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Joint Risk Assessment

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

As well as highlighting a number of areas in which there has been improvement, the updated Joint Risk Assessment highlights a number of key operational and non-operational priorities which should support the Authority's efforts to reduce the high number of accidental fire deaths, particularly the need to support the strategic vision with actions to support priorities identified in the Risk Reduction Plan.

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Summary

1. The Wales Audit Office delivers the Wales Programme for Improvement (Fire) by inspecting the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs). This inspection takes the form of an operational assessment, undertaken by a Peer Assessment Team observed by Wales Audit Office staff and a non-operational assessment undertaken by Wales Audit Office staff. This process results in a Joint Risk Assessment (JRA) agreed by the Wales Audit Office, Peer Assessment Team and officers of the Fire and Rescue Service. The JRA is updated each year and informs the regulatory work – audit and inspection – undertaken.
2. This report summarises the key issues to have emerged from the updated JRA which we have recently developed with your officers. This updates the JRA which was presented to the FRA in June 2007. The work undertaken examined progress made over the past year and was also informed by a thematic operational assessment, which considered the preparedness of Fire and Rescue Services for major disruptive events, with a particular focus on wide scale flooding.
3. The key risks and priorities identified through the JRA process should inform the Authority's annual Improvement Plan and Risk Reduction Action Plan, as well as informing the process of determining audit and inspection work through the agreement of the Regulatory Plan which we will discuss with officers and present to the Authority.
4. The updated JRA highlights a number of key operational and non-operational priorities which should support the Authority's efforts to reduce the high number of accidental fire deaths, particularly the need to support the strategic vision with actions to support priorities identified in the Risk Reduction Plan.
5. This report summarises the high-level findings of the JRA and is not exhaustive in listing every risk facing the Authority. The detailed findings are set out in the Risk Assessment Template (RAT) which will be made available to members in electronic format. Members may wish to consult the RAT for further information and detail. The RAT categorises the inherent risk and level of residual risk in each area of the WPI framework, using high/medium and low categorisations of risk which were discussed and agreed with senior officers.
6. The Wales Audit Office will continue to update the JRA annually, and will work with officers and members to actively promote improvement. This report is intended to set out some of the key issues for the new Authority in a way that will help Members and officers to deliver their Risk Reduction and Improvement Plans and to improve fire safety in North Wales.

The operational assessment identified improvements but also highlighted key risks relating to the high number of accidental fire deaths, risk analysis, spate conditions and operational policies

- 7.** The JRA highlights a number of areas of progress identified by the operational assessment:
 - Risk analysis and the development of controls via the Risk Reduction Forum, allocation of risks to senior officers and reporting to the Chief Officer to support the implementation of the Task Group report, and member engagement in Risk Reduction Planning.
 - The Authority is a key player in the Local Resilience Forum and is working to improve further its communication with individual fire fighters and stations about local resilience issues.
 - There has been progress populating the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model.
 - An overarching Business Continuity Management policy has been developed and its implementation is underway; there has been progress in respect of Civil Contingencies: the Authority is the lead agency in North Wales on Chemical, Biological, Radioactive and Nuclear events and has led the development with its partners of a multi-agency response plan.
 - A joint control room with the North Wales Police is due to open later this year and will represent a unique approach; while this represents a potentially significant step forward, the Authority will need to manage carefully any risks arising from the inevitable 'bedding in' period for the new arrangements.
 - The Peer Assessment Team found that the Service has 'demonstrated though all its activities a strong desire to learn and improve service delivery to the public. There is clear evidence demonstrating that the service responds to critical events elsewhere and implements appropriate changes in a timely fashion.' The Service has commenced a programme of station based audits involving peer challenge.
- 8.** The JRA update and work on flooding also identified a number of key risks which had either a high or medium level of residual risks which are set out in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: main risks from the operational assessment

Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/ controls	Level of inherent/ residual risk
Risk analysis	<p>The PAT Team noted that: North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) identify and manage risks to the organisation through its risk reduction forum. This together with a clear organisational structure ensures that risk is identified and managed at an appropriate level. The service has a current Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) that clearly identifies its priorities in developing Community resilience and more critically the resilience of service delivery. There is clear evidence that the Combined Fire Authority have been engaged in the process of implementing risk reduction measures.</p>	<p>Failure to keep risk register up-to-date.</p>	<p>The Service has developed an approach to managing risks, including a focus on earlier studies and the risks these identified. The approach incorporates the last operational peer review and the CFO's Task Force Report. Senior officers have been allocated specific actions and have to report on progress to the CFO at regular intervals.</p>	<p>H/M</p>
Chief Officer's Task Group	<p>Chief Officer's Task Group: A Chief Fire Officer's Task Group has been setup to review the significant increase in the number of accidental fire deaths. This was chaired by the CFO and also included the Chief Constable of North Wales and the Chief Executive of Flintshire.</p>	<p>Potential risk around capacity to delivery of objectives arising from the CFO Task Force</p>	<p>Actions identified in last year's Peer Review and the CFO's Task Force report are being implemented. The CFO is taking overall control of this process and receives regular updates from managers on progress.</p>	<p>H/H</p>

Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/ controls	Level of inherent/ residual risk
Operational intelligence	The 2008 PAT Team noted that: It is recognised that further development of the operational intelligence project will provide these staff with more current and specific risk information; although development in this area is hampered by the absence of a mobile data solution. Recent events involving the loss of life of fire-fighters need to be reviewed by the Service and a lessons learned approach adopted	Potential risk that operational information will not be available to fire fighters	In advance of any formal findings from the HSE the Service has fully reviewed its systems for collecting and distributing risk information on premises 7.2(d) information.	H/M
Spate conditions policy	The 2008 PAT Team Noted that: There is a spat conditions policy in place, which has been validated operationally, and the risk modelling of resources that has been undertaken will further support this.	Failure to maintain operational response during times of peak demand	The Service has undertaken a key station plan exercise to ensure the service can respond under extreme conditions when only a minimal number of stations would be available.	H/M
Operational policies available at the incident ground	The 2007 PAT Team noted that: Operational Policies: A suite of operational policies is available to all personnel electronically, however, the Service would benefit from a review of these to reflect changes in legislation and to conduct equalities impact assessments. The Service would also benefit from a system that ensures that operational policies are being accessed and understood by personnel. Operational aide memoirs are available to all operational personnel and these are kept up to date.	Potential for operational ineffectiveness / error due to working to policies that are not updated	The 2007 PAT Team noted that: Further work is required to ensure that up to date risk critical data, including 7.2(d) information, is consistently available at the incident ground. This is being addressed.	H/H

Source: Wales Audit Office, Risk Assessment Template.

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9. Clearly, the priority for the Authority will be to implement the recommendations of the Chief Officer's Task Group to reduce the level of accidental fire deaths which is one of the highest of any FRA in England or Wales¹. The Authority's Risk Reduction Plan sets out a series of actions that will be needed to promote fire safety and prevent fires in high risk communities. The non-operational assessment links directly with this because of the difficulties of the Authority in supporting key elements of the Risk Reduction Plan (see also paragraph 12), which could compromise efforts to address the key issues identified by the Chief Officer's Task Group and are the reason the higher level of residual risk than in last year's JRA. Reducing accidental fire deaths by promoting fire safety and effectively targeting preventative activity is clearly the major priority for the Authority.
10. While the main focus will inevitably remain reductions in accidental fire deaths, the Authority also needs to address the following key operational risks:
- the current level of accidental fire deaths means that risk analysis will remain a key priority;
 - the further development of the operational intelligence project, with a particular view to responding to and learning from the lessons that will continue to emerge from the recent tragedy in Atherstone, and also to provide staff with more current and specific risk information although development in this area is hampered by the absence of a mobile data solution;
 - the ongoing development of the spate conditions policy by risk modelling resources; evidence suggests that wildfires place a significant strain on the Service's current resources and the effects of such events could be reduced by engaging the LRF as has been the case for flooding; and
 - ensuring that operational policies are available at the incident ground.

The Authority needs to develop and deliver a clear direction of travel to address the challenges, operational, financial and organisation that it faces

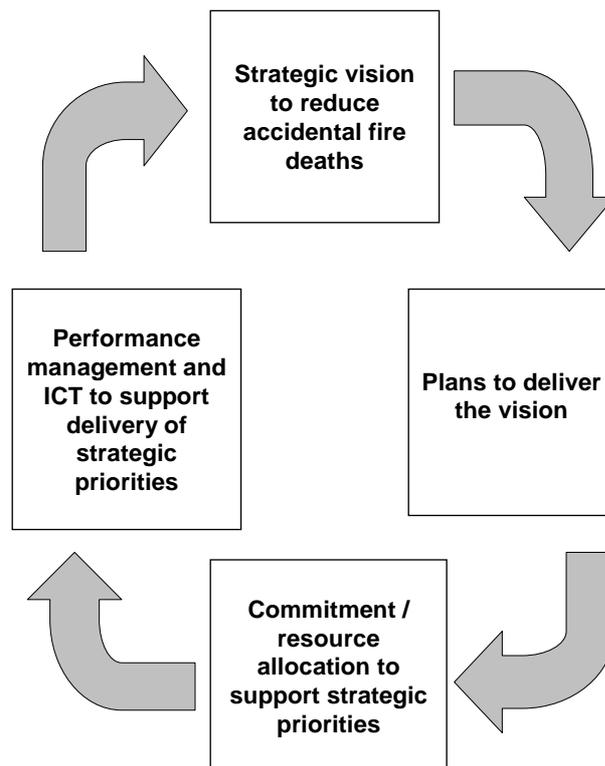
11. The non-operational assessment highlighted a number of areas of progress:
- developments in communications, including a new website, a communications strategy and new corporate communications team, whose public engagement had led to a significant volume of requests for home fire safety audits;

¹ Fire Statistic Monitors (2006 – Provisional), Department for Communities and Local Government.

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- a number of positive examples of partnership working which included joint work with the North Wales Police who lead strategic procurement on behalf of the Authority, the joint control room project, the joint facilities unit and Local Resilience Forum; the recently agreed data sharing protocols with local authorities and NHS Trusts represent a significant step forward and potentially good practice within the sector, and the Authority is contributing to Local Service Boards in North Wales;
 - public engagement where the number of home fire safety audits increased from 14,000 to 26,000 between 2006/2007 and 2007/2008;
 - the Authority is pursuing the Welsh Local Government Association Members' Charter and will need to address the recommendations and good practice examples to emerge from the Wales Audit Office's report on this subject;
 - there have been changes in management arrangements, including a new strategic rota and management structure which seeks to make best use of managerial skills available;
 - the Authority is populating the Fynnon performance management system; and
 - the Welsh Assembly Government has awarded the Authority the Gold Occupational Health award, and the Authority is working towards Green Dragon accreditation.
- 12.** The non-operational assessment highlighted some significant risks that will need to be addressed to support the key priorities identified in the operational assessment. The key challenges are around agreeing the strategic vision and then translating that vision into action. Although the previous Authority had a clear strategy to address the high rate of accidental fire deaths, expressed in the Risk Reduction Plan and Improvement Plan, there were problems agreeing to deliver actions implied by those documents. After the consultation period for the 2008/2009 Risk Reduction Action Plan, the Fire Authority was not able to support all of its four recommendations. In particular, two key changes proposed by the Service, namely those dealing with changes to rostering and a proposed 'dedicated response option' which would allow the Service to fund improved fire prevention activity, were not agreed by members of the Fire Authority. This may affect the ability of the Service to fully implement its proposals to improve the level of service delivery and community safety initiatives.
- 13.** Linked to this, the Authority faces pressures in respect of financial standing where the challenging financial settlement, and need to prioritise the use of resources to deliver increased preventative activity consistent with the Risk Reduction Plan, could compromise the delivery of the Authority's strategic objectives. Identifying means of committing and reallocating resources to key strategic priorities to support increased prevention and fire safety activity to reduce the level of accidental fire deaths is likely to be one of the most pressing issues for the new Authority, particularly in the context of a very challenging financial environment.

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14. There are still high or medium risks in terms of performance management, e-fire and rescue, equalities and sustainability although in all three areas the Authority has taken action to address the risks. Exhibit 2 sets out the links between some of the key non-operational risks identified in the Joint Risk Assessment, which are described in more detail in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 2: There are links between some of the key non-operational risks facing the Authority



Source: Wales Audit Office.

Exhibit 3: main risks from the non-operational assessment

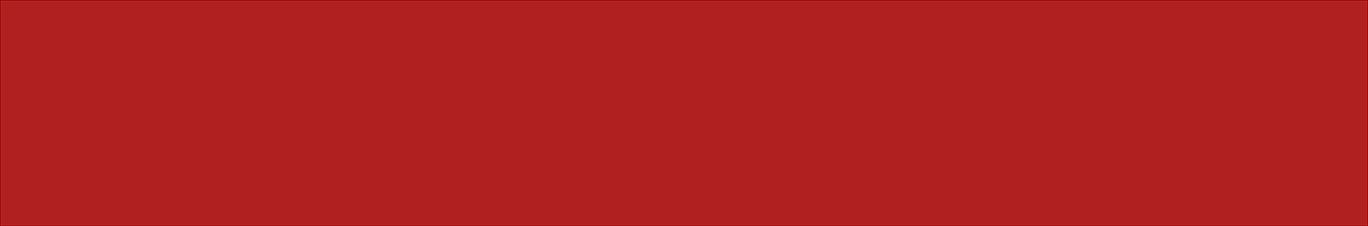
Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/controls	Level of inherent/residual risk
Strategic vision	<p>Strong strategic lead provided by senior officers and the FRA which is well communicated to staff. A Risk Reduction Plan is in place and is available on the website, as is the Improvement Plan. Wide consultation held on the RRP and the final document lays out clear areas for improvement in each key section. The Improvement Plan and the RRP are linked with the same vision and objectives. The Improvement Plan gives details of performance on targets compared to all Wales and its own family group.</p>	<p>Potential failure to ensure clarity of vision.</p>	<p>The 2008-2009 consultation period of the RRP has been completed. However, the Fire Authority was not able to support all of the four recommendations. In particular, two key changes proposed by the Service, namely those dealing with changes to rostering and a proposed 'dedicated response option' which would allow the Service to fund an improved fire prevention actively, were not agreed by members of the Fire Authority.</p>	H/H
Plans to deliver the vision	<p>Strong leadership in place to embed prevention activities. Community Safety Managers head up the Fire Service in each County Area with strong links to the local Community Safety Partnership and local fire safety priorities. Senior managers are promoting the structure of command adopted by the FRS and are maintaining this approach through communicating with staff and station visits by senior officers which are programmed corporately. The PAT Team noted that: The Service and its County</p>	<p>Plans to deliver vision and strategic priorities.</p>	<p>Senior Managers regularly monitor and review current structures to ensure that they reflect external challenges and best practice and key actions from the peer reviews and the CFO Task Force which are reported to the CFO at regular intervals. The reluctance of the Fire Authority to support key proposals within the 2008-2009 RRP may affect the ability of the Service to fully implement its proposals to improve the level of service delivery and community safety initiatives. The potential for large scale retirements of fire fighters recruited to the service in</p>	H/H

Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/controls	Level of inherent/residual risk
Plans to deliver the vision (continued)	Managers work enthusiastically with partner organisations throughout North Wales to drive down risk. This work could be enhanced by the development of a service wide policy, to ensure a consistent approach to managing the varying levels of community risk across the Service area.		the late 1970s, and the longer duration of recruitment and training than their notice period, could compromise workforce capacity to deliver the vision and maintain service to the public.	
Member engagement and scrutiny	There are clear Member structures in place within the Fire Authority and meetings of the Fire Authority and its sub committees take place across the FRS area. Members have agreed the terms of reference of the Executive Panel and there are Standing Orders in place for the Fire Authority covering the roles of members based on Conwy County Council, however these are being updated by the Council during 2007/2008. The latest Annual Audit Letter did not raise any particular concerns with regard to governance and management structures with the FRS.	Failure to deliver changes to structures when needed and provide effective corporate management and support services	A Members' charter is to be adopted which will include induction training for new members along with short training sessions about the role and responsibilities of being a member of the Fire Authority to ensure a good level of understanding by Members of their own roles and responsibilities. The Fire Authority has adopted a series of Members' working groups including a Champions' Group which has proposed that the Fire Authority progress with the adoption of the Members' Charter and has endorsed the required work need to achieve the basic level of this Charter.	M/M

Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/controls	Level of inherent/residual risk
Financial standing	The Authority has a good track record of operating within its budget and its overall financial position is sound, however, actual expenditure in 2006/2007 exceeded the approved budget by £121,000. The overspend was funded from the release of money from specific provisions. Latest budget monitoring report estimates expenditure for 2007/2008 will be in line with budget.	Potential failure to ensure robust financial management	The Service is aware of its financial pressures and its need to maintain effective financial standing to ensure the delivery of the Service. Regular internal budget/performance management meetings with heads of departments have been introduced to improve financial management.	H/M
Performance management	A Performance Management System has been established, and BVPI data is collected and reported but it is not linked to FSEC data. The AAL reported that the PM system needs to be strengthened and the last report on the PMF concluded that 'although the Authority is making progress and there is a performance management framework in place, it needs to be strengthened. The Authority has recognised what needs to be done but sufficient resources are required to ensure the plans can be fully implemented'.	Potential failure to meet objectives with the RRP due to a lack of a robust performance management framework	The FRS is to adopt Ffynnon software and staff training and the population of data is underway.	H/M

Aspect	Description	Potential impact	Mitigating measures/controls	Level of inherent/residual risk
E-fire and rescue	Development of IT systems needs to be addressed to enable better effectiveness in the approach of the FRS. The FRS told us that it has resolved historical problems with software licences. New ICT manager in place and is progressing the findings of a major review of ICT services.	Potential failure to maintain effective IT systems	Wales Audit Office review programmed to establish whether effective arrangements are in place to manage IT risk. The Service recognises that there are still problems with remote infrastructures. It is investing over the next three years to address these difficulties.	H/M
Sustainability	Each building is being assessed against current environmental legislation. RRP highlights environmental impact.	Failure to ensure sustainability is fully embedded	The Service has recognised the level of risk to delivery due to capacity of resources and budgets. The Service has set up a joint facilities unit with North Wales Police and has instigated recycling procedures in all stations, undertaken an assessment of main buildings and is progressing towards the first level of 'green dragon'	H/H
Equalities	Equalities is part of the Asset Management Plan with diversity and DDA part of the approach to scoring. Diversity is also embedded in basic training programme. Equalities Impact Assessment guidance has been produced and has been consulted on by the Equality and Diversity Forum, and has now been adopted.	Failure to meet legislative requirements	Staff appraisals now include an equalities assessment and it forms part of the County Service plans	H/H

Source: Wales Audit Office, Risk Assessment Template.



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