheshire 2015-2020", was formally approved in June 2015.

Coinciding with the life of the current five year fixed term Parliament, the strategy places an emphasis on maintaining the Authority's Cheshire footprint for the delivery of all of its services which work directly with local communities.

The strategy says that the approaches it proposes should ensure local communities will continue to be protected by a first class fire and rescue service. It warns, however, that if the Authority feels further cuts would produce an unacceptable increase in risk levels, then it will consider asking residents to vote for an additional Council Tax increase.

Protecting local communities

The Authority has always recognised that the best way of improving the safety of the residents it serves is through a clear commitment to investment in prevention.

That strong focus on prevention has helped to deliver major improvements in fire safety in recent years across the Authority's area.

Over the last five years (2010-11 to 2014-15), the total number of incidents attended by the Service has reduced by 29% down to 7,281. Other key improvements over the same period include:

- The number of injuries in Accidental Dwelling Fires down 13% to just 28
- Accidental Dwelling Fires reduced by 15% to 401
- The number of fires in businesses and commercial premises down by 15% to 191
- Deliberate Fires reduced by 57% to 1,043.

There were five fire deaths in 2014-15, with three as a result of accidental dwelling fires. The numbers have been consistently low in recent years, with most occurring among older people who are most at risk.

That's why the Service's Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme - which gives householders vital safety advice and free smoke alarms if needed – has been adapted in recent years. It is now only provided to those who have been identified as most at risk rather than being an universal offer.

Recent national, regional and local discussions with partners in the National Health Service have highlighted the potential for the Service to expand the scope of its programme.

The Service will continue to focus on those most at risk from fire but will work with health partners to identify those households which also face additional health risks. It is also confident that it can substantially increase its annual target of 25,000 by making use of the extra capacity from recent changes to duty systems.

As a result, in 2016-17 the Service intends to relaunch its HSA programme as 'Safe and Well' visits, with its firefighters and community safety advocates carrying out additional basic health checks. These are likely to focus on preventing falls, providing cancer screening information and drug, alcohol and smoking cessation support and referral. In addition, the Service will also support those who have recently been discharged from hospital.

It is hoped that the move to increase the scope of the Service's 25,000 home visits a year to around 40,000 will act as an early warning system for those whose health is starting to deteriorate. In addition, it is expected that future Safe and Well visits will be able to help in reducing the number of excess winter deaths that occur among the over 65s, mainly to:

- Influenza and chest conditions
- Cold housing
- Loneliness and isolation.

Campaigns

The continuing development of the Service's HSA programme has been a major factor in the improvements to the safety of local residents in recent years. It is clear, however, that other approaches are also necessary if the Authority is to achieve its vision of "a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies."

In 2015 the Authority saw the culmination of a successful three-year campaign when Parliament approved new legislation 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 a high profile campaign by the Service and a range of key partners.

The Service is also supporting another long-term national campaign to make the fitting of sprinkler systems a requirement in all new domestic buildings in England. In Cheshire the Authority continues to make progress with an innovative scheme which has earmarked £160,000 to work with local housing associations on retro-fitting sprinkler systems into local high-rise blocks of flats.

While legislation can make a big difference by requiring people and businesses to take more safety precautions, changing people's behaviour and attitude towards fire risk takes even more time and commitment.

That's why the Authority remains committed to a comprehensive programme of youth engagement which covers courses for pupils in Years 5 and 6 right through to Prince's Trust programmes for older teenagers and young adults. It has been working with the Prince's Trust for over 20 years, with its 12-week programmes helping to turn round the lives of thousands of local young people.

The Service's community fire stations also have strong links with young people in their area, with virtually every one having an active Fire Cadet unit. Some of the cadets are scheduled to go on a life-changing trip to Nepal in November 2015 to build a school in the Himalayas having raised over £65,000.

The Authority's biggest ever statement on the importance of prevention, however, is its commitment to build Cheshire's first dedicated safety centre. Scheduled to open towards the end of 2016-17, the innovative circular building is integrated with the new fire station planned for Lymm, near the M6 / M56 interchange.

It will feature scenarios designed to raise awareness of a wide range of risks and although young people are the main audience, priority will also be given to older people and those who provide care.

A number of major private sector companies have already committed to support the creation of some of the scenarios, while discussions with public sector partners will continue in 2016-17. The centre will be run by a charity and other work will be carried out during the financial year to finalise the management, partnership and funding arrangements.

Partnerships

The Authority recognises that some of the underlying issues which can increase the risk of fires and other emergencies - such as drugs, mental health and alcohol misuse - are in areas outside its immediate influence. That's why it works hard to ensure it is recognised as a key local partner on projects and programmes designed to co-ordinate and streamline the work of agencies.

After operating as the lead agency for the Government-funded sub-regional Transforming Community Safety programme, the Authority is also supporting a £5 million Government-funded programme to integrate front line services across the Sub Region of Cheshire and Warrington.

The Complex Dependencies programme aims to tackle the causes of crisis for children, families and individuals across a range of related complex issues. The Service has provided dedicated staff to work with the programme which aims to improve the lives of an estimated 10,000 individuals across the Sub Region as well as delivering nearly £10 million in savings through improved case management, commissioning and service integration.

False alarms

While automatic fire alarm systems (AFAs) can be important in alerting staff and visitors to businesses about potential fires and the need to evacuate, faults can result in fire crews being turned out unnecessarily. Not only does this waste time, it can lead to delays in firefighters being able to respond to genuine emergencies elsewhere.

In recent years, changes by the Service to the way it handles and responds to these calls have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of false alarms attended. In 2014-15 crews attended 1,251 AFAs – nearly half the number they did five years ago.

The Service has always piloted any changes before formally adopting them to ensure there isn't any increased risk. It intends to adopt the same approach when it proposes any further changes to its policies in 2016-17.

Enforcing fire regulations

As highlighted previously, the Authority has a duty to enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 but always tries to work with businesses to help them fulfil their responsibilities in the first instance. Its dedicated business safety team goes out to meet and discuss issues with local firms as well as staging specific events to highlight key issues or themes such as arson.

If while the Service prefers to work with firms, it will take court action as a last resort. To date the Service has always been successful in its prosecutions, leading to fines and costs totalling many thousands of pounds.

During 2016-17 the Service will continue to ensure any prosecutions are highlighted and publicised as a deterrent to encourage firms to work with the Service and avoid court costs and damage to their reputation.

During 2016-17 the Service will continue to support the primary authority scheme following completion of the consultation exercise highlighted in the previous section. Any approaches which offer improvements in streamlining processes and improving safety will be presented to the Fire Authority for approval. The Service is hoping to develop expertise and relationships with a specific sector such as brewing.

Responding to emergencies

The 2016-17 financial year will be a critical one for the Authority's initial Emergency Response Programme, with work on building all four new fire stations due for completion.

The first station in the £16 million scheme was officially opened in August 2015 after a nine month build programme to completely renovate a former council depot in Alsager. The on-call station has a team of new recruits who have completed their initial training and will become fully operational shortly.

The other three fire stations are at Penketh, Powey Lane near the M56 and at Lymm where the building will also incorporate "Safety Central" - a dedicated safety centre to educate those most at risk. Just under £6.5 million of the costs are being met by funds secured from the Government with the remainder from the Authority's reserves to avoid the cost of taking out loans.

In addition to the building work, the programme involves a range of other activity in 2016-17 to ensure the new sites are ready to go live. This includes recruiting and training new staff, redeploying some existing staff and implementing new duty systems as well as buying and installing new kit and relocating existing vehicles.

The final phase of the programme in 2017-2018 will see new crewing arrangements introduced for the second fire engines at Crewe and Ellesmere Port, while the on-call crew at Penketh is due to become fully operational.

Throughout the four year Emergency Response Programme the Service has continued to review risk and activity levels, particularly in those station areas where the Programme proposed removing or changing how the second fire engine is crewed.

The latest review has confirmed that the plans remain fit for purpose, with continuing reductions in local risk and activity levels.

Considerable work is already underway, however, on a second, comprehensive Emergency Response Review to identify further options to

improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation's frontline staff and vehicles.

A dedicated project team has been established with the objective of developing a range of options to remodel the Service's frontline services, to assure firefighter and public safety, exceed the agreed performance standards, and assist the Authority in achieving a balanced budget between 2017 and 2020.

The comprehensive review will aim to ensure all options are able to guarantee a professional response to day to day activity with the resilience to cope with major incidents such as the Bosley wood mill explosion.

Other key areas of the review include options to improve the recruitment and retention of on-call staff – those who live or work close to their local fire station and respond by pager when there is an emergency.

The Fire Authority will then launch a detailed consultation on all the agreed proposals in September 2016 to ensure residents, staff and partners can have their say. Final decisions will be made in February 2017 when the Fire Authority sets the budget for the 2017-18 financial year. The Service will also explore a pilot scheme that will support the North West Amulance Service by mobilising our resources as well as theirs to cardiac incidents.

Crewing and shift systems

Following nearly two years of detailed discussion with trade union representatives, local agreements have now been confirmed for both the wholetime and day crewing duty systems.

From January 2016, wholetime crews will start working two 12 hour days and two 12 hour nights followed by four days off, instead of the existing two 9 hour days, two 15 hour nights and four days off.

Changes to the day crewing system – where firefighters live in Authority - owned houses next to the stations, providing cover as normal during the day but responding from home at night - were brought in from April 2015.

The objective behind the changes was 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.

The Service is now going to do a comprehensive review of its Nucleus Duty System to ensure that it supports the other shift systems, is fit for purpose and provides value for money.

During 2016-17 the Service will also be aiming to implement changes designed to improve the efficiency of local station management and officers' out of hours arrangements in preparation for the new stations all going live.

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.

During 2016-17 the Service will be replacing two of its three aerial appliances which allow crews to work at height. It will also moving some of its more specialist units to the new Powey Lane fire station near the M56. This will involve transferring the Foam and Environmental Protection Units from Ellesmere Port, the Incident Response Unit from Chester and potentially the High Volume Pump from Congleton.

In addition, the Service will be monitoring the effectiveness of a pilot project which will see some existing petrol and diesel vehicles used by station staff and advocates replaced by electric cars. If successful, the use of electric vehicles could then be rolled out on a more permanent basis to parts of the support fleet.

Emergency Services Network

The Service continues to support the multi billion pound Emergency Services Network (ESN) project to implement a new communications network for all three emergency services.

Staff will be working to ensure the Service remains on track to meet the expectations required of it for the project which aims to improve interoperability between blue light service with a new service which is smarter, faster and cheaper than existing arrangements.

North West Fire Control

The joint North West Fire Control in Warrington went live in May 2014, 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.

Since then the Service has continued to work closely with the centre and colleagues in the other fire and rescue services to ensure the system is working effectively and best use is being made of the new technology.

The new Centre is managed by a company wholly owned by the four fire authorities, with a board of directors comprising two Members from each. It has allowed the Authority to make annual savings of around £300,000, with each of the four organisations contributing to the running costs in proportion to the volume of incidents in their area.

Work continues to identify further opportunities for collaboration between the four services and to explore the potential for the Centre taking on additional services.

Projects and proposals 2016-17 – summary

- Complete preparations for phase one of the blue light collaboration programme with Cheshire Constabulary and develop an implementation plan for phase two
- Launch value for money reviews on all support areas of the Service not covered under the blue light collaboration programme
- Develop action plans to respond to the independent Operational Assessment and Peer Review of the organisation and the reaccreditation under the national Fire and Rescue Service Equality framework
- Implement a staff engagement plan in response to the Service's fourth staff attitude survey
- Launch a new two-year firefighter apprentice scheme

Protecting local communities

- Launch Safety Central – the Authority's new dedicated safety centre at Lymm
- Transform the Service's Home Safety Assessment programme into Safe and Well visits and increase the annual target to 40,000
- Support the Government's revised 'Primary Authority Scheme' aimed at streamlining fire safety processes for businesses

Responding to emergencies

- The new on-call fire station at Alsager becomes fully operational
- Go live for the new fire station at Penketh, using the second fire engine from Warrington and removing the second fire engine from Widnes
- Launch of the 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
- Go live for the new fire station at Lymm, with Technical Rescue Unit transferred there from Knutsford as well as the Incident Response Unit from Winsford
- Transfer the hydraulic platform from Stockton Heath to Warrington
- Introduce on-call model for Stockton Heath and Knutsford
- Review the Service's Nucleus Duty System
- Launch a pilot project with NWS to mobilise our resources to cardiac incidents in certain areas

- Launch a comprehensive public consultation on options identified during the Authority's second major review of emergency response services

Consultation and engagement

This draft plan sets out the final phases of the Authority's emergency response programme which was developed following its most comprehensive consultation to date.

While the work to build, fit out, equip and staff the four new fire stations will clearly occupy most of 2016-17, the plan also includes other proposals on how the Authority aims to make savings and manage its budget in the future.

While the proposals in this plan are not as far reaching as recent years, the Authority remains committed to ensuring residents, businesses, partners and staff have the opportunity to give their views.

A formal 12 week consultation and engagement programme will run from September 28 to December 28, 2015. A full feedback report will be considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting on February 10, 2016 when Members also set the organisation's budget for 2016-17.

In addition to face to face briefings and presentations for key stakeholders, there will be a number of community consultation roadshows for residents and senior management roadshows for staff. Extensive use will also be made of 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

tel. 01606 868407

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 covers a five year period. The plan is subject to regular review to reflect issues at a local, regional and national level and makes informed assumptions about future pay, inflation, Government grants and Council Tax levels.

By April 2015 the Authority had achieved savings of £7.5 million over the previous five financial years to ensure it could balance its budget following changes and cuts in Government funding.

Most initial savings came from reductions in corporate budgets and support service departments, however, efficiencies from the Authority's Emergency Response Programme are starting to make significant contributions. In addition, the value for money review of support areas produced ongoing revenue savings of £1.3 million.

This latest Plan has highlighted current Government indications about reducing central funding for fire and rescue authorities by 40% between 2016-17 and 2019-20. The plan also includes the following assumptions:

- a 1.99% annual increase in the Authority's Council Tax precept
- a 1.5% increase in staff pay for 2016-17 followed by annual rises of 1%
- a 2% allowance each year for inflation.

As a result it means that the Authority will need to make over £8 million in revenue savings by 2019-20.

The Authority also has a capital spending programme to plan for the purchase of buildings, fire engines and other specialist equipment. With the Government no longer providing annual capital grants, the Authority now pays for this spending by using its own reserves and bidding for one-off pots of central funding.

This has meant that the near £16 million capital cost of building the four new fire stations and integrated safety centre can be paid for without having to borrow money and pay back interest in the future from the Authority's day to day revenue budget.