

February 2008



Corporate Plan & Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP 5) & Budget Consultation Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1) Introduction	3
2) Executive Summary	4
3) Methodology	5
4) Key Findings – All Consultees	6-28
5) Formal response from the Unions	29-37
6) Media Coverage	38-44

Appendices

- A – Copy of the questionnaire for members of Response, CHAWREC and employees of the Service.
- B – Copy of the questionnaire for members of the Business Community
- C – Copy of the Summary Document
- D – Consultation Timetable and details regarding consultees
- E – Demographic information – Response Members

1) Introduction

This report contains the results of an extensive consultation exercise regarding the Service's draft Corporate Plan & Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2008/09 (IRMP 5) which was carried out from 14th December 2007 until the beginning of February 2008.

The following groups were fully consulted:-

- Members of Response, Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service's dedicated residents' consultation panel
- The Cheshire Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council's residents' panel
- Residents via the media and the Service's website.
- Key stakeholders of the Service
- Businesses via the Business Liaison Panel
- Employees of the Service and
- The Representative Bodies – Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association and UNISON.

This extensive research has been carried out to find out how all the above consultees feel about the draft proposals within the 2008/09 Plan and management of the Authority's budget.

Members of Response, Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service's dedicated resident's consultation panel and Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Racial Equality Council's BME consultation panel were fully consulted via a postal questionnaire and were also given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online although only a small proportion of members chose this method on this occasion.

At the time of writing this report, 210 responses had been received from members of Response (a 47% response rate) and 41 responses were received from members of CHAWREC's panel (a 41% response rate). The full results for both panels are included under the relevant section of this report and all comments received are included under the corresponding section.

All the results received were fully analysed and this report was written by the Service's Consultation and Communication Officer in February 2008.

2) Executive Summary

In total, 296 questionnaires were received from the four groups of consultees – 210 from members of Response, 41 from members of CHAWREC's BME panel, 13 from members of the business community and 32 from members of staff from the Service.

Below is a summary of the headline results for our proposals – the full results are included under section 4 of this report.

Objectives – there is overwhelming support for the updating of the Service's objectives from all four groups of consultees.

Local Government Re-Organisation - there is strong support for the proposal to devote resources to ensure the Service's role and responsibilities are fully considered as the new Cheshire authorities are set up.

Road Traffic Collisions - strong internal and external support for the Service to develop the trauma skills of frontline staff.

Using Positive Action event for recruitment - there remains some confusion and concern among both internal and external consultees over the use of positive action events to encourage more job applications from under-represented groups

High Potential Development Scheme - strong support for the proposal from external consultees with the added comment that academic qualifications should not be more important than experience. The majority of staff responses have been against, with concerns expressed that it could discriminate against serving firefighters

Advocates and Volunteers – external consultees backed proposals to develop the skills of the Service's advocates in specialist areas and increase volunteer numbers. Some concerns by staff over relevant skills and experience of future advocates and volunteers.

Fire Cadet Units – public support for proposals to develop cadet units at specific locations such as schools and on estates with some concerns from internal consultees over moving away from fire stations and payments for cadet leaders.

Environment - there is strong support for the Service to invest in reducing its environmental impact, even if this means spending more money initially.

Budget - strong support for limiting the increase in the Authority's Council Tax precept to under 3% and to continue investing as many resources in into preventing fires as in providing emergency response

3) Methodology

A detailed postal questionnaire including 18 questions in total (as shown in Appendix A) was carried out using the Service's Consultation Panel – Response, which included ??? residents from across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington at the time of conducting this survey.

100 members of CHAWREC's residents' panel were also sent the same questionnaire.

Each member of both panels received a letter explaining the purpose of the survey, a copy of the summary (as shown in Appendix B) a copy of the questionnaire (as shown in Appendix A) and a Freepost reply envelope.

Members of staff from the Service were also given the opportunity to read the draft Plan and complete the same questionnaire via the Service's website. Members of the Service's Fire Liaison Panel were also consulted via a postal and online questionnaire (as shown in Appendix C).

4) Key Findings

Proposed Changes - Aims & Objectives

Q1) For Emergency Response, we propose to change two of our current objectives to the proposed objectives shown below.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

	Current Objectives	Proposed Objectives
ER1	Deploy emergency teams according to risk	Identify the risks facing local communities and ensure plans and resources are in place to respond
ER2	Deal effectively with emergency incidents	Provide a flexible, efficient and resilient response to emergency incidents

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	88	6	6
CHAWREC Panel	93	2	5
Businesses	62	23	15
Service Staff	57	20	23

Q2) For Community Risk Reduction, we propose to change one of our current objectives as shown in the table below.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

	Current Objectives	Proposed Objectives
CRR2	Protect life, property and other interests	Protect life, property and other interests through detailed risk analysis and assessment

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	81	11	8
CHAWREC Panel	87	4	9
Businesses	92	0	8
Service Staff	68	13	19

Q3) For Corporate Services, we propose to change one of our current objectives as shown in the table below.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	84	6	10
CHAWREC Panel	89	0	11
Businesses	92	8	0
Service Staff	60	20	20

Comments - Changes to Objectives

“It is hard to comment on changes on objectives because I’m not entirely clear of the implications of the objective changes and what noticeable effect they will have.”

“Due to the high number of firefighters due to/currently leaving there will be an issue with experienced staff to carry out a flexible, efficient and resilient response to incidents.”

“Why the need to change wording ER1 and ER2 – both versions mean the same!”

“ER1 should be “identify risks facing local communities and ensure appropriate plans and resources are in place to respond. & CRR2 should be “Seek to protect life, property and other interests through detailed risk analysis and assessment.”

“CRR 2 needs to be broken down to 2 objectives.”

“I would suggest that the differences in the wording at least are so subtle, so as to not cause confusion.”

“These questions are difficult to answer as I believe the wording although similar to the original aims might well have a hidden agenda as they are very open questions.”

”Agree to ERR1 but not ERR2 as the current objective is the same as proposed.”

“No problem with the risk analysis and assessment but the proposed objective for CRR2 implies abdication of responsibility to protect life.”

“These questions seem simply to be only a slight rewording with little significant change in meaning.”

Local Government Re-Organisation in Cheshire

- Q4) The Authority intends to devote resources to ensure the Service's role and responsibilities are fully considered as the new local government arrangements in Cheshire are set up.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	90	3	7
CHAWREC Panel	80	4	16
Businesses	84	8	8
Service Staff	71	16	13

Comments – Local Government Re-organisation in Cheshire

"To answer this question, I would need to know what resources were to be devoted."

"I don't know whether the local government re-Organisation in Cheshire is now going ahead."

Equality & Diversity

- Q5) The Service is keen to ensure that its workforce is representative of the community in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington and intends to encourage under represented group to apply for operational posts within the Service through targeted recruitment events.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	66	16	18
CHAWREC Panel	89	4	7
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question.		
Service Staff	52	35	13

Comments - Equality & Diversity

"The reason I disagree is because we need to be careful that this is not seen as positive discrimination."

"Targeted events for recruitment need to be consulted over to find best venues, areas, groups etc not just County Hall or unsuitable events/venues."

"The word intends portrays to the reader that it will not necessarily take place, therefore not positive enough. Either will or similar word should be used in this instance."

Question 5 I feel is positive discrimination against the ordinary public who apply for an operational post.”

“Regarding equality and diversity, I feel all communities should be entitled to the best professional service available irrespective of ethnic or gender makeup.”

“A firefighter should be employed on his or her ability and not just to under-represented groups.”

“It should not be to the detriment of efficiency in the force.”

“We need the best people, not some minority must have rep.”

“Q5 causes me some concern as I sense a hint of positive discrimination here. Visual attributes do not always show the inner person and I worry that if this idea goes ahead, a group of folks who do not fit into either category may not have a chance.”

“Question 5 I feel is positive discrimination against the ordinary public who apply for an operational post will be looked over in favour of under represented groups so not always employing the most suitable candidate for the job.”

“Through the Service’s involvement with all communities, I believe barriers are breaking down. By having active recruiting days in the towns (autumn 07), it shows that the Service is open to all.”

“With regard to equality and diversity, it should not be necessary to have targeted recruitment events. Interested individuals should be free to apply for relevant posts irrespective of race, colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation etc.”

Empowering our Communities

Q6) In 2008/09, we will publish a new Community Empowerment Strategy and as part of the strategy, we are keen to give local people greater say regarding funding of community safety initiatives in their area.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	84	4	12
CHAWREC Panel	89	7	4
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question.		
Service Staff	71	13	16

Comments - Community Empowerment Strategy

"I disagree with giving local people too much of a say in the decision making process. You are right to consider their views but at the end of the day, you are the professionals and usually such consultation events only get answers from the same people over and over again."

Senior staff and the committee must make many of these decisions based on their perception of public needs. Consultation tends to throw up wants and desires and it is too easy to agree without fully costing the solutions. The Service is first and foremost an emergency service and we must not lose sight of this."

"Regarding empowerment, I feel all communities should be entitled to the best professional service available irrespective of ethnic or gender make up."

"Remember that you are the experts, don't let local community do-gooders and busy bodies tell you your job."

"What is a community empowerment strategy."

"I agree that local issues need to be looked at and could cut costs in the long term."

The Environment & Corporate Social Responsibility

Q7) To what extent do you agree that the Service should invest in reducing its environmental impact, even if it involves spending more money initially?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	74	8	18
CHAWREC Panel	86	7	7
Businesses	92	0	8
Service Staff	87	3	10

Q8) Please rank the following priorities 1 to 4 in order of which you think is the most important for the Service to tackle.

- Reducing our energy consumption
- Reducing our carbon dioxide emissions
- Increasing our recycling
- Reducing the impact of our work on the environment

Please note in this report, we have focussed on the results for first priority.

Consultee	Energy (1 st priority)	Carbon Dioxide (1 st priority)	Recycling (1 st priority)	Impact (1 st priority)
Response Panel	26	30	23	21
CHAWREC Panel	27	27	27	19
Businesses	30	0	10	60
Service Staff	19	23	32	26

Comments – Environment & Corporate Social Responsibility

“All of the first three options will absolutely deliver option 4.”

“I have always thought that in fire situations, you have three priorities – look after your people (firefighters and customers), look after the environment and look after your other assets – in that order.”

“I feel unable to comment sensibly as taken to extremes, no turnout to fires and emergencies saves energy. Everyone should take manageable steps to protect the environment. I think your Service must establish their own priorities and not ask the public.”

“Safety first must be a priority after what happened recently in the Midlands but the environment is a worldwide issue nothing much can be achieved at a local level.”

“Perhaps you could use 80g/m2 paper instead of 100g/m2 to reduce costs.”

“Perhaps you could give £50 M & S vouchers to winner if hard copy and £100 if emailed.”

“I believe all these issues share equal importance.”

“The fourth action surely encompasses the other three and more.”

“Before I could possibly answer this question, I would like to know what possible impact the Fire Service has ever had on the Environment. Should we expect you to reduce the amount of smoke created by a fire. Suggest you strike this question from your considerations.”

“I find it hard to answer these questions without being flippant, anyway here goes. My responses are – change your light bulbs to low energy; go for battery powered fire vehicles; create income from Fire Service; prevent your firemen /women from trampling on garden and borders when attending house fires. Sorry I can’t take these questions seriously. I hope I’ve not offended you.”

“This survey could have been printed on recycled paper and only needed black ink.”

“All Service buildings/houses to be fully insulated – loft and walls, energy saving to be rewarded, recycling to be promoted to all stations.”

“The reduction of paper use within the Service could be dramatically reduced with proper management.”

“It is disappointing that during the recent refurbishments of several fire stations nothing significant has been done to reduce energy consultation or use renewable energy. All officers should use environmentally friendly vehicles and not gas guzzlers.”

High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS)

Q9) The Service is considering introducing a High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) 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.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	79	10	11
CHAWREC Panel	86	7	7
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question		
Service Staff	35	52	13

Comments - High Potential Development Scheme

"Excellent initiative."

"Excellent idea."

"The how would be useful to know – detail is critical."

"Would want more information about exactly what is meant by positively targeting and what exactly the criteria is for making someone suitable."

"If it is going to be costly, I feel the money could be better spent elsewhere."

"I am opposed to any fast track schemes and believe these do not produce better managers."

"This scheme may/would discriminate against other/some individuals."

"As long as he/she is a good worker, it could focus their minds better."

"Should have a strong implementation policy in reality."

"To recruit officers from a wider and more diverse field to address in injecting new ideas and priorities will support the pace of change needed to achieve modernisation."

"HPDS should not be biased on grounds of sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion as it is a positive action to find future leaders."

"This must not be done at the risk of producing a badly managed team."

"I feel that suitable individuals, proper training, physical abilities along with experience then academic qualifications i.e. in Service training will help them to move up to middle management roles. I also that that if that person possesses a degree of leadership skills and intelligence, I think that is enough qualifications needed to perform such a great task."

"If the HPDS is accessible to all through all mediums then this does sound like a good idea."

"To an extent this is fine but we could do with more firefighters than layers of middle management. Only pick the best candidates for management roles but ensure they know how to be a firefighter first."

"As long as management doesn't become top heavy!"

“There is a risk that experienced and capable staff might be marginalised to make way for untried and untested ‘potential’. It has to be borne in mind that potential doesn’t always deliver and there might be a possibility of under achieving fast trackers bottle necking the system in future years.”

“Providing the individuals spend a reasonable amount of time (approx 5 years) carrying out operational duties on a fire appliance so that they can fully understand what the role entails, then rapidly moving to a management position could work if carried out correctly. Anyone not willing to carry out that amount of time in an operational post is unlikely to be able to effectively carry out a management role truly representing all aspects of the job.”

“I don’t like HPDS schemes in any form. Too often academic qualifications are considered more highly than experience. I am not better in any way as I hold a PHD, MA and other qualifications but from my work in the public sector, I feel people are often promoted too easily.”

“Do you have a cadet scheme, do you have contact with local sixth form colleges.”

“Sounds similar to fast track in the Police and the stories I have heard from this initiative are not encouraging.”

“Risk alienating long serving staff by pushing newcomers up the promotion ladder.”

“Look out and positively encourage ex service (particularly Royal Navy) suitable candidates for Service within the Firefighters Brigade. Discipline would be good and you would make a good impact on all.”

“Very undecided about this. Would this mean that other firefighters (who may be late developers) may not get a fair chance if other more academic talented ones are encouraged to go up the ranks quicker.”

“It worries me that political correctness rather than best person for the job is used in our Emergency Services recruitment strategies.”

“Providing the selected individual has been thoroughly trained as a firefighter and has had operational experience and proven qualities and is not the selection committee’s blue eyed boy lacking these qualities.”

“Please ensure that practical qualities are as important as managerial qualities.”

“Would this mean new training teams being formed.”

“I feel middle management should only come after a very good knowledge of the people they are managing therefore should have a good few years under their belt before moving to middle management.”

“Would HPDS work against people who do not have the highest levels of physical and academic qualities but have the qualities and staying power to meet required targets. The most physically able and intellectual may not have the most appropriate personality for the job.”

“Getting the right person for the job is the prime criteria. Knowing the job is more important than fast track management.”

“Normal practice in business to fast track exceptional employees but Managers don’t necessarily perform well at the sharp end e.g. Managers don’t need any physical attributes.”

“I agree to this if something similar is done to fast track exceptional staff on the support side too.”

"I assume all candidates will be firmly grounds in all aspects of service requirements, meriting upgrading only by their proven knowledge, skill and ability."

"There is not a substitute for experience."

"If this person is to move into management, they do not need any particular physical attributes. The effect could be to deny opportunity to many intelligent and potentially effective future managers. Could accept a selection process that looks at potential and ability but with no emphasis on physical qualities."

"Strongly agree with positive discrimination including targeting."

"Staff should be promoted on experience as well as ability."

"If they are good, they should move more quickly."

"Although I agree with these proposals, I assume that there will not be any positive discrimination to satisfy quotas and that the most suitable person will be selected."

"Isn't this basic criteria – employ people with all the best attributes. Surely people with the above qualities are fast tracked to where they are best suited anyway."

"Every employee must be valued even if they do not have potential to move quickly etc."

"This should be based on an assessment of the individuals behaviours and competencies."

"Promotion should be available to all candidates. No one should be excluded just because they didn't get qualifications when they are young. People develop at different ages."

"With so many degrees totally irrelevant to a modern fire service, I would agree with the above if a relevant degree e.g. fire engineering and if the individual has relevant experience in what is a specialist role."

"HPDS sounds like a good scheme, however those who are targeted would need a good understanding and knowledge/experience as a firefighter in order to understand the challenges involved in order to put the necessary plans in place to improve all aspects of service."

"Only those who want these higher roles should be encouraged. Those with physical abilities should not be discouraged from remaining at an active firefighter level."

"What on earth does this question mean? Have you ever heard of the campaign for plain English?"

"Q9 causes me some concern as I sense a hint of positive discrimination here. Visual attributes do not always show the inner person and I worry that if this idea goes ahead, a group of folk who do not fit into either category may not have a chance."

"The Fire Service should always test, examine, interview to find out the best people for the job of firefighters regardless of ethnic, sex or culture."

"Past has proven academics are not always the best and appropriate people for the management jobs."

"Two tier entry already works in other services i.e. Armed Forces, Police etc. it can work in the F/Service only if every person on the HPDS has a comprehensive understanding of every role he or she may be in charge of. IN my capacity of being in Fire Safety (Technical) now known as Community Fire Protection, VERY few people especially in HQ know nor understand what we do, yet they manage us at times not very well."

“I feel that if you are making decisions that will affect operational effectiveness, that you require a certain amount of practical firefighting experience not just academically qualified as reality is often different than paper exercises.”

“The HPDS is a great idea and a long time in coming!!!”

“There is a risk that experienced and capable staff might be marginalized to make way for untried and untested potential. It has to be borne in mind that potential doesn’t always deliver and there might be a possibility of under achieving fast trackers bottle necking the system in future years.”

Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs)

Q10) Our firefighters are often the first emergency services staff to arrive at the scene and we are therefore looking at increasing the trauma skills of our staff.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	94	1	5
CHAWREC Panel	96	0	4
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question		
Service Staff	78	16	6

Comments – Road Traffic Collisions

“Just be careful here. You would need to train to paramedic level to avoid litigation claims for bad work.”

“Care must be taken with trauma skills to make sure that the skill involved is first aid and not heroics.”

“The trauma that our men and women must go through in certain instances is frightening to many. Anything should be done despite the cost to help them.”

“As an ex trauma nurse I am keen on this. The format in America is relevant to this subject and I feel many lives could be saved by increasing firefighters trauma skills.”

“Increasing trauma skills of firefighters would lead this government to reduce jobs in other areas i.e. Ambulance Service.”

“Fire & Rescue Services should never replace paramedic skills and experience. Fire and Rescue Service uniforms will not be as clean as ambulance crew cotton suits which can be laundered more easily. The Fire & Rescue Service should be a valuable partner with the paramedics/Ambulance Service.”

“Work on ties with the ambulance service who are increasing the response times for paramedic staff. Make sure that your staff are aware of the medical risks at scenes that include trauma, but don’t move the focus away from key aspects of their own roles.”

“Whilst agreeing in part, I am always concerned at folk taking on extra knowledge without appropriate remuneration for added skills – will this be done?”

“Currently insufficient emphasis put on training for firefighting so additional responsibilities including trauma care may be difficult to achieve without compromise to another skill competency.”

“There already exists issues with first aid training, to extend that to trauma training would require continual training and I do not think we are set up presently to do this.”

“I am a former 1st aid instructor/examiner and the difficulty with the subject is its diversity. Any 1st aid or trauma care is highly time consuming in training both initially and continuity training. To demonstrate this fact, pick up the basic 1st aid manual and flick through the chapters. Look at each sections ‘signs and symptoms’, keep in mind this is a basic book. Trauma care is more in depth using more complex equipment. The impact the extra training will have will knock on HSAs and the proposed fire safety inspections proposed that ER crews will shortly be undertaking. The Ambulance Service in Cheshire is better than in most parts of the country.”

Developing Advocates & Volunteers

Q11) We will develop the skills of our advocates in specialist areas and aim to increase our volunteers to 500 over the next two years and to 1,000 by 2013.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	83	3	14
CHAWREC Panel	87	2	11
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question		
Service Staff	29	45	26

Comments - Advocates and Volunteers

“More advocates and volunteers from BME communities.”

“500 in two years and 1000 in 2013 sounds unrealistic. 500 (two years) and another 500 (eight years). How can someone like me find out about volunteering/advocacy – which isn’t recruitment of this readily available.”

“I strongly advocate anything that helps youths develop a sense of purpose, achievement, self assurance etc plus earmarking future potential.”

“Advocates and volunteers should be employed by other agencies and not be given on the cheap by the Fire Service.”

“I feel that volunteers could be used in many ways, but not for emergency response.”

“The use of volunteers not a good idea. Time and effort to co-ordinate them for only a few hours work when they may not turn up. Volunteers would have uniforms which could be abused like the incident of flooding in Warwickshire (member of public dressed in FFs uniform.)”

“Advocates are a good idea, HOWEVER if there is a need for increased input in the community then lets pay for professional people 9 till 5 trained fully to accommodate the need and not do it on the cheap. As a matter of interest, I wonder how many CFRS uniforms are out there no longer being used but could be used by people illegally and could put us in an awkward position. Being in CFP, I have also had to undo some of the inappropriate safety advice some of them have imparted to people.”

“I agree in principal with developing the skills of advocates and volunteers however I would need to know what the specialist areas are before taking a more objective view.”

Fire Cadet Units

Q12) We intend to develop a more risk-based approach to the recruitment and development of cadet units which will include looking at options to run schemes at specific locations such as schools and on estates.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	91	2	7
CHAWREC Panel	87	0	13
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question		
Service Staff	53	37	10

Comments - Fire Cadet Units

“The need of more work to engage BME with the cadet units.”

“Don’t really understand what Q12 is saying.”

“If in future, the government introduced the National Service or similar schemes, youths who are interested in the Fire Service jobs can be approached/encouraged to join the Fire Service.”

“I particularly like the idea of establishing fire cadet units on estates as it may be a way of involving the local youth into something worthwhile rather than have them hanging around the streets. If the unit is based on their doorstep, they may take an interest – good idea.”

“Our targeting must be refined to ensure those who are most in need of diversionary activity are targeted for recruitment.”

“Will not be easy and must require highly skilled trainers as I’d be concerned those trainers may not be available for active service.”

“This is an excellent idea and would have a two-fold achievement. 1, encourage possible cadet recruits, 2, highlight a responsible approach by young people to fire safety issues in the community.”

“Would this include boarding schools.”

“Getting the young involved is a great idea. It might help to get rid of some of the yobbish behaviour, the Service has to contend with.”

“Why don’t you look to the young ones that can not get jobs after leaving school. I know some of the lads and girls would like a good job that would give them something to work for.”

“The diversification of activities undertaken appears to detract somewhat from the primary purpose and goals of the fire authority. While the advocate and volunteer work is commendable, this should remain with focus upon fire and rescue to concentrate the attention of the public on this Service.”

“Having knowledge of fire cadets and talk to them, it appears that part of the thrill and fun of being a cadet is being at the fire station and seeing firefighters in action. Taking it away to other locations would make it more like a youth club.”

“Trying to set up cadet units in schools will need liaison with the schools and I feel there are other agencies that are better equipped to run youth groups.”

“The idea of cadets off station is not a good idea as it will involve more time planning and resourcing the cadets, equipment either transported regularly or stored off station and all the instructors are volunteers therefore do not get paid. It would be better to build up some exchanges with other youth groups i.e. St Johns visit and spend the night having a go at hoses and ladders. Another night the cadets visit St Johns and have a session on first aid.”

“I started the cadet unit at Crew 5 years ago and am currently a Scout Leader. The WHOLE essence of a group is to be part of the organisation therefore to run cadet units off a fire station goes against this essence.”

“The development of the cadet units is good, however the resources will need to be put in place within these locations and all relevant training given. Often this is done on a voluntary basis however a financial reward would be appreciated.”

“Having been involved with cadets for some time, I struggle to believe that setting up units within schools and on estates would be successful without substantial financial support.”

“Who will run these groups? Maybe a resource and continuity issue here unless dedicated youth workers are employed or overtime paid to existing staff.”

Access to Critical Information

Q13) To help us tackle business fires and improve firefighter safety, we will invest resources to improve how we record and access information about the design and structure of commercial buildings.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	96	0	4
CHAWREC Panel	98	0	2
Businesses	84	8	8
Service Staff	97	3	0

Comments - Access to Critical Information

“Your trained firefighters should approach businesses in the local area and hold fire training. Charge the businesses so there is income for the Services – win/win and hold open days at companies.”

“For new buildings, Fire Services should play a key role in incorporating the latest fire prevention measures.”

“Good information is always needed by new staff.”

“All acquired data should be well recorded by using computer based systems to be accessed by all staff with minimum training required. Graphical utility interface.”

“If possible, Fire & Rescue Service should be involved during planning and drawing construction of new commercial buildings to ensure latest fire prevention techniques are incorporated.

”I think this is a valid point, a map of all particular buildings and warehouses should be given to the firefighter in Service as this can be beneficial, knowing your way around the buildings, helps reduce injuries and safety to others.”

“The Health and Safety Manager of various organisations should be kept informed of new regulations/activities of the Fire Service and other Fire Services in the UK and Europe in general.”

“Work should be undertaken to provide suitable knowledge to every worker in the workforce to tackle fire whenever it is convenient and routine checks of fire safety and risk of commercial centres should be done.”

“Not just work with businesses but also reach out to employees and customers. Visit businesses and talk through fire hazards/situations – you could then make this mandatory.”

“Any danger should be known, even the contents of a commercial building as there is enough potential hazards that fire crews come across.”

“I thought this was already in place. If you are just planning on putting money into consultants hands to get a new programme it seems a waste.”

“I think access to information would be essential to you to evaluate safety and availability of exit procedure in event of fires for the staff and your own exit practices.”

"I feel you should visit primary and secondary schools in order to help with your prevention scheme."

"What an excellent idea if information about buildings such as commercial business were on a database with access to on board computers. You would have access to all the amenities you need."

"Information is important re design of buildings etc. Care must be given to the firefighters for their safety."

"Can businesses not be investing at least a portion of the required resources to make these improvements."

"Suggest that business rates (taken by Council) are asked to give % from business profits to this and not from tax as firefighters are too vulnerable to be lost due to poorly maintained business premises as these may be sweatshops etc."

"As previous stated, I would like the affluent business sector to be forced by government legislation to maintain safe buildings so that firefighters, employees do not have to take huge risks first to attempt to save property."

"Commerce needs to be responsible for precautions too."

"Ensure security of any data captured and held."

"You also need to know what is store inside buildings and quantities. You should have more fire inspections looking for stored inflammables. I work in industrial manufacturing."

"Local businesses should complete regular risk assessment forms – info which could be kept on Fire Service database i.e. key holders."

"It must be remembered the tragic loss of life for firefighters in recent months."

"I feel it is very important to tackle business fires and improve firefighter safety. Because there may be old buildings which need safety updating (escape routes, easy access etc) and utmost the firefighters safety after all they are risking their own lives for us and their safety is just as important as the general public."

"I understood that this had always been done in the past. Has this been neglected?"

"Being in CRR, I know that there are insufficient staff to effectively carry out our personal work load so giving us additional work would put added pressure on our already stressed staff."

"If people in HQ understood better than they do, what we do in CFP, they would understand we have been trying to achieve this since day 1. As technology improves so can the dissemination of information. In addition, people in other departments need to know what we can and already do to this end."

New Training Centre – Frodsham

Q14) We intend to develop training facilities at Frodsham fire station to test and develop the incident command and control skills of our staff.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	85	0	15
CHAWREC Panel	87	0	13
Businesses	Please note businesses were not asked this question		
Service Staff	81	6	13

Comments - New Training Centre, Frodsham

“The training facilities are very important – not only at Frodsham fire station but everywhere.”

“Why Frodsham? All fire stations should have the facilities to train firemen.”

“The proposals in Q14 are to be welcomed. Hopefully this will remove the threat of station closure mentioned in previous IRMPs.”

“When we became a two tier county, what provision is there for other areas to have training excellence centres.”

“Great idea.”

“I support training development but with caution if it includes simulation of events that could cause chemical or other pollution in the atmosphere.”

“Why Frodsham, is there enough car parking etc? Would it be better in the centre of the county i.e. carbon footprint? The extension at Winsford, will this affect car parking facilities.”

“Frodsham is a good place for Command and Control training and it can be used as a solid base in the past whenever somewhere like this has been set up and the equipment was moved about.”

Improved Vehicle Replacement Programme

Q15) 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 appliance and a hydraulic platform.

How strongly do you agree/disagree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	89	5	6
CHAWREC Panel	81	2	17
Businesses	92	8	0
Service Staff	47	48	9

Comments - Improved Vehicle Replacement Programme

"Emergency Services should not be based on local analysis only. Priority should be given to saving lives, reduce expenditure."

"Research should be carried out on better ways of dealing with fire."

"Hope the hydraulic platform can be used in future buildings of up to 50-100 storeys/floors."

"Important to have quick and smaller vehicles eg like the cars paramedics use) to get to a situation quickly."

"Vehicle replacement should be seen as a long term investment strategy to maximise procurement of service. Link with Police, Fire, LA, Health Procurement strategies to maximise efficiency savings i.e. all buy from one/two suppliers of vehicles."

"A good 9kg dry powder extinguisher puts out a big fire. Smaller rapid intervention vehicles backed up if necessary if needs be are the way forward."

"Good idea although response times should remain the most important consideration."

"Provided attendance times are adhered to and the first attendance of appliances and personnel is adequate for the task in hand. This is very important for the safety of the community and business."

"Agree particularly if it eliminates the need to transport specialised equipment many miles across counties as was the case in 2007 when equipment from Devon (Plymouth) had to be driven to Cornwall (Newquay) to aid in dealing with a hotel fire."

"Risk and hazard analysis should be team based and occur annually to capture change of circumstances."

"Sounds like you are looking for excuses to provide less - best to have too much than too little in an emergency."

"Essential to have a range of vehicles for the range and severity of incidents requiring your firefighting equipment and choice of best to meet requirement of particular incident."

"I am sure you know best what vehicles you need."

"I believe that TRVs reduce the amount of firefighters attending an incident. This can place them at additional risk and delay attendance of a full appliance placing public at risk."

"Feel unable to comment intelligently. We should avoid whatever the problems experienced by Cornwall Fire Service when turntable/platform tenders were off the road and there was a long delay for another Service to provide alternative tenders."

"Does this mean a reduction in other vehicles."

"Keeping up to date is very important in all aspects."

"I am in total agreement as I think having the right machine and equipment for every incident is the perfect formula."

"Ensuring equipment can deal with a wide range of problems is important."

"You are the experts so do as you think fit without excessive spend on it's new so it's better and flashiness i.e. firefighters motorbike being used to transport firefighter home at 0745 each day along A49 south of Warrington."

"Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service should provide fully manned fire appliances so as not to put the public and service personnel at risk."

"Approve of risk analysis to focus better use of resources."

"By not having a vehicle that is up for most jobs, could cost lives i.e. if you had to wait for a vehicle to come from another district."

"As long as risk analysis does not actually mean 'cut backs'".

"Local risk analysis should be undertaken across a wide board of local experts, not based solely on statistical evidence."

"As long as TRVs have been recorded and proved to be performing well in the field and are effective, they will justify investment. How confident are Cheshire Fire Authority in their risk analysis, methodology and tools."

"I don't fully understand this statement. But if my interpretations are correct, it sounds like you plan to buy smaller equipment which is probably better for domestic situations. But the unexpected catastrophies should not be overlooked."

"The Fire Service must always have the right vehicles and equipment available for emergencies and be able to response to situations within an acceptable timescale – as ambulances etc."

"The Service is being asset stripped in terms of appliances and making do With less. It will all end in tears one day!!! Somebody's life."

"The age of the existing fleet is certainly an issue but TRV's are not the answer due to the limited capability and slow speed. Better focussed attention to replacing the structural appliances involving the staff who use them would result a better appliance suitable to local needs."

"TRV's in some areas are okay but when we talk of vehicle replacement let's NOT forget other departments eg CFP. For 3 years we have been the butt of public humiliation, driving around in smart cars. I have been asked – where's Big Ears, do your legs ache after peddling that all the way here and other not so quite polite things!! I had considered taking the Fire Service to a tribunal siting dignity at work. Re standard appliances with hydraulic platform, when I first came to Crewe we had a pump HP but was absolutely no good because the platform could not extend far enough over gardens to reach roofs etc and it was not capable of varying a 13.5m ladder. It was changed to a more manageable WRI (with a 13.5m ladder. You can not replace the versatility of

an appliance with a ladder, the old pump HP was high maintenance. Keep H/P platforms on strategic stations as they are now.”

“TRVs are not the way forward as they do not have the capabilities of a modern fire appliance and are just seen as a cost cutting measure, however the pump HPs would be a great asset.”

“The introduction of TRV’s is almost certainly a step in the wrong direction as regards to firefighter safety. I am greatly concerned about the impact that these machines will have within the community, as respect to operational efficiency.”

“Should not take traditional fire appliances off the run to save costs and use smaller less equipped TRVs.”

Budget Consultation

Q16) In 2007/08 Cheshire Fire Authority set the lowest Council Tax precept of any fire authority in the country. It is intending to limit any increase in next year’s bill to 3%.

To what extent do you agree that the increase is reasonable?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	68	13	19
CHAWREC Panel	65	13	22
Businesses	100	0	0
Service Staff	58	13	29

Comments - 3% Increase

“At this point, I am not aware or have a sense of what is a reasonable increase.”

“If the budgets better used on other areas, less money should be used on the above or any of section 3.”

“3% target should be a guideline only and apply to base load expenditure with one off revenue or capital projects costed and rigorously justified.”

“By all means limit bill by 3% as long as you do some aggressive buying/purchasing.”

“Avoiding tax rises should not be a priority. The priority needs to be to respond to fires effectively and to prevent fires. If restructuring the Service costs money, I don’t object to paying for it but only if services end up improved.”

“I can’t stop thinking that some of the new measures are designed to keep tax increases down rather than improving fire response efficiency. Other restructuring measures such as IVRP seem designed to really improve services. But it is difficult to really know what the consequences of the changes are going to be.”

“The 3% increase is above local pay awards. How much of this increase is going to frontline services? Having cadets, youth groups and targeted events are all laudable as long as there are sufficient funds.”

“Should be limited to 2.5%”.

"I feel 3% increase is based on the government's figures which I am in favour off but it has to apply to everyone, not just essential services."

"I would gladly pay more tax to ensure that we have the best force in the world. You are anyway, bless you lads – keep up the brave, good work you do."

"There is only so much in the pot, especially rate payers contributions. It would be better to target central government for certain projects etc."

"Targets are dependent upon the background of those who set them as with the NHS they can cause chaos in the force, resulting in the lowering of efficiency."

"3% is head of inflation – how does this compare."

"An increase in line with inflation is fine beyond that funding should be from central government."

"This needs to be balanced with the requirement for credibility in role."

"Without knowing detail about previous funding and how it compares to other authorities, I don't feel I can give a useful answer to this question."

"Is it not enough."

"If this is the lowest in the country and other service providers follow suit, why are local government employees pay awards less than this level of inflation."

"Will the firefighters pay rise be more than 3%? If not, how will firefighters afford a 3% increase in their council tax!"

"No increase will mean cost cutting elsewhere, especially if we propose increasing the number of advocates."

Q17) New projects and developments in recent IRMPs have been funded entirely by efficiencies or savings elsewhere in the Service. Some future proposals to improve the safety of both our staff and local communities may require new funding.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	79	6	15
CHAWREC Panel	84	0	16
Businesses	92	8	0
Service Staff	71	10	19

Comments - Funding of new projects

"Funding should be provided by the government."

"Question 17 is ambiguous. What is the question? We either apply for the new funding, look for further efficiency savings, or don't do the work which is not really option where safety is concerned."

"While I agree with proposals to improve safety, would need to know more about source of funding."

"Costs need to be monitored but at no time should they result in forcing the Brigade to cut back on its own resources even if we as a ratepayer have to pay more in the future."

“Too hypothetical – better to ask the question when and if the need arises.”

“Depends on where the funding needs to come from.”

“CFRS has a duty to provide value for money to the taxpayers. Stations with low levels of activity will therefore provide a case for reviewing the crewing system. There is a need though for careful consideration of the budget implications if the revised day crewing system is implemented on stations with low activity levels. This will have an impact on sickness levels and staff retention, thereby a budget implication. My suggestion would be day crewed town houses using the current station and ambulance station, or relocating to do this. This would operate on a shift system that although has more hours, is tried and tested, give firefighters their own lives and will grow the nest egg through the equity growth of the houses.”

“I agree with this as long as the new funding is not to the detriment of front line staff. Cuts/working conditions have seriously affected morale already.”

Q18) The Authority continues to invest as much resources into preventing fires and emergencies as it does in providing an emergency response.

To what extent do you agree with this approach?

The results for all consultees are as follows:-

Consultee	Agree %	Disagree %	Neither %
Response Panel	92	1	7
CHAWREC Panel	96	2	2
Businesses	92	8	0
Service Staff	62	19	19

Comments - Prevention and Emergency Response

“Prevention is always better than cure.”

“The Service is a Fire & Rescue emergency service. It is in danger of becoming a bureaucracy part of a nanny state. I wholeheartedly agree that any spare resources should go into prevention but this aspect must not take resources from the primary resource.”

“I would like to see efficiency audits on schemes to prevent fires and emergencies rather than them being implemented one after another.”

“These budget options are very difficult to rate in isolation without much greater information to permit a proper understanding.”

“Strongly agree prevention better than reaction – can’t comment on financing of operational provision”.

“The Fire Service can not be under funded to meet political criteria.”

“The Fire Service is a high profile part of the community – if savings can be made great but I would prefer to pay extra and for it to have all the resources it needs.”

“Prevention must be a continued priority. I am also concerned of the arson incidents particularly in school holidays – more school involvement telling kids consequences of their behaviour, loss of life etc.”

“While I agree with the statement, it would be far easier to comment if there was a statement showing the possible savings coming from the prevention.”
“This is blatantly not correct – staff are leaving CRR and very limited numbers are replacing them – this applies to fire safety and technical fire safety officers.”

“It is my belief that although the amount of money spent on emergency response is greater than that spent on preventing fires and emergencies, the amount of support and time given to the latter is far greater than that spent on the former.”

“We need to invest far more in the CFP (technical) department as we are hugely understaffed yet increasing busy. We need to appreciate the staff we have far better than we do, many of my colleagues are increasingly becoming despondent and want to get out.”

“I’ve not complaint if this is a statement of fact rather than a conscious decision as I believe that providing an emergency response should always be a priority.”

General Comments – IRMP 5

“I have no reservations about your proposals and congratulate the Service for their work in the past.”

“As indicated I agree in general with all the questions but their viability can only be assessed in retrospect.”

“Thank you to all of you for all the wonderful work that you all do.”

“overall I think you are doing a great job. Good luck in everything you do.”

“I found some of these questions difficult to answer. I really do not know enough about the workings of this Service and I am sure lots of other people are the same.”

“This form would have been much easier to understand if plain English had been used. You are presumably trying to target the general public and the wording of this form/questionnaire does little to encourage us.”

“I believe the fire service does a good job and are very effective in my area – Little Sutton, Ellesmere Port. I think it is wise for them to promote fire safety in the home as some people don’t even bother buying a fire alarm which is a life saver.”

“One of the Service’s values is ‘people’. Some of the question posed in the recent workplace survey included 1) are senior management interested in and committed to the wellbeing of employees, 2) Is Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service flexible in balancing my work and home life 3) the organisation recognises the needs of carers with dependents in terms of flexible working arrangements. Clearly it should be a goal of everyone at CFS to improve upon the 17% of operational staff feeling valued by the service, however the current revised day crewing system on the table as a response to low levels of activity

in Wilmslow and Birchwood does not seem to fit with the above values and areas for improvement. In actual fact, excessive hours on station with no permanent home may indeed worsen these areas.”

“Have education in communities needed to promote safety awareness – alarms, smoke detectors, emergency practices, civil contribution – how to help the Fire Service by the public – not obstructing work etc.”

“The draft is all about more and more cuts at the cheapest price. When will it all end?? With deaths as in Warks most probably.”

“PDGs should stay in the same format regardless of local government review in order to keep the services as local as possible. Page 21 – online improvements – are staff going to be consulted to see if they want every system electronic or would some items i.e. SIS be better in paper form as they are too long to read on screen and would need to be printed off. Procurement – the Agresso system, needs refining now before it goes any further to make it user friendly at the start of the process. The next 2 years will see the biggest turnaround of operational staff with many retirements and recruitment programmes (est 40% change). The emphasis for this should be training, from basic watch training on station to larger exercises at high risk places.”

“The future is bright, the future is Cheshire Fire Service.”

5) Union Responses – FBU & FOA

Below is the response received from the Cheshire FBU in response to the 'Draft' Corporate Plan & IRMP 2008/2009.

In response to the consultation document we wish to make the following observations:-

Many of the proposals were included within IRMP4 and therefore we would wish to re-iterate our comments, concerns and observations included within our response to IRMP4 (a copy is available if required).

Our main concerns within our 2007 response were regarding the emphasis placed on the Process Evolution system rather than maintaining the National recommended FSEC modelling toolkit. We still have concerns with regard to the tools and techniques used to assist the local risk analysis and would request further consultation. We also highlighted our disappointment that the opportunity to improve on the Cheshire standards for response had not been taken. We were looking for improved standards to be set for attendance times as well as attendance times for the weight of emergency response (subsequent appliances).

Key Proposals 2008/2009

New training centre

We welcome this proposal and would request full involvement of ourselves in the development of the facilities and how our members can make best use of this facility. We believe this facility is greatly required in the light of the increased number of firefighter deaths, the greater emphasis being placed on the time of operational firefighters to carry out community work and the lack of investment with station practical training facilities. We believe this facility needs to be fully utilised and the improved skills in command and control should not be used as a substitute for improving the operational skills of all our firefighters and instead of improving local practical training facilities.

Access to critical information

We would question; 'how robust is the IRMP process without this critical information'. Surely access and recording systems for such information should have been improved before implementing changes to fire cover based on the known risk. We believe greater emphasis should be given to the 7.2d visits from operational crews and on site inspections carried out by fire protection staff, particularly in the wake of the HSE improvement notice served on Warwickshire Fire Rescue Service.

Ongoing improvements

We wish to refer the Authority to our 2007 response to the Wilmslow project and again emphasise that we wish to be fully involved with the research into the operability of this system. This proposal will mean the loss of 12 firefighter posts to which the FBU is opposed to in principle as well as the legal implications regarding the working time directive and the right to a family life.

At this stage however we are committed to finding a satisfactory outcome and are willing to enter into meaningful dialogue with an open mind, although we are somewhat frustrated with the patchy information received so far. Despite numerous requests we have not been afforded the data that supports this proposed change of status to a 'modified day crewing station'.

We welcome the change from the original preferred option for Birchwood that would have meant the loss of availability of one fire appliance in the Warrington area at night. We are keen to explore how management propose to maintain the same level of emergency response standard and at the same time not commit our members to 96 hours continuous duty.

We welcome the efforts being made to reduce the number of false alarms within the 'Unwanted fire signals' policy. We have serious reservations with the introduction of the more robust phases and do not support any policy of non-attendance. We urge caution with this policy and do not expect a blanket policy to be applied to attendance to AFAs.

The service has not shared with us the criteria used to assess and reduce attendance at premises with AFA systems, and therefore we are concerned with the risk analysis undertaken, its scientific basis and the robustness of the assessments. We believe each premises should be independently assessed i.e. Aztec Chemicals was the scene of one of Cheshire's largest fires in recent times but was deemed to be a single pump AFA attendance. We would argue this type of premises would warrant a greater pre-determined attendance.

Improved vehicle replacement programme

Again we welcome this proposal and agree that there is a need to improve on the existing fleet of appliances that we suspect has not been subject to the normal fleet replacement/rotation programme. We believe there has been an impact on the availability of first line appliances whilst IRMP proposals have been worked up and the new type of vehicles budgeted for.

We have concerns over the move to dual purpose (pump/aerial) vehicles, firstly over the safety of these vehicles for dual purpose use and secondly over the suitability of the vehicles for each purpose as well as the impact on the availability for each purpose. Despite some major problems being encountered in other Brigades with the use of these vehicles we need to learn from mistakes made elsewhere but do accept there have been advances in technology that may enable these vehicles to perform both functions more efficiently.

Targeted Response Vehicles are welcomed as an additional resource, provided we can introduce safe systems of work and compliance with the relevant guidance. Currently the issue of adhoc guidance regarding the use of BA at fires in the open has led to confusion regarding BA control procedures and further work is required to introduce procedures for the circumstances where CF&RS are advocating less than full control procedures are required. We do not support the use of these vehicles to supplement structural appliances at property fires but despite this our members are willing to fully evaluate the capabilities of these appliances provided this evaluation is carried out in a controlled environment. Until this operational evaluation is completed and data is provided to assess the impact on the overall emergency cover, we suggest the proposal to replace RDS appliances with TRVs is put on hold.

High potential

We have serious reservations with a fast-track scheme of suitable applicants and would wish to see minimum levels of operational competency built in to all promotional assessment for operational managers. There is no substitute for quality practical development and operational experience to equip our managers with the necessary incident command and control skills.

Dave Williams (Cheshire FBU Secretary)
Andrew Price (Cheshire FBU Chair)



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31st January 2008

IRMP year 5 Consultation Response

Dear Chief,

Thank you for sharing the draft Cheshire Fire Authority Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2008/09 with the Fire Officers Association. Having had time to read the draft plan we would like to offer the following considered response.

The Fire Officers Association are a forward thinking organisation who are committed to change and modernisation through consultation and negotiation and encourage our members to work positively as the National Fire & Rescue Service modernisation agenda takes shape.

We recognise that much of the year 5 plan is a continuation of the proposals set out in the year 4 plan. Having had an opportunity to reflect on the key points of the plan the Cheshire branch of the Fire Officers' Association would indicate our general support many of the proposals set out in the document.

We would however offer the following views for consultation.

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service approach to Risk.

2007 has been a fairly significant year with regards to risk and response. We have had a number of tragic events to contend with, most recently the fire appliance crash in central Scotland which has resulted in the loss of another fire fighters life whilst responding to an emergency call. Recent events have no doubt made us all reflect on the everyday risks faced by our staff as they go about their daily activities.

We believe that recent tragic events offer a timely reminder to all concerned that whilst change and modernisation is delivered we need to remain vigilant of the type of job the Fire & Rescue Service is here to deliver.

To this end we fully support your foreword statement paragraph 7 which indicates a desire for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service to learn from any lessons learned through investigations to improve the safety of both our staff and our communities.

We would urge the Service to reflect on the current learning points which arise from both internal and external investigations, and to take the appropriate steps needed to ensure that the Health & Safety of our members and the wider workforce is pivotal to any proposed changes.

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service Objectives (page 5)

We note and welcome the minor amendments you have introduced in order to ensure that the objectives that the Service aims to deliver are relevant and reflect the changing environment.

ER1 specifies that you aim to “identify the risks facing communities and ensure plans and resources are in place to respond”. We would go one step further in that not only do we support the identification and resourcing for identified risks, we would support robust testing of the risk response mechanisms. Where we do not test our response to risks we face the prospect of a narrow learning window. We believe that tried and tested responses offer a much more efficient and effective response in the event of real emergencies.

Core Values (page 6)

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service has a set of embedded values that we fully support. The values that relate to people indicate that employees are valued and the Service promotes this by recognising and rewarding performance. We are not convinced that the policy for reward and recognition has been implemented, if it has we would welcome some feedback about how it is being used; further how many people have benefited from such policy. We would urge the Service to pursue the implementation of such policy within the life of this plan, and ensure that the criteria for accessing any such rewards and recognition for employees are not unachievable.

The recent CPD process has proven that those persons at the heart of delivering fundamental change have sadly missed out on this process which, whilst we recognise the national constraints applied to the process, we have already indicated that we would have been more than happy to work with the Service to develop a local scheme which would recognise and reward those middle managers who are delivering significant change on a day to day basis and often go the extra mile to develop a performance management culture at the point of Service delivery.

Key Proposals for 2008/09

The environment (page 8)

The Fire & Rescue Service has a requirement under the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004 to ensure the environment is protected. We believe the Service could do more to ensure that environmental protection is enhanced. We welcome the development of an environmental protection policy but would also welcome a review of current equipment provision for staff to use in order to protect the environment when attending incidents. Further to this we would like the Service to commit to the provision of training for staff in mitigating environmental damage.

High potential (page 8)

The High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS) was raised as a concept of IRMP year 4. In our considered response to this plan we asked a number of questions relating to this proposal and failed to receive a response from the Service.

We understand that this proposal has been developed and has received member approval. We are not convinced however that there has been any form of consultation with representative bodies throughout the development of this proposal.

We would welcome evidence that indicates that people with degrees make good leaders? Indeed many people who possess academic qualifications such as degrees have never managed people. We would also raise the point that there are already a number of people employed within the Service who possess degrees yet their acquired skills are not recognised under this proposal. Is the Service after a certain type of person or is it the qualification status? where is the support and assistance for current serving employees to progress through vocational qualifications?.

Whilst we note the comments made by professor Bain in his review of the Fire & Rescue Service we remain unconvinced that the real value of this proposal has been fully thought through and would ask why the focus is on Station Manager level?, we would suggest that Watch Manager level is a senior role which attracts senior pay. We strongly believe that some form of consultation on this proposal would have offered us the opportunity to work with the Service to deliver the HPDS.

Fire Investigation (page 15)

We welcome a review of the review of the role of Fire investigators. We note that the subject of developing protocols with neighbouring services has been a subject raised at the North West Regional Management Board level for some years. We would welcome some involvement in the development of any such proposals as we believe we can offer the right skills and positive input that would assist the Service in developing this proposal.

Building safety (page 15)

Given the size and complexity of many of the larger buildings within the Cheshire boundary we support any review of implications associated with such. We would also support your proposal to invest in current staff on fire engineering degrees to build upon the underpinning knowledge already developed in role.

Access to critical information (page 16)

Events such as Warwickshire have identified the need for suitable and sufficient risk information to ensure crews have the most up to date, relevant information available to them at incidents. Any review which supports the gathering and applied use of such risk information is in our view the most appropriate way forward and we fully support the review of systems for capturing, interpreting, recording and assessing such information.

Improving skills and capacity (page 16)

We fully support this development. Our members deserve the best training and equipment available to them. The Cheshire branch Fire Officers' Association would fully support the implementation of a skills maintenance programme that ensures our members are able to execute their role effectively. We would welcome any developments in enhancing the skills and knowledge of middle managers. This development would also satisfy the H&S legislation that the Service is bound by law to comply with.

We fully support and welcome the proposal to develop Frodsham fire station into a command and control facility. This is an underused resource which could be used to develop much of the Service in the principals of command and control.

We note the proposal to enhance the officer rotas to further increase the number of positive hours. We would welcome this review but remain unconvinced that positive hours can be further increased without having a detrimental impact on our member's health safety & wellbeing. We would be keen to become involved in this review and would like to be proactive in the development of any revised duty systems prior to negotiations.

Performance delivery groups (page 18)

The decision to introduce reorganisation within Cheshire has brought with it a real opportunity to review and revitalise the organisational structure. We are conscious that the move to east and west Cheshire split will bring with it an opportunity for the organisation to have a good look at how Performance Delivery Groups are structured and how they operate. We would welcome the opportunity to become involved in the development of the revised PDG structure and how other Group Managers might be utilised within functional roles. Obviously the impact of any changes will directly affect our members and they will no doubt be anxious about their future roles within Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. We would like to begin discussions on the Services proposed changes at the earliest opportunity and would welcome the opportunity to assist in the shaping of the changes.

Better resilience (page 19)

The Fire Officers Association recognises that the environment is adapting and as such Fire & Rescue Services need to review their approach to resilience, we accept the fact that support staff can offer a variety of skills and assistance during large scale incidents and would support this approach within strictly controlled parameters. Whilst we recognise that there are areas of emergency response that support staff can assist in during times of need, however we would urge the Service to carefully consider the matter of Health & Safety legislation and ensure that the risk of using the support staff to bolster resilience does bring with it increased risks.

We would expect therefore that Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service considered all the requirements associated with training including refreshing of skills, expectations of roles at incidents, health & safety matters and other associated risks.

Modernising support services (page 20)

We recognise that national documents and guidance is directing Fire & Rescue Services to look at the services they provide and where possible look at collaboration with partners.

Since their establishment the Regional Management Boards have had a specific role in developing these collaborative areas.

Whilst we support collaboration in principle we would like more information on what this means for Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service. Is it about improving Services or reducing posts as service provisions can be achieved more efficiently through the collaborative approach?

We look forward to further information on the finer details of how the Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service intends to modernise support services. We would also ask you to note that the Fire Officers Association represents managers in the Fire & Rescue Service; this includes some green book managers who may be affected by these proposals. We would therefore ask that we are included in the consultation on the modernisation of support services.

Regional collaboration (page 20)

The Fire Officers Association notes the establishment of the Regional Management Boards and their establishment as part of one of the National Framework Document directives.

We acknowledge the work of the board with regards to the delivery of the regional control centre project but other positive outcomes still remain to be seen. The review of training that was completed through the NWRMB did not appear to deliver any positive outcomes within individual Fire & Rescue Services. If this is not the case we would welcome some information to the contrary.

We look forward to your views on this consultation response and as always we welcome further dialogue through the consultation and negotiation machinery.

Conclusion

The Fire Officers Association continues to embrace change and modernisation we believe that Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service has an opportunity to take a leading role within the NWRMB and should take the opportunity to drive regional collaboration and co-operation forward.

We trust that our consultation comments will assist Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service to develop its proposals.

Yours truly,

Leon Parkes
Branch Secretary FOA.

John Salt
Branch Chair FOA

Derek Dickson
Health & Safety rep FOA

6) Media Coverage – IRMP 5

Please find all the media coverage received regarding consultation on the draft Corporate Plan & Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP 5).