



Making Cheshire safer

Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2008/09 – consultation summary

Introduction

Assessing the practical risks facing the communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington and then ensuring a fast, effective and flexible response is the Fire Authority's fundamental priority.

But if we are to continue to make our area a safer place for everyone who lives, works or visits here, then it is vital that we respond to the wider opportunities and threats which will influence our ability to deliver the emergency services our communities deserve.

The next couple of years will see the massive changes to the way in which public services are delivered across our area. Not only will several councils be abolished and replaced by new ones with wider powers, but the effectiveness of all public services will be judged through a new system of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Helping our partners achieve these joint performance targets is a key priority for us and we will be ensuring our community safety, protection and emergency response services are delivered to best support the LAAs across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

Also important for us over the next year will be a programme of work in response to several major emergencies and tragedies which occurred elsewhere in the country in 2007. The increasing effects of climate change saw unprecedented flooding in Yorkshire, Humberside and Gloucestershire, followed by tidal surge alerts on the South East coast.

Our search and rescue specialists were involved in the height of the floods and then had the extremely demanding task of helping out in the aftermath of Warwickshire warehouse tragedy. Clearly we will be making sure we learn any of the lessons which emerge to improve the safety of both our staff and our communities in the future.

Finally, we are pleased at the progress we are making on equality and diversity. There is still lots to do, however, and we will be setting ourselves challenging targets so we remain on track to deliver clear improvements to the safety of ALL our local communities.

Steve McGuirk,
Chief Fire Officer

Tony Hooton,
Chairman, Cheshire
Fire Authority

Cheshire's approach to risk

The Service uses increasingly sophisticated tools and techniques to help in local risk analysis. In addition, however, there are an increasing number of wider local, regional and national issues which influence the Authority's future plans and proposals.

Local Government Reorganisation within Cheshire is the first and most obvious issue as this will not only affect the future structure of the Authority but also our planning and delivery of services at a local level.

In addition, we will be making sure we play our full part in the development of new Local Area Agreements which will cover all of the Fire Authority's area. These are intended to simplify some central funding, join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances.

Other key influences affecting the Authority's future planning include:

- A whole range of fire-specific national policies and guidance covering future inspection arrangements, Government expectations on all fire authorities for 2008-2010, Equality and Diversity, a national Centre of Excellence and the development of the online Fire Gateway
- The continued roll-out of the Regional Control Centre project
- New legislation on the enforcement of fire safety for specific national firms
- Legal requirements to consult local communities and ensure effective management and internal political governance
- The implications of the Government's 2007 comprehensive spending review

Like all public agencies, there are also a host of other national and even global issues which will impact on how we deliver our services, such as climate change – not only our response to increased flooding risks but also the need for the authority to limit the impact it has on the local environment. Key influences and issues are highlighted in a more comprehensive Political, Economic, International, Social and Technological analysis (PEIST) available on our website - www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Corporate vision, mission, aims and objectives

Our **vision** is where we want to be; our mission is about what we want to do; our objectives are the actions we will take and our values are about how we do it.

Our **vision** is a Cheshire where there are no preventable deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies. Our **mission** is to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests.

Our three key **aims** are to:

- Respond effectively to emergency incidents
- Improve community safety by risk reduction
- Deliver efficient and effective services under-pinned by robust government framework.

Under these key aims we have more specific objectives for the three functions of Emergency Response (ER), Community Risk Reduction (CRR) and Corporate Services (CS). This year we have proposed minor changes in the wording of some of these in response to previous consultation requests for greater clarity and to reflect national changes in legislation.

Our approach to risk

Our approach to risk management covers all the steps involved in identifying, assessing and judging risks, taking actions to reduce or anticipate them and monitoring and reviewing progress. This is essential in ensuring the Authority is fully informed when making decisions on how services need to be adapted in response to local risk changes.

In previous IRMPs we outlined how we had developed our own 'Cheshire Standard' for responding to emergencies. This divides our incident types into eight specific categories such as house fires, business fires, road traffic collisions, etc. Attendance standards are then allocated in each category for every station. Our current standards include a response within 6 to 10 minutes for high risks and of 16 to 20 minutes for low risks. Our target is to achieve our standards on 90% of all occasions – a target we are currently exceeding consistently.

Our response to risk

The last few years have seen major reductions in the numbers of accidental fires

and injuries across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. At the same time we have also visited around one fifth of all households through our Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme, offering safety advice and fitting free smoke alarms. In addition, we have focused on modernising and improving the efficiency of our services.

The Authority's current Corporate Plan / IRMP for 2007/08 contains a number of medium to long-term projects such as the review of crewing arrangements at Birchwood and Wilmslow, new combined appliances, and the new build programme for Chester, Runcorn, HQ. These will continue to occupy a considerable amount of the Service's resources in 2008/09, however, recent key achievements and key proposals for 2008/09 are set out below for each function.

Emergency Response

Objectives: we are proposing to amend both of our objectives (*existing ones in brackets*):

ER1 - Identify the risks facing local communities and ensure plans and resources are in place to respond (*Deploy emergency teams according to risk*)

ER2 - Provide a flexible, efficient and resilient response to emergency incidents (*Deal effectively with emergency incidents*)

Key Achievements in 2007/08

New duty system – we agreed a new duty system with our day crewed staff to provide a more modern, consistent and comprehensive approach to the cover they provide.

Major incidents – we successfully dealt with what was a major incident in Crewe without any recorded injuries and supported colleagues elsewhere during major flooding and in the recovery afterwards.

New technology and appliances - we continued to pilot our new midi appliances known as Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs) and provided one as an extra appliance at Nantwich Community Fire Station.

Better facilities – we launched a major improvement programme which has seen extensive improvements at Nantwich, Ellesmere Port and Widnes Community Fire Stations to provide modern facilities as a base for our staff and equipment and to increase engagement with the local community.

Key Proposals for 2008/09

Cheshire Standards - Our latest analysis shows that none of the local risk levels have increased over the last 12 months. However in 2008/09, five years after launching our local standards, we intend to carry out a fundamental review to ensure we are continuing to use and target our resources to best protect our local communities.

New Training Centre - As part of our commitment to training and developing our staff, we intend to develop training facilities at Frodsham fire station to test and develop the incident command and control skills of our staff.

Improved Vehicle Replacement

Programme - We intend our future vehicle replacement programme to be based on local risk analysis so that we have a wide range of firefighting vehicles to meet local needs. This will include midi fire appliances (TRVs) and appliances which combine a standard fire appliance and hydraulic platform.

Community Risk Reduction

Objectives: we are proposing to amend one of our objectives (in bold, existing in brackets):

CRR1 – Prevent dangerous anti-social and careless behaviour

CRR2 - **Protect life, property and other interests through detailed risk**

analysis and assessment. (*Protect life, property and other interests*)

Key Achievements in 2007/08

Home Safety Assessments (HSAs) – we carried out over 45,000 HSAs in 2007, giving priority to those residents most at risk. We also set up agreements on data information with public and private sector partners to improve how we prioritise and target our HSAs.

Cadets – we supported an international aid project through our Fire Service cadets who built a second school in Ghana.

Unwanted fire signals – we carried out a major consultation campaign with local businesses and launched a new policy to reduce the number of false alarms we attend and thereby improve our response to genuine emergencies.

Fire and Flu – we extended our joint campaign which sees our mobile stations used to offer free flub jabs and fire safety advice to residents over 65. Together with our NHS partners, we also received a top award for the campaign at the North West Public Health Awards.

Youth programmes – we led the joint Respect project which has seen young people from across the area graduating after completing a demanding 12 week programme.

Community Safety Advocates – we recruited a further 7 advocates to increase our community work, including targeting vulnerable individuals in partnership with Social Services.

New business safety legislation – we rolled out a major campaign to raise awareness and implement a new fire safety order, including preparing to carry out new enforcement duties when required.

Key Proposals for 2008/09

Road Traffic Collisions - Our firefighters are now attending many more road traffic collisions and accidents than fires and we are often the first emergency service to arrive at the scene. We are therefore looking at increasing the trauma skills and training of our staff to help them deal with road traffic incidents. We are also continually working with our partners to meet targets and raise awareness of road safety to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads.

Developing Advocates and Volunteers -

The Service has a dedicated team of advocates and volunteers who play a vital role in terms of our community safety work. We aim to increase the number of volunteers to 500 over the next two years and to 1,000 by 2013.

Fire Cadet Units - There are successful fire cadet units at many of our stations but for 2008/09, we are keen to develop a more risk-based approach which will include looking at options to run schemes at specific locations such as schools and on estates. We will also look to set up units to engage and involve young people who are hard to reach or from minority groups.

Access to Critical Information - To help us tackle business fires and improve firefighter safety, we will improve how we record and access information on the design and structure of commercial buildings.

Corporate Services

Objectives: we are proposing to amend one of our objectives (in bold, existing in brackets):

CS1 - Develop a work-force competent and able to realise our vision

CS2 - **Use inclusive consultation and communication to involve local**

communities in developing services which meet their needs (*Ensure services meet the needs of all local communities through inclusive consultation and communication*)

CS3 - Ensure value for money and maximise investment in front line services.

Key Achievements in 2007/08

Independent inspection – achieved a “good, performing well” rating in the national Comprehensive Performance Assessment – putting Cheshire in the top six of all 46 fire and rescue authorities in the country. We also achieved the top 4 star rating for frontline services.

Funding – limited the increase in the amount of Council Tax needed by the Fire Authority to 1.5% - the lowest of any fire authority in the country.

Equality and diversity – we completed schemes and action plans covering Age and Gender and submitted our self assessment for Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. We held positive action events and promotional campaigns to increase interest among women and black minority ethnic communities in joining the Service. 10% of those who joined as firefighters were from under-represented groups.

Online access – we launched text messaging services to help deaf and speech-impaired residents request HSAs and to alert people and businesses to major incidents and key safety campaigns.

Extra training for Fire Authority Members – we launched a new training programme for Fire Authority Members and carried out a second series of in-house seminars on key corporate topics.

Payroll and pensions – we successfully let two new contracts to deliver our payroll and firefighter pensions services.

Key proposals for 2008/09

Local Government Reorganisation in Cheshire - This will have a number of implications for the Authority and it intends to devote resources to ensure the Service’s role and responsibilities are fully considered in future arrangements and local area agreements.

Equality & Diversity - As part of our commitment we are keen to ensure that our workforce represents the community in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington and intends to encourage under represented groups to apply for operational posts within the Service through targeted recruitment events. We will also set out a timetable and action plan to

achieve Level 4 of the Local Government Equality Standard by the end of 2009.

Empowering our Communities

Engaging with the community is a key objective for the government and the Service and in 2008/09, we will publish a new Community Empowerment Strategy to increase the opportunities for residents and businesses to get involved in developing our services. We will also develop action plans to help us target and engage with gypsy and travellers, migrant workers and Muslim communities as part of our commitment to equality and diversity.

The Environment & Corporate Social Responsibility - The Service takes its environmental responsibilities seriously and a key priority is to introduce an Environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility Policy which will include stringent targets regarding prevention in terms of consumption, waste, sustainability, biodiversity and pollution.

High Potential Development Scheme - The Service is committed to providing long term career prospects and development opportunities and is keen to promote that there are operational and non-operational roles within the Service. Therefore the Service is considering introducing a High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) for which would involve positively targeting suitable individuals with the physical attributes required to be a firefighter, along with the academic qualities, ability and potential to move quickly through the Service to middle management roles and beyond.

Financial planning

As a result of some financially prudent decisions in recent years, the Authority is now in a strong financial position and the Council Tax precept it set in 2007/08 was one of the lowest in the country. The precept increase for 2008-09 is expected to be no more than 3%.

New projects and developments in recent years have been funded entirely by efficiencies or savings elsewhere in the Service. The Authority will strive to continue this approach but recognises that in future years some proposals to improve the safety of both our staff and local communities may require new funding.

At a local level the Authority will be looking to ensure greater community involvement in the community safety budgets it provides to its eight area-based performance delivery groups (PDGs).