

Draft Improvement Priorities for Inclusion within the Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report summarises the Fire Authority's statutory responsibilities to prepare and publish an annual best value performance plan and presents a suite of draft improvement priorities for consideration and inclusion within the plan at a later date.

2 Recommendations

The Audit and Performance Management Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

The Local Government Act 1999 places a statutory requirement¹ upon best value authorities, which by definition² includes fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), to prepare and publish an annual best value performance plan. The form and content of the performance plan is determined by guidance³ that the Secretary of State may issue from time to time. The existing two-year Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Performance Plan 2006-08 was published in June 2006 and satisfied the then relevant issued guidance.⁴

1 Local Government Act 1999 Chapter 27, Section 6. – (1).

2 *Ibid* Section 1. – (1), e.

3 *ibid* Section 6. – (4).

4 ODPM Circular 02/2004 - Local Government Act 1999: Part 1 Best Value and Performance Improvement Guidance on Best Value Performance Plans



The most recent guidance to which the Fire Authority is minded to take note of is:

- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Circular 05/2006 Addendum to ODPM Circular 02/2004 - Local Government Act 1999: Part 1 Best Value and Performance Improvement Guidance on Best Value Performance Plans
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Fire and Rescue Circular 57-2006: Improvement planning for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2006-07
- Communities and Local Government (CLG) Fire and Rescue Circular 5-2007: Improvement planning for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2007-08

The key aspects of the above guidance were presented to the Fire Authority at its most recent meeting on 14 February 2007.

4 Implications for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

Cognisant of the statutory requirements and associated guidance, the Fire Authority has agreed to repeat the previously approved Strategic Planning Framework as set out within the Fire Authority's current Performance Plan (page 14). The outcome of this process will be a 'refreshed' version of the present two-year performance plan, that will require publication by no later than 30 June 2007, to adhere to current Government guidance.

A planning constraint noted by the Fire Authority is that any improvement priorities identified to address the performance shortfalls identified through the recent Use of Resources assessment should ideally be agreed prior to 31 March 2007. This requirement is set out within the Audit Commission's consultation document 'Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 and proposals for re-categorisation' (issued November 2006). The consultation document states that:

"...the cut off date for inclusion of evidence in the use of resources assessment would be set at the end of the financial year. We are therefore proposing that in 2007/08 this date will be 31 March 2007... In setting a cut off date at the end of the financial year our assessments will take into account outcomes delivered after that date, but the arrangements must have been in place before that date."⁵

The Audit Commission's formal results arising from the Performance Assessment Framework undertaken during 2006/07 will not be released in full for all fire authorities until April 2007. The results (see report 7 on the agenda for this meeting) arising from the Service Assessment element were published in February 2007. Results from the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessments, undertaken in 2006, were, however, only published in mid-

⁵ Audit Commission (2006) Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 and proposals for re-categorisation. Para 24.



March 2007, too late to be considered in full within the agreed strategic planning process timetable set by the Fire Authority. Notwithstanding the latter, the Audit Commission has been extremely helpful in providing early informal feedback, upon which a number of improvement planning assumptions can be made.

5 Identifying 'Improvement Priorities'

The Fire Authority has identified and recorded within the current Performance Plan (page 16) a suite of 'Shared Priorities.' These shared priorities were identified through the application of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis framework in early 2006. This same process was repeated in February 2007 to review the existing shared priorities and identify new priorities, renaming them as 'Improvement Priorities' thus adopting Communities and Local Government and Audit Commission terminology.

SWOT analysis is an important tool for auditing the overall strategic position of a business and its environment. It is a general technique, which can be applied across diverse functions and activities, but it is particularly appropriate to the early stages of strategic planning and is for the most part appropriate in addressing the planning needs of the Fire Authority. Once the key improvement priorities have been identified through a SWOT analysis, they feed into the Fire Authority's objective and target setting process to be undertaken during April/May 2007.

Performing a SWOT analysis involves generating and recording strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is customary for the analysis to take account of internal resources and capabilities (strengths and weaknesses) and factors external to the organisation (opportunities and threats). A SWOT analysis workshop has taken place, with 19 officers/managers representative of all departments of the Service taking part. Workshop attendees reviewed a wide range of performance data, information and emerging factors that resulted in an initial 184 issues being identified. These issues were further reviewed and prioritised, leading to an eventual list of improvement priorities for further consideration as part of the Fire Authority's overall strategic planning process. The identified improvement priorities are set out within the attached appendix. The results of this exercise have been shared with the Audit Commission's relationship manager.

The improvement priorities will be the subject of further review in April/May pending release of the results from the Cultural Audit and a full evaluation of the recently published Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessments. Officers will thereafter bring forward to the Strategy and Resources Committee on 24 May the draft Performance Plan 2007/08, incorporating the refreshed improvement priorities for consideration.

Members are recommended to note the outcomes arising from the SWOT Analysis workshop.



6 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any consequential financial implications arising from the preparation of a revised performance plan as set out within this paper will be the subject of a separate report.

7 Legal Comment

The Local Government Act 1999 places a statutory requirement upon Fire and Rescue Authorities to prepare and publish an annual best value performance plan. The Fire Authority's legal responsibilities are set out within this report.

The adoption of the proposals outlined in this report by the Authority will ensure compliance with its statutory obligations.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed. It is, however, fully recognised that the proposed arrangements set out within this report to prepare and publish a revised performance plan will be subject to Equality Impact Assessments as deemed applicable at the appropriate times.

9 Appendix

Draft Improvement Priorities 2007/08

10 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

Performance Plan 2006-08

14 February 2007 Report 18 - Best Value Performance Plan 2006-08

Government

Local Government Act 1999, Chapter 27, Sections 1 and 6

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Circular 02/2004 - Local Government Act 1999: Part 1 Best Value and Performance Improvement Guidance on Best Value Performance Plans

Department for Communities and Local Government Fire and Rescue Circular 57-2006 - Improvement Planning for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2006/07



Communities and Local Government Fire and Rescue Circular 5-2007 -
Improvement Planning for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2007/08

Audit Commission (2006) Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 and
proposals for re-categorisation

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk); the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment	*	Operational Assurance	*
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	*
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	*
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*



Draft Improvement Priorities 2007/08

SWOT factor	Improvement Priority	Improvement aims/actions/issues to support delivery of Improvement Priority	Aligned to Performance Plan Strategic Aims and Objectives
Strengths*	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Skills/Competency • Culture • Commitment 	3.8, 3.9, 5.16, 5.17
	Leadership/ Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Direction • Stability • Vision 	4.13
	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration • Controlled • Flexible • Risk based reserves 	4.11
	Management Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structures/Procedures • Evidence • Budget • Review 	4.13
	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Reliability • Availability • Capacity 	3.10
	Partnership/ Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement • Consultation • Governance • Influence 	4.11
Weaknesses	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve succession planning • Implement rank to role • Further develop all line management skills • Improve management of poor performance 	3.9
	Measurement of Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set targets (outcomes) • Measure against targets • Re-evaluate partnerships • Benefits management 	4.11



	Data Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint Information Officer • Introduce new systems e.g. IRS, Resourcelink, Psoft, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training ○ Support • Implement new Information Technology and Communications Strategy 	4.13
	Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase positive action • More female staff • More black and minority ethnic staff • Remove barriers to disabled persons 	5.17
	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align Medium Term Financial Plan to objectives • Remedy weaknesses in accounts • Maintain and improve budget flexibility 	4
	Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced regional • Learn from others • Share best practice 	4.11
Opportunities	Efficiency Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firebuy • Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) 	4.12
	Service Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRMP Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road traffic collisions ○ Water safety ○ Co-responders ○ Neighbours 	4.12
	Central Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek funding opportunities • Flooring release • Favourable settlement 	4.12
	Stakeholder Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRMP • Effective management of partnerships • Influence media/present positive image • Consult widely • Maximise new CPA score 	4.11
	Staffing (Increased Turnover)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit best people • Ensure processes don't jeopardise diversity • Address outcomes of Cultural Audit 	3.9



	Information systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate systems • Maximise opportunities from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MIS ○ FireCotrol/IRS • Make information more user-friendly 	4.13
	Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate methods of reducing environmental impact 	4.14
Threats	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on co-responding for Fire Authority • Performance indicators for all activities • Process for Business Plan, change in line with cost benefit analysis 	4.13
	Regional Convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain good links with regional delivery teams • Keep eye on Local Authority Controlled Company governance • Properly resourced convergence 	4.11, 4.12
	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish action plan to deal with Cultural Audit • Close down current issues (CPA, rank to role etc.) • Maintain recruitment process 	3.5, 5.16, 5.17
	Government Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up finance scenarios to identify possible outcomes of Comprehensive Spending Review • Continue to lobby for increase in floor 	4
	Government Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research into Fire Authority carbon footprint • Link carbon emissions with fires • Induction package for Members • Member – MP – Officer regular meetings • Fire Authority lobby group 	2.7, 3.9
	Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up practice contingency plans • Key roles - processed mapped 	1.2

* Improvement priorities from strengths were viewed differently in that the strengths of the organisation are a given and seen as supporting the other improvement aims.

