



Introduction

This self assessment document has been prepared under the guidance issued through the fire and rescue performance framework 2007, and offers evidence in support of the direction of travel (DoT) and use of resources (UoR) assessments. The document is presented in two parts. Part 1 sets out to describe how the activities of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire & Rescue Fire Authority (SWFA) impact directly and indirectly on several fictitious families who reside in the county of Shropshire. Whilst the family names are fictitious, the actual events described are all true and accurate. The case study will illustrate the effect of the Authority's ambitions and priorities in delivering a cost effective service to the families described. Part 2 presents a range of supporting evidence for consideration by the Audit Commission to inform their judgement in respect of the key lines of enquiry applicable to DoT and UoR assessments.

A case study of how the operation of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority (SWFA) reflects and meets the needs of its communities

Part 1

Mr & Mrs Jones, who live in Wem, collected from their local library in 2006 a copy of the SWFA Performance Plan 2006-08 and read with curiosity the ambitions and priorities of the Authority and felt that they were able to identify what *their* Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) is seeking to achieve. Their interest in the Service was prompted by their attendance at the Brigade's Annual Festival of Carols¹ that was held in Wem's Church of St Peter and St Paul in December 2006, a truly '*community focused*' event that raised over £1000 for local charities. The Performance Plan inspired them to take an active role in supporting the Authority and they took the time to return the provided consultation questionnaire, feeling that they were able to influence the direction of *their* FRS. Their motivation to attend the Festival of Carols was, in part, sparked by the fact that they had received a visit by their local retained fire-fighters who had carried out a home fire risk assessment (HFRA) and installed free of charge two smoke detectors² and the further home safety advice that they had received via the FRS's partnership with Age Concern.³ The HFRA was one of 28,389 carried out in 2006/07, resulting in over 12,000 smoke detectors fitted free of charge, an activity receiving the support of local MPs within the county.⁴ Mr Jones spoke with his good friends, the Smith family, from Telford who also had received advice from the FRS. The Smith family had received a visit under very different circumstances, as neighbours of theirs had had a chip pan fire. The fire was contained to the kitchen (SF&RS is in the upper 'Best Quartile' for BVPI 144) and the family escaped without injury (SF&RS is in the upper 'Best Quartile' for BVPI 143(ii) & 208) but FRS personnel then, and within the hour, visited every household within the immediate neighbourhood and provided fire safety advice to reduce the likelihood of future similar occurrences. FRS personnel, whilst offering fire safety advice, identified several properties where the residents were found to be of Asian descent and had some difficulties in communicating in English. This situation was soon remedied through the attendance of Muhammad Sajid Younis, a multi lingual advocate⁵ from SF&RS who was able to liaise with the local residents providing the necessary advice. The '999' call to the FRS on this occasion was made by a member of the Patel family who had attended the 'Sparx!' theatre production⁶ joint initiative arranged by the FRS, Telford and Wrekin Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership and police, that gives out key fire safety messages as well as dealing with bullying and peer pressure. Mr and Mrs Patel's children received a CD of the music and a follow-up pack containing lesson plans for citizenship, PSHE, English, dance and drama. The eldest daughter, Sangetta Patel, is keen to join the FRS but is apprehensive about what it entails. In June 2006 she was able to attend one of two 'Taster Sessions'⁷ hosted by the FRS aimed at attracting more women and people from under represented groups. In addition to attending the 'Taster Session' Sangetta has also been provided with a recruitment DVD prepared and distributed through West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB).

Heather Jones, daughter of Mr and Mrs Jones, who lives in Clun in South Shropshire, joined the retained FRS at Clun in 2004. She feels part of the community and moreover part of an 'inclusive' organisation that she feels represents both hers and local community's needs. Since joining she has undergone extensive training which has also included subjects such as diversity, equality and fairness that have brought benefits to her normal occupation as a local teacher. She has been particularly impressed by the charitable⁸ work undertaken by the station and moreover the open-culture of the FRS and her ability to be able to contribute to the development and implementation of the Authority's priorities. This, she felt, was particularly so during the IRMP process where Members of SWFA and the executive officers of the FRS had taken the time to visit every station and watch to discuss the IRMP, with a particular emphasis on introducing improvements to the retained FRS. In 2006/07 Heather witnessed the outcomes of the Authority's £800k+ investment in the retained FRS and she now feels far better equipped to meet her local communities needs through the provision of a modern eight-seater appliance,⁹ equipped the latest equipment. She and her colleagues certainly notice the benefits of the Authority's earlier investment in providing all fire appliances with the new digital Airwave voice and data communications system that provides them with guaranteed radio coverage and instant access to risk information and detailed mapping. Perhaps most notable to Heather however is the fact that the appointment of eight retained FRS support officers¹⁰ had led to significant improvements across the county in the availability of retained appliances. Heather, like many of her retained colleagues, are justly proud of their contribution to SF&RS, particularly as they represent the majority of stations, and as a consequence feel that the CLG's operational assessment of service delivery score of '4 – Performing Well,' reflected on their



professionalism. This pride was further compounded by the CLG using SF&RS's retained review project as the lead case study in the CLG's national OASD report. The Fire Authority have sought to share the successes of the retained review project and in July 2007 hosted a national seminar¹¹ that attracted over 150 delegates from 39 fire and rescue services. Staff at the station also feel that they too play an important role in influencing the shape of the retained FRS and they were pleased to have been invited to participate in a BBC documentary on the Service¹² and particularly delighted that they received acknowledgement for their contribution to the local community from the then Minister for fire – Angela Smith MP.¹³ Heather is now looking forward to her local school's open day when she will enlist the support of SF&RS's new 'Outreach Vehicle' to further promote community safety within the rural communities.¹⁴ This will build upon the school's interest in community safety, with the school having participated in the FRS's 'Be Cool Be Safe School' quiz¹⁵ during 2006, a quiz entered by 34 Shropshire schools. Mr Wilkins, the head teacher from the school is also proud of Heather's role in the FRS and the benefits, such as her newly acquired NVQ Team Leader qualifications,¹⁶ brought to the school and he was pleased to accept on behalf of the school governors a certificate of recognition¹⁷ from the Authority for the school, as Heather's employer, for support to the retained FRS.

But Clun and Wem are not the only stations where a true commitment to supporting and place shaping local communities can be found. For most stations are involved in hosting, in partnership with other agencies, community safety events and open days.^{18 19 20 21 22} These events and initiatives are of course sensitive to the dynamically changing cultural environment in which the FRS operates, and so where appropriate, the FRS is keen to forge strong but moreover productive partnerships with other service providers and community groups. Two such examples are the partnerships formed with the Telford Muslim community where fire safety advice is delivered through local mosques²³ and Shropshire County Council where access has been achieved to the permanent resident Gypsy communities.²⁴

The Service's partnerships are however not only constrained to the local communities. In 2006 the FRS forged an exciting and unique international partnership with Falck, Denmark's private provider of fire, rescue and emergency care services.^{25 26} This important partnership has been supported financially through the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo)²⁷ and enabled the exchange of staff from both organisations for personal development.²⁸ Building upon the successes of this innovative partnership, in 2007 the FRS successfully secured EC funding (51,000€) creating extra capacity to facilitate exchange visits to five European countries for 36 members of staff and Fire Authority members.²⁹ Notably, in October 2007, three members of the Fire Authority, accompanied by the Chief Fire Officer, will visit Falck³⁰ to explore in detail the benefits of private sector involvement in the delivery of public safety services. In addition, the 2007 exchange programme will include, as a humanitarian aid gesture, the transportation and donation of a fully equipped FRS rescue tender (soon to be redundant) to the Hungarian Firefighters Association³¹ in Budapest. But what difference does this make to Mrs King from Albrighton? Well the 2006 visits exposed staff to a wealth of new ideas and innovation causing them to challenge convention in the UK. This, in one area, has led to the procurement of Danish firefighting equipment for evaluation in Shropshire to improve the Service's procedures for dealing with roof fires.³²

Whilst the FRS is eager to participate in constructive partnerships it is cognisant that some partnerships can be ineffectual if not led, managed and delivered effectively. During 2006 a detailed assessment of partnerships was undertaken, with the Service's participation reduced to those partnerships where only real community benefits could be quantified.³³ In 2007 the Authority commissioned Warwick University Business School³⁴ to work with Service in developing an objective and analytical diagnostic management model to evaluate both historic and future partnerships to determine the tangible benefits realized by local communities. The scope of the study will identify measures for direct financial benefits, direct non-financial benefits and indirect benefits. This innovative and unique piece of work is in progress and is anticipated to have wider benefits to the UK fire and rescue service community.

Of course the Authority will always, irrespective of partnerships, continue to strive to provide a first class emergency fire and rescue service capable of responding to needs of the community at the time of crisis and disaster. In recent years the Authority's ability to respond to the changing demands placed upon the Service has been bolstered through the effective partnerships created through WMRMB.³⁵ Several important resilience and response projects³⁶ have been managed through WMRMB, projects that have had tangible outcomes within the local and regional community. But what difference has this made to Mr and Mrs Edwards from Much Wenlock? Probably very little noticeable difference until such time as they have the need to call upon the FRS. But as a similar small community in Lockerbie in 1988 discovered, you can never predict when disaster will strike. But when it does, the FRS is now better equipped to deal with a plane or train crash, collapsed building or terrorist attack – whatever the major incident, fire crews are now ready to cope with the aftermath. Despite not being in receipt of major urban search and rescue (USAR) assets, the Authority has been proactive in training personnel and improving existing equipment to provide a first line of attack pending arrival of regional USAR resources. And if Mr and Mrs Edwards are in any doubt as to the measures that they can take to protect themselves against the unthinkable, the WMRMB website (managed by this Service) publishes detailed information and advice to keep the general public informed³⁷ and the Service's website gives direct access to the local resilience risk register.³⁸



The Service, despite being one of the smallest in England, made some of the greatest contributions to the flood relief efforts during the summer of 2007, with personnel attending for protracted periods incidents in both Sheffield³⁹ and Gloucestershire.

In the town of Owestry, Mr Williams, who manages one of the Town's larger businesses is grateful to the FRS for the support he has received in driving down the occurrence of false alarms at his property (SF&RS is in the upper 'Best Quartile' for BVPI 149(i)) and more recently, the support given in preparing his business for the transition to the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Order.^{40 41} Mr Williams is one of the many businessmen in the community that have benefited directly from the Service's initiatives to drive down false alarms⁴² and the professionalism of fire safety officers who are properly trained to offer advice and guidance.⁴³ He knows exactly what level and standard of service he can expect from the FRS through the standards set out within the Service's Customer Charter.⁴⁴ Mr Williams also feels able to contribute to the strategic development of the FRS through participation within the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process⁴⁵ as the Service has published all of its consultation proposals on its website and moreover offers the means whereby the members of the public can comment online⁴⁶ or attend one of the public consultation sessions conducted independently by Opinion Research Services.⁴⁷ Mr Williams was also one of the many respondents to the 'After the Fire' survey conducted by ORS.⁴⁸

But how effective is the FRS in delivering a service to the community? Well the evidence in terms of measurable outcomes would appear to indicate that the Service is performing well and certainly one of the better performing Authorities in England. The *subjective* audit results from the 2005/06 Performance Framework corporate assessments led to the Authority receiving the scorecard results indicated opposite. And when *objective* measures are applied to the Service, its performance is as equally impressive and most readily recognisable through the key Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) which, as illustrated below, demonstrates continued improvement in the majority of areas.

FRA Performance Framework 2006/07 SCORECARD			
CPA 2005 Score:	Use of Resources:	Direction of Travel:	Service Assessment:
Excellent	4 - Performing Strongly	Improving strongly	4 - Performing Strongly
Good	3 - Performing well	Improving well	3 - Performing well
Fair	2 - Adequate performance	Improving adequately	2 - Adequate performance
Weak	1 - Inadequate performance	Not improving adequately or Not improving	1 - Inadequate performance
Poor			

Corporate Health			
BVPI	Improvement in		Current Quartile
	1 Year	3 Year	
BV2b	◄►	▲	2nd
BV8	▲	▲	Best
BV11a	◄►	▲	2nd
BV11b	◄►	▲	Best
BV11c	No data currently available*		
BV12(i)	▼	▲	3rd
BV12(ii)	▼	▼	Worst
BV15(i)	▼	▼	Worst
BV15(ii)	◄►	◄►	Best
BV16A(i)	No data currently available*		
BV16A(ii)	No data currently available*		
BV210	▲	*	3rd

Fire Prevention			
BVPI	Improvement in		Current Quartile
	1 Year	3 Year	
BV142(ii)	▼	▲	3rd
BV142(iii)	▲	▲	2nd
BV206(i+ii)	▼	No data previously recorded	3rd
BV206(iii+iv)	▼		Best
BV206(i)	▲		3rd
BV206(ii)	▼		3rd
BV206(iii)	▼		Best
BV206(iv)	◄►		Best
BV207	▲		3rd
BV209(i)	▲		2nd
BV209(ii)	▲		2nd
BV209(iii)	▲		2nd

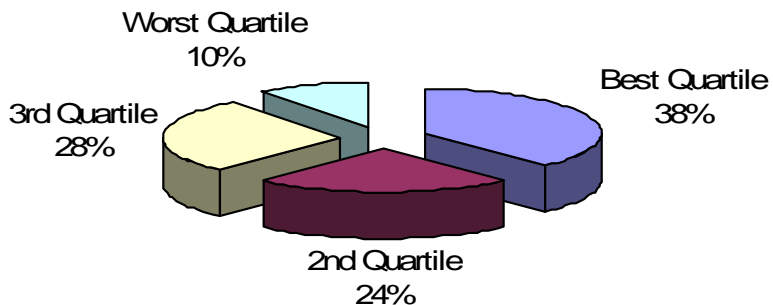
Operational Response			
BVPI	Improvement in		Current Quartile
	1 Year	3 Year	
BV143(i)	▲	▼	2nd
BV143(ii)	▲	▲	Best
BV144	▲	▲	Best
BV146(i+ii)	▲	*	3rd
BV146(ii)/(i+i i)	▲	*	Best
BV149(i)	▲	▲	Best
BV149(iii)	*	*	*
BV208	▲	*	Best

Key: ▲ Improving, ◄► No Change, ▼ Deteriorating

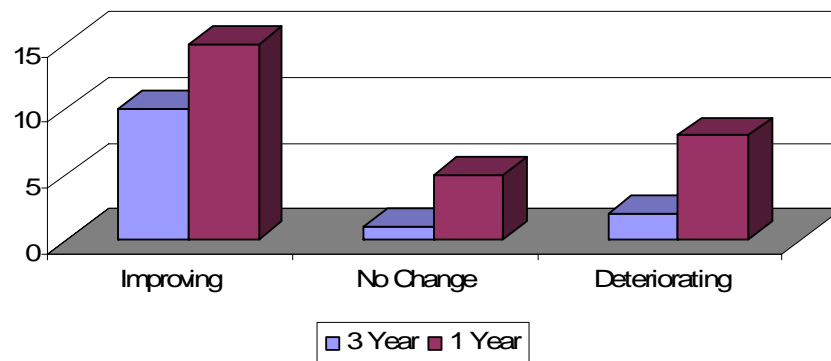


The Authority's performance is summarized within the graphs below, where it can be seen that 38 percent of performance achieved upper quartile (Best) results, as opposed to only 10 percent of performance falling within the lower quartile (Worst). And direction of travel, over the most recent twelve months and three-year period indicate that the continuous improvement outweighs any absence or change or moreover deterioration.

BVPI Performance



Direction of Travel



This level of performance is equally impressive within the Operational Assurance performance indicators (PIs: F1 – F13c) where in 2006/07 the Authority achieved five PIs within the upper threshold and five PIs in the mid table, giving an overall OASD score of '4.' But perhaps the most impressive and moreover tangible benefit to the community is the reduction of deliberate primary fires (BVPI 206 (i) & (ii)) which has, through proactive initiatives, been reduced by almost 53 percent to date since 2001/02.

So, it can be seen from the case study examples above that the community of Shropshire receives a *citizen-centric service* that is consistently delivered well, resulting in a safer community at a price stakeholder feedback⁴⁹ indicates people are prepared to pay, and one they and the Authority believes represents value for money. The Authority has very clear ambitions for the future as set out within its 2007/08 Performance Plan.⁵⁰ And as with the Authority's performance, the development and implementation of the performance plan is the subject of continuous improvement with this year's plan articulating the priorities that lay ahead together with unambiguous direction of travel statements to secure excellence. The plan is underpinned by a robust Medium Term Financial Plan⁵¹ for the period 2007/08 to 2009/10, in which the Authority has maintained the precept increase for 2007/08 at below 4% thereby fulfilling Members' commitment to maintain a downward trend in precept increases. As a further enhancement in the Authority's planning arrangements for 2007/08 will be to integrate further the existing Strategic Planning Process in order to align Service, Budget and Improvement Planning. The outcome of the proposals will be two overarching integrated strategic documents – a forward looking 'Corporate Plan' and a backward facing performance report - 'Annual Report.'⁵²



Part 2 What had the Authority sought/is seeking to achieve?

1. What evidence is there of the fire and rescue authority (FRA) improving outcomes?

1.1. Are services improving in areas the FRA has identified as priorities and areas the public say are important to their communities?

(Areas for investigation:

- Performance against local targets including progress against IRMP annual action plans
- Measurable impact from prevention activities and community safety projects
- Track record of improvement, including in user satisfaction results
- Delivery of outcomes based on the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services)

Introduction of local 'Response Standards' targeting risk to life, not property, were introduced on 1 April 2006. The new standards are now driving improvement in our response capabilities with the introduction of numerous XL Cab appliances in the more rural areas of the county, to ensure the standards are able to be met. This provides better service to the public, with an additional breathing apparatus crew being available to aid in search and rescue that much sooner, as well as increased safety for crews, with the Incident Commander having the staff available to make sure all appropriate systems of work are effectively implemented.

The Retained Review Project⁵³ is largely completed with benefits now being realized.

Over the last 2 years Retained Duty Staff (RDS) have undertaken the following work:

- 2005/06 – 13,000 home fire safety visits with 4,233 smoke detectors fitted
- 2006/07 – 28,389 home fire safety visits with 12,025 smoke detectors fitted

Over the same period:

- Number of deaths in dwelling fires per 100,000 population – down from 0.89 to 0.44
- Number of injuries in dwelling fires per 100,000 population – down from 4.2 to 1.76
- Fires confined to room of origin – up from 90% to 93.5%

In addition, and as a consequence of the IRMP⁵⁴ process, a change to the crewing policy for the Service's two aerial appliances resulted in a reduction of eight wholetime posts, with the savings being re-invested into the Retained Review Project with the employment of eight new Retained Support Officers (RSO's). The RSOs became operational on 1 August 2006. Their remit is to provide support to RDS personnel. Since the introduction of RSO's the number of RDS application forms dispatched has risen by over 1000% and overall RDS appliance availability has risen from 94% in June 2006 to over 97% in February 2007.

Targets are set annually by the Strategy and Resources Committee⁵⁵ (S&RC) and monitored quarterly by the Audit & Performance Management Committee⁵⁶(A&PMC) and the Service's Policy Group. All performance, including performance against the 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), are reported regularly to Policy Group (monthly) and A&PMC (quarterly). In addition to the ten KPIs A&PMC and Policy Group receive a comprehensive quarterly report on all BVPI's and local performance information. At this juncture Policy Group is given the opportunity to highlight any additional performance indicators they wish to monitor or forward to A&PMC – for example retained duty system performance data.

In order to assess user satisfaction, in 2005/6 ORS were commissioned to undertake an after the incident survey (ATI)⁵⁷ seeking the views of members of the public who have actually had cause to use the service. Following the national customer satisfaction survey in 2006 it has decided to run the ATI survey on an annual basis and will continue for 2007/08. Direction of Travel (DOT) and Improvement Priorities (IP) are monitored through departmental business plans (DOT) and a comprehensive reporting process (IP).

Delivery of key outcomes from the National Framework 2006-08 are managed through West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB), a strategic partnership that is predominately managed on a day-to-day basis by officers from SWFA. The outcomes achieved are recorded within the region's annual reports.⁵⁸ The region, and in turn its five constituent FRAs are recognized as one of the best performing regions in England.



How is the Service being delivered along with value for money?

1. What evidence is there of the fire and rescue authority (FRA) improving outcomes?

1.4. Is value for money improving as well as quality of services?

(Areas for investigation)

- Use of resources value for money areas for investigation (questions 5.1 and 5.2)
- The extent to which the FRA is delivering and planning for value for money)

Case study 1 within the Audit Commission publication entitled 'Fire and Rescue performance assessment - scores and analysis of performance in fire and rescue authorities 2006'⁵⁹ refers to both the performance and cost of SWFA, e.g., *'the Service is performing well in priority areas and in relation to the national framework'* and *'the service is providing good value for money. Its costs compare well with others and have remained below average.'* Performance continues to improve with SWFA expected to maintain its service assessment rating of 4 'performing strongly' for 2007. As reflected in the MTFP⁶⁰ 2007/08 to 2009/10, SWFA precept increase for 2007/08 was maintained at below 4% thereby fulfilling SWFAs commitment to maintain a downward trend in precept increases.

SWFA continue to make best use of available benchmarking information to ensure that best value and VfM are achieved. Updated CIPFA statistics are due to be published shortly and these will enable SWFA to progress its benchmarking activities. Detailed assessments of the two new data tools provided by the Audit Commission have been carried out and reported to SWFAs Strategy and Resources Committee.⁶¹
⁶² Whilst the 'performance information' tool highlights clearly the continuing strong performance of the Authority and the Service, it is very unfortunate that once again the tool provided to assist with the benchmarking of 'value for money' is of very limited value. This has been once again highlighted to the Audit Commission.

The Retained Review has now been implemented and the massive investment (£824,000 in 2006/07) in the Retained Service can clearly be seen to be paying dividends. Recruitment has increased massively, firefighter retention has improved, fire engine availability has improved dramatically, retained firefighters installed over 12,000 smoke alarms in 2006/07 and SWFA are held up as best practice nationally for the way in which improvements to the Retained Service have been achieved. Most recently over 140 delegates from all corners of the UK attended a seminar⁶³ organised and held by SFRS to share best practice. The performance improvements identified have been monitored by a working group of Fire Authority Members and reported to the Fire Authority on a quarterly basis. Responsibility for ongoing monitoring has recently been delegated to the Authority's A&PMC.

Detailed information and supporting evidence against each of the VfM key lines of enquiry (i.e, 5.1, the authority currently achieves good Value for Money, and 5.2, the authority manages and improves Value for Money) is available on request.

2. How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement?

2.2 How well is the improvement planning being implemented: are key objectives and milestones being achieved?

(Areas for investigation:

- Quality of leadership and strategic direction
- Implementation of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Progress against current improvement

The Authority has very clear ambitions for the future as set out within its 2007/08 Performance Plan.⁶⁴ As with the Authority's performance the development and implementation of the performance plan is the subject of continuous improvement with this year's plan articulating the priorities that lay ahead together with unambiguous direction of travel statements to secure excellence. The plan is underpinned by a robust Medium Term Financial Plan⁶⁵ (MTFP) for the period 2007/08 to 2009/10.

Service delivery and risk reduction improvements are managed through the comprehensive Member led Integrated Risk Management Process⁶⁶ (IRMP) which involves detailed consultation leading to the production of a pragmatic benefit focused action plan.⁶⁷

Delivery of key outcomes from the National Framework 2006-08 are managed through West Midlands Regional Management Board (WMRMB), a strategic partnership that is predominately managed on a day-to-day basis by officers from SWFA. The outcomes achieved are



<p>plans)</p>	<p>recorded within the region's annual reports.⁶⁸</p> <p>Progress against improvement plans as set out within the Performance Plan is excellent and is reported on structured regular basis to the Authority's A&PMC.⁶⁹</p>
<p>2.3 Does the FRA have the capacity to deliver its plans? (Key areas for investigation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial capacity • Organisational development • Workforce planning • Member development • Diversity and equality) 	<p>The Authority has implemented a MTFP⁷⁰ and a People Strategy⁷¹ for the period 2006-09 both of which are reviewed annually. Budget monitoring is regularly undertaken by Policy Group and budget variations are reviewed against the requirements of the establishment. Regular establishment meetings are also held to ensure Executive and financial input and understanding and to maintain links with other plans e.g. IRMP. These meetings are also part of the workforce planning process, considering information provided by HR and Finance on forecast turnover and current budget forecasts and collective decisions are then made about recruitment volume and scheduling. Member of the Fire Authority have the opportunity for a Development Review annually with the ACO and development activities are then targeted to meet the areas of greatest need both individually and collectively.</p> <p>An Equality and Diversity Officer is in post and has responsibility for collating and monitoring progress against the Authorities Equality Schemes and the LG Equality Standard.</p> <p>An organisational Training Needs Analysis has been developed to highlight and provide for key development/training issues and management development occurs regularly.</p> <p>The Authority has recently appointed an 'Information Officer' and invested in a performance management system to improve access to performance information and data quality.</p>
<p>2.4 Is the FRA working with partners and Regional Management Board to improve its capacity to deliver its own priorities and outcomes and contribute to overall improvements across the area? (Areas for Investigation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of partnership working including governance arrangements and cost effectiveness • Working across sector to deliver outcomes for children and young people and the most vulnerable, disadvantaged or potentially excluded groups • Quality and impact of contributions to the RMB at staff and member level • Involvement in RMB work streams • Degree of influence on RMB issues) 	<p>During 2006 a detailed assessment of partnerships was undertaken, with the Service's participation reduced to those partnerships where only real community benefits could be quantified.⁷² In 2007 the Authority commissioned Warwick University Business School⁷³ to work with Service in developing an objective and analytical diagnostic management model to evaluate both historic and future partnerships to determine the tangible benefits realized by local communities. The scope of the study will identify measures for direct financial benefits, direct non-financial benefits and indirect benefits. This innovative and unique piece of work is in progress and is anticipated to have wider benefits to the wider fire and rescue service community.</p> <p>Social exclusion occurs whenever and wherever people feel themselves to be cut off from opportunities and services that most people in society take for granted. Social exclusion is not confined to the inner cities; it exists amongst green fields, beautiful countryside and pretty villages. Yet the hardship experienced by some people in the countryside largely goes unrecognised. Some people in rural areas face the same disadvantages as those in urban areas - low income, lack of a secure home, difficulties reaching health care and services, social isolation and powerlessness. The difference is they are often hidden, obscured in the wider community alongside people in very different circumstances. The rural excluded population was one that we therefore needed to include if we were to be inclusive in our service delivery. In 2006 the Authority invested in a rural community outreach vehicle to support the work our RDS staff were already doing in delivering the fire safety message to rural areas. Recognising that access to rural services was a significant factor to the FRS and to public services as a whole the DCFO became the Chair of both Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin's Rural Access to Services Partnerships.</p> <p>Service officers play a key role in coordinating and managing the region's WMRMB Programme Plan of modernisation. Staff and Members are involved in all of the region's thematic project work streams. The region's programme manager (SWFA's ACFO) also sits on a number of</p>



	<p>national working groups responsible for modernisation within the FRS. SWFA has probably the greatest influence of all FRAs on RMB issues in the region.</p>
<p>2.5 Are there any significant weaknesses in arrangements for securing continuous improvement or failures in corporate governance that would prevent improvement levels being sustained? (Areas for Investigation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance management • Business risk management • Project management • Governance arrangements • Member engagement) 	<p>As stated in the Statement on Internal Control (SIC) 2006/07, no significant issues have been identified in the Authority's internal control environment. The Authority's SIC Assurance Process reviews all aspects of its internal control environment and is driving continuous improvement through the production and implementation of an annual SIC Improvement Plan. Progress against the Plan is monitored by the Risk Management Group, with quarterly reports to the Service's Policy Group and the A&PMC.⁷⁴</p> <p>A weakness in SWFA planning arrangements is the disjoint in national requirements imposed upon FRAs. To address this, the Authority's planning arrangements for 2007/08 will integrate further the existing Strategic Planning Process in order to align Service, Budget and Improvement Planning. The outcome of the proposals will be two overarching integrated strategic documents – a forward looking 'Corporate Plan' and a backward facing performance report - 'Annual Report.'⁷⁵</p> <p>The Authority has recently appointed an 'Information Officer' and invested in a performance management system to improve access to performance information and data quality.</p> <p>Service officers/staff with responsibilities for performance, risk, project and programme management are all qualified to university and accredited government standards (e.g. PRINCE2, MSP, MoR and business degrees).</p> <p>Governance arrangements are robust and well documented.⁷⁶</p>
<p>VfM KLOE</p>	
<p>Key line of enquiry 5.2 The authority manages and improves value for money (Evidence that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authority monitors and reviews value for money • The authority has improved value for money and achieved efficiency gains (limited to the last three years) • Procurement and other spending decisions take account of full long term costs) 	<p>The IRMP process revolves around the use of risk information to ensure that resources are correctly targeted and efficiently and effectively utilised. The target for efficiencies set in the National Framework 2006/08 is 5.67% of total 2004/05 expenditure over 3 years. SWFA have achieved their disaggregated levels of these savings. The Fire Authority has a number of methodologies and structures for promoting and delivering efficiencies and value for money. These are described fully within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2007/08 to 2009/10.</p> <p>SWFA continue to force out efficiency savings as evidenced in the latest MTFP where savings in such areas as hydrant maintenance contract reduction, increased rental income, reissue of PPE, firefighter redeployment and changes to recruit training are described. The MTFP also describes very clearly how SWFA have recognised the pressure which may be imposed on their budgets by the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review and details the approach for dealing with these pressures.</p> <p>Budget management by Departments (and sub department) is now well embedded within SWFA. The approach is described within the Authority's MTFP and budget monitoring is undertaken by senior managers monthly on this basis and by the Fire Authority quarterly.</p> <p>All significant procurement, including the decision whether procurement is appropriate, is based on a full assessment of the need to be met. Procurement activities are constructed to meet these needs using the specialist input of contractors and the proposals are assessed on the basis of the best way to meet the identified need. Costs are assessed over the life of the purchase (RMG Minutes, OH Contract, exemptions papers)</p>



What has been achieved to date/is being achieved?

1. What evidence is there of the fire and rescue authority (FRA) improving outcomes?

1.1. Are services improving in areas the FRA has identified as priorities and areas the public say are important to their communities?

See evidence provided on page 5 above (KLOE 1.1)

1.2. What contribution is the FRA making towards wider community outcomes?

(Areas for investigation:

- Contributions to achievements through the LSP and CDRP and specific initiatives to tackle local priorities such as community safety, anti social behaviour and health

Working across sectors to deliver outcomes for children, young and elderly people)

1.3. To what degree is the FRA improving both access and the quality of service for all its citizens focusing on those who have been 'hard to reach' or previously excluded?

(Areas for investigation:

- Knowledge and understanding of local communities and how they are changing
- Community safety work is targeted to protect the most vulnerable and reach those at highest risk
- Access to information and services is improving for the most disadvantaged, isolated and potentially excluded groups)

The Authority has targeted its limited resources at the key indicators identified in the performance plan. All of our community safety actions were designed to improve the safety of communities and in doing so have a positive impact on our performance as measured by the direction of travel. Examples where the Service works across sectors to deliver safer communities are:

- Working with teams such as the Deaf and Hard of hearing coordinators in Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire the Service has have fitted 120 specialist smoke alarms for deaf people. Additionally our ongoing work in schools teaches children from as young as 5 in the need to have an escape plan at home. A recent survey identified that 46% of Shropshire homes have such a plan.
- Dwelling fires have fallen from 7.3 to 6.0 fires per 10,000, the success here is the work undertaken with traditional hard to reach groups such as minority ethnic people and gypsies and travellers. The Service's Our People at Risk Team, which includes a fire safety advocate from the Muslim and an officer from the Sikh community, have served to target these particular groups. Following visits to both local Mosques by Executive and senior officers the Service's advocates have visited 571 homes of minority ethnic people giving home safety advice in three community languages. Additionally the Service has visited a large number of traveller and gypsy sites, giving information; advice and fitting specialist smoke alarms in mobile homes.
- In targeting hard to reach groups The Service has have worked closely with the Community and Voluntary sector. For example, Age Concern carried out home fire risk assessments in homes of older people especially those exiting from hospital. In 2006/07 they carried out 650 such assessments on behalf of the Authority.

Working through LSPs and CDRPs the Service has:

- Addressed an increasing trend in the number of empty public houses being set alight by working with the local CDRPs, Police and Local Authorities to increase the security fitted to these premises; getting local authority planners to agree to demolition of these properties as quickly as possible before they become targets for the arsonist and working with local police and CSOs to identify local arsonists and deal with them appropriately.
- Partnered with Telford and Wrekin Borough Council to target the removing of 100% of abandoned cars within 24 hours and continuing to work with Police and SOCOs to confirm a worrying trend of deliberate car fires started by igniting the number plate – if correct this could be a significant national discovery.
- Continued the Be Cool Be Safe Quiz and call challenging process. This innovative youth quiz has been running for over 4 years. Sponsored almost completely by partners the quiz (and the online quiz) attracts all but 2 of the county's senior schools. The quiz is used by staff to gain access to schools, to engage and support the learning of the young people in subjects linked to the PHSE curriculum such as water safety, drugs and alcohol, stranger danger, bullying, holiday fire safety and malicious calls. <http://www.becoolbesafe.co.uk/>



- Fire Control staff have been increasingly effective at challenging possible hoax callers and have been very successful in reducing the proportion of such calls attended from 0.36 to 0.33 significantly better than the national average and well in the upper quartile of performance.

In addition to the above the Authority is fully involved with partners in Local Strategic Partnerships and together have achieved much since 2006. The Authority is involved specifically in targets which can be linked with the achievement of the Service's Performance Plan objectives or where working with specific partners reaps rewards in other areas.

See Telford:

<http://www.telford-partnership.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E7EF9EC5-B08D-4595-9C7A-FC2F58F0EAE5/0/FINALLAAFeb20051305.pdf>

Shropshire:

[http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/shroppart.nsf/viewAttachments/RTUR-75MA5T/\\$file/version-4-delivery-plans-may-2007.pdf](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/shroppart.nsf/viewAttachments/RTUR-75MA5T/$file/version-4-delivery-plans-may-2007.pdf)

The Service's local partnerships are seen as high performers. On a recent visit to Telford Phil Woolas, the then minister for Local Government said...

'I have given it the idea of "Team Telford" rather than Jobcentre Plus, Telford Council, Primary Care Trust, Police or fire service...They work not in the silos of their line managers but together for the people of Telford.'

He also described the strong partnership needed for Local Area Agreements to work 'It was described to me in Telford last week...the idea that the public servants across the Partnership work for the people of Telford rather than the Government ministers or Whitehall departments.'

Other initiatives have led to percentage of young offenders re offending (Shropshire) reduced from 54.6 to 46.8 in 2006/07. The Service's intervention workers have had a busy year working with more fire setting children than ever before. Linked through a range of partners and using the Child Index the Service have had 43 children and young people referred for education. The Service have thus supported the significant result of reducing the percentage of young people re-offending in Shropshire from 54.6% to 46.8%.

Work with partners in reducing RTCs began in may 2006 and has led to the implementation of a RTC prevention strategy targeting at risk groups, particularly 17-25 year old males.

In partnership with the Children's Trust, the Service obtained Beacon status for its early intervention work. Using a multi-agency approach it actively participates in Team Around the Child meetings (TAC) where the vulnerable at risk children who demonstrate fire setting behaviour are supported and educated. (20 referrals from Shropshire and 23 from T&W.)

The Service has worked with partners to increase the number of older people who can maintain their safe independence in their home. Working with Age Concern, housing Trusts and the PCT the Service carries out home risk assessments and fit smoke alarms where necessary. In 2006/07 we supported Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire in meeting their BVPIs.

2. How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement?

2.2 How well is the improvement planning being implemented: are key objectives and milestones being achieved?

See evidence provided on pages 6 & 7 above (KLOE 2.2)



2.5 Are there any significant weaknesses in arrangements for securing continuous improvement or failures in corporate governance that would prevent improvement levels being sustained?

- (Areas for investigation:
- Performance management
- Business risk management
- Project management
- Governance arrangements
- Member engagement)

See evidence provided on page 8 above (KLOE 2.5)

VfM KLOE: 5.1 The authority currently achieves good value for money

(Evidence that:

- Costs compare well with others allowing for external factors
- Costs are commensurate with service delivery, performance and outcomes achieved
- Costs reflect policy decisions
- Efficient and effective use of resources in the implementation of the IRMP and action plan, including using more efficient working practices where appropriate)

Case study 1 within the Audit Commission publication entitled 'Fire and Rescue performance assessment - scores and analysis of performance in fire and rescue authorities 2006' refers to both the performance and cost of SWFA, e.g., *'the service is performing well in priority areas and in relation to the national framework'* and *'the service is providing good value for money. Its costs compare well with others and have remained below average.'*

The Retained Review has now been implemented and the investment of £824,000 in 2006/07 in the Retained Service can clearly be seen to be paying dividends. Recruitment has increased, firefighter retention has improved, fire engine availability has improved, retained firefighters have fitted many thousands of smoke alarms and SWFA are held up as best practice nationally for the way in which improvements to the Retained Service have been achieved. Most recently over 140 delegates from all corners of the UK attended a seminar organised and held by SFRS to share best practice; the conference has received widespread acclaim through the fire and local press.

Asset Management planning is used to align investment and ongoing expenditure on physical resources directly contributes to the Authority's aims and objectives

The extra capacity created through joint working through WMRMB has enabled the delivery of several key National Framework objectives. The Authority is keen to promote and foster regional collaboration to aid capacity building.



What plans does the authority have for the future?

2. How much progress is being made to implement improvement plans to sustain future improvement?

2.1 Does the FRA have robust plans for improving? (Aligned with other plans, SMART¹, detailed, resourced, agreed and widely communicated?)

(Areas for investigation:

- Strategic planning
- Key plans are SMART; integrated with each other; cover the medium to long term; and, support the vision and aims of the authority
- Plans are clearly communicated internally to staff and authority members and externally to the public and to partners)

The Authority has a long tradition of producing robust plans for the delivery of improvements, plans that undergo regular review and continuous improvement. The Authority undergoes a strategic planning process on an annual basis, a process based on SWOT analysis.⁷⁷ The outcome of this process is the annual Performance Plan. As a further enhancement in the Authority's planning arrangements for 2007/08 will be to integrate further the existing Strategic Planning Process in order to align Service, Budget and Improvement Planning. The outcome of the proposals will be two overarching integrated strategic documents – a forward looking 'Corporate Plan' and a backward facing performance report - 'Annual Report.'⁷⁸

Priorities for 2007/08 are set out within the Performance Plan 2007/08.⁷⁹

The key plans – Performance Plan, MTFP and IRMP are integrated and SMART. Moreover, progress against the priorities and objectives set out within these plans is monitored on a regular basis by the Authority.

Plans are communicated to Members, staff and key stakeholders with the Service's website⁸⁰ acting as a central reference library.

2.3 Does the FRA have the capacity to deliver its plans?

(Key areas for investigation:

- Financial capacity
- Organisational development
- Workforce planning
- Member development
- Diversity and equality)

The Service's wholtime pumps have a 100% availability record and availability of RDS pumps has increased steadily with the introduction of Retained Support Officers and their efforts to increase the number of new recruits we attract (as referred to elsewhere). The Service now only have 2 out of 23 of the RDS stations identified as being in priority need of new recruits and all of the last 3 recruitment courses have been at full capacity.

Training delivery has increased to over 80% each month and the number of 'wasted' places at training centre is reducing. New recruit training is undertaken regionally with Staffordshire and Hereford and Worcester with instructor support supplied by Shropshire.

The extra capacity created through joint working through WMRMB has enabled the delivery of several key National Framework objectives. The Authority is keen to promote and foster regional collaboration to aid capacity building.

European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (Leonardo)⁸¹ has provided additional financial capacity (51,000€) to enable the exchange of 36 members of staff and Fire Authority members in 2007 to five European countries for.⁸²

2.4 Is the FRA working with partners and Regional Management Board to improve its capacity to deliver its own priorities and outcomes and contribute to overall improvements across the area?

In addition to the evidence set out above in respect of regional working (KLOE 2.3 and 2.4) officers from this Authority are now preparing the WMRMB Programme Plan for 2008-11, a three year plan that will deliver the requirements of the soon to be issued National Framework 2008-11. To secure the most effective arrangements for the delivery of the new Framework officers plan to undertake a review of current arrangements utilizing the Government issued 'Partnership Assessment Tool.'⁸³

¹ Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed



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