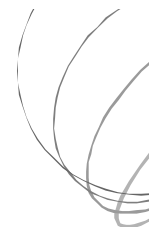


# Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authority

**Performance Audit report 2006**



# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Part 4. Workforce management</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Part 5. Management of operational business</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Part 1. Strategic management</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Part 6. Communication</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Part 2. Fire prevention and risk management</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Part 7. Improvement agenda</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Part 3. Financial management</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Appendix 1. Glossary</b>	<b>34</b>



# Executive summary

1. Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authority (the FRA) has a clear strategic direction which reflects the requirements of the Fire Scotland Act 2005 and accompanying national framework and is designed to meet local needs. The FRA has been through recent fundamental change, with the appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in February 2006.
2. Board members and the senior management team demonstrate a strong commitment to the service reform agenda. There is scope to improve service planning and performance management is significantly underdeveloped. The FRA has enhanced its capacity through participation in the South East Scotland Collaboration Group. The May 2007 elections provide an opportunity to introduce a development programme for members and review the Board's structural arrangements to reflect the service reform agenda.
3. The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is the key document for realising the FRA's vision, and has resulted in a shift of resources from intervention to prevention. The FRA undertakes a wide range of community safety activities, although many of these pre-date IRMP and have not been systematically evaluated against current corporate objectives. Progress on home fire safety checks has been slow, although the FRA now has plans in place for further work in this area. There is scope for the FRA to make greater use of retained staff in the delivery of community safety.
4. Partnership working is recognised as valuable but there is no overall strategic approach to partnership working, although the FRA has developed a partnership register. There is scope for the FRA to do more to consider the principles of Best Value when designing services in response to IRMP objectives and ensuring it is delivering efficient and effective services.
5. The FRA has a draft people management strategy and needs to progress its implementation. There has been good progress on implementation of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) to wholetime firefighters. Support for retained firefighters and non-uniformed staff<sup>1</sup> has been less well-developed, however the FRA has recently put significant resources into training and development for these staff. There is a clear commitment to equality and diversity within the organisation.
6. The FRA is committed to improving communication but it has made slow progress since 2004. The FRA has produced a draft communication strategy that embraces mainly internal communications, and now needs to expand and progress it. The FRA also needs to develop its approach to public

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term non-uniformed is used to describe only those staff who are not subject to the NJC Schemes of Conditions of Service Sixth edition 2004. We have used this term in the absence of any nationally agreed description for this group of staff. Some FRAs use 'support staff' and/or 'corporate staff'.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts Commission (2004) Scottish Fire Services. Verification of the progress of modernisation (March) and the second verification of the progress of modernisation (October).



performance reporting in order to meet fully the legislative requirements under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003.

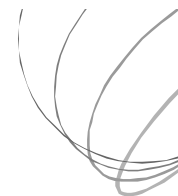
7. Overall, the FRA has made reasonable progress since the 2004 Accounts Commission Phase 2 Verification Audit. IRMP is delivering a shift in resources from intervention to prevention, the transition from rank to role has been substantially implemented, and a number of new policies to improve efficiency implemented. The new CFO and Senior Management Team need to work quickly to deliver their ambitious programme for improvement.



# Introduction

## Background

8. Fire and rescue authorities across the UK are undergoing an extensive programme of modernisation following the National Joint Council (NJC) agreement on pay and conditions in 2003. This programme of change is intended to move authorities towards a more targeted and risk-based approach to prevention, protection and emergency response.
9. As part of the NJC agreement, the Accounts Commission undertook a verification exercise to examine whether the intended benefits of the various national changes under modernisation were being delivered locally. This was conducted in two phases during 2004 with reports on progress produced in March and October of that year<sup>3</sup>.
10. The second verification on the progress of modernisation reported that progress was being made in Scotland and that the building blocks were in place. However, the report concluded there was still a significant amount of work to be done before real change would be delivered on the ground. As a result, the Accounts Commission asked Audit Scotland to undertake a performance audit on the Scottish fire and rescue authorities during 2006, to include a review of the overall outcomes of modernisation.
11. Following the NJC agreement, new legislation was enacted in Scotland under the Fire Scotland Act 2005, which provides the statutory framework to enable Scottish fire and rescue authorities to modernise their services. The Act is accompanied by a statutory Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland, finalised in September 2005, which sets out the priorities, objectives and guidance for fire and rescue authorities.
12. With enabling legislation and a new statutory framework in place, the Commission agreed a project brief for a national performance audit of fire and rescue authorities, in February 2006. The overall focus of the audit was the extent to which fire and rescue authorities are achieving the objectives of modernisation, and in particular whether:
  - Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) are effectively supporting the change in emphasis from intervention to prevention, and
  - the progress to modernisation is reflected in the culture of the organisation.
13. During the summer of 2006, an Audit Scotland performance audit team visited all eight FRAs. In each authority, the audit team conducted an extensive range of interviews, reviewed relevant documents and analysed performance information. The audit team reviewed six areas of performance:
  - Strategic management



- Fire prevention and risk management
  - Financial management
  - Workforce management
  - Management of operational business
  - Communication.
14. This local audit report presents our findings and conclusions against these six areas for Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authority (the FRA). A national report summarising our findings for all Scottish Fire and Rescue Authorities will be published around February 2007.
15. In conducting the local audit work, Audit Scotland reviewed the inspection report of Central Scotland FRA by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland (HMFSIS). The inspection was carried out in November and December 2005.
16. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the audit team by the many councillors, FRA staff and other stakeholders who assisted us in our audit work.

## Local context

17. Central Scotland is the second smallest geographical area in Scotland to be served by an FRA, covering 2,643 sq km —3.4% of Scotland —and delivering services to a population of 284,379 —some 5.5% of Scotland's population as at June 2005. This gives a population density of 108 persons per sq km against a Scottish average of 65 persons per sq km.
18. The FRA serves three council areas: Clackmannanshire, Stirling and Falkirk. The region is diverse, spanning sparsely populated and remote rural areas in Stirling as well as densely populated Central Belt settlements in and around the towns of Stirling, Falkirk and Grangemouth.
19. The population of Central Scotland is projected to increase by 5% by 2024, though this headline figure masks significant local variations. For example, the population of Stirling Council's area is projected to increase by 5% in that period, while the population of Falkirk Council is projected to increase by 7%.
20. There are also marked changes in the demographic profile. By 2024, the number of persons aged 0-15 is forecast to decrease by 12% across Scotland, and by 14% in Clackmannanshire. Conversely, the population aged 75+ is set to increase by 53% across Scotland, by 59% in Falkirk, 67% in Stirling and 87% in Clackmannanshire. As the demographic profile changes, so will the nature of the risks which the FRA must contend with.
21. The 2001 Census identified that some 1.1% of the population in Central Scotland came from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Recent years have seen a substantial amount of new house building and



immigration to Falkirk and its hinterland, with a rise in the size of Falkirk's Polish community. The increasing diversity of the population brings specific challenges to the FRA, noticeably around risk mapping and reduction, and in ensuring that preventative community safety messages can be communicated effectively across all geographical communities and communities of interest.

22. Parts of the area covered by Central Scotland FRA feature prominently in the Scottish Executive's Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), and there is a strong link between living in an area of deprivation and being at risk from fire. The Executive has mapped in 6,505 'datazones' across Scotland, founded on Census output areas. In Clackmannanshire nearly a quarter (23%) of the datazones are among the 15% most deprived datazones in Scotland. The figures for Stirling and Falkirk are 6% and 10% of datazones respectively. The spectrum of areas featuring differing levels of deprivation and affluence brings challenges in terms of operational and community safety services' performance.
23. The Grangemouth petrochemicals complex in Grangemouth is one of the largest in Europe and features many hazards. This was underlined by a serious incident in August 2006, when a major incident triggered a multi-agency response of national interest and had potentially serious consequences.

## The Fire and Rescue Authority

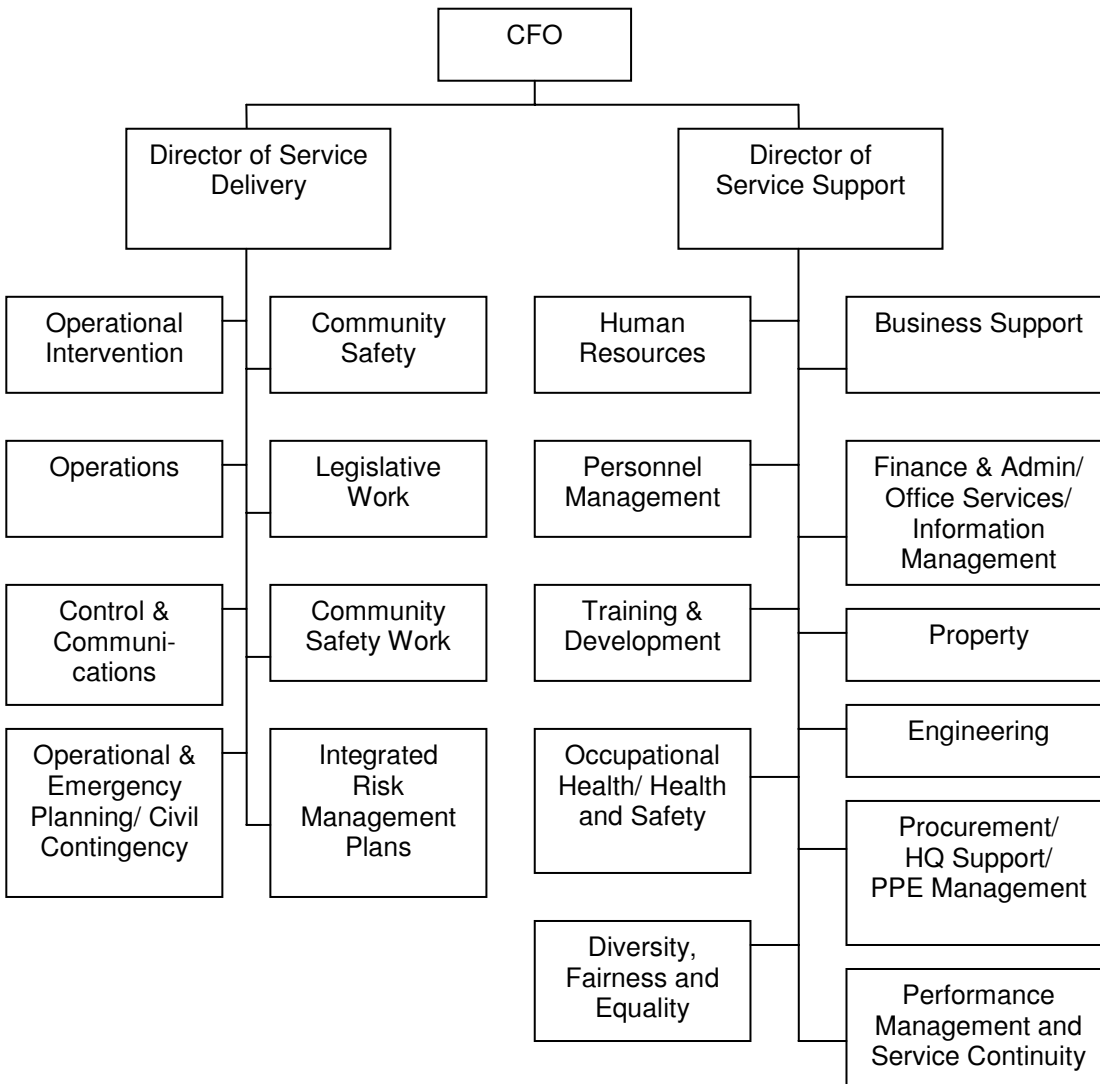
24. Each of the three constituent councils in Central Scotland is formally a fire and rescue authority in its own right. Their responsibilities are pooled and delegated to a Joint Board of 11 councillors comprising two members from Clackmannanshire, six from Falkirk and three from Stirling. The Joint Board is led by a Convener (Stirling), supported by two vice-conveners (Falkirk, Clackmannanshire).
25. The FRA's net revenue expenditure in 2005/06 was £15.39 million, with supporting capital expenditure of £1.8 million. As at 31 March 2006, the FRA employed 243 wholetime firefighters, 161 retained firefighters, 17 Control Room staff, and 41 non-uniformed staff. Further support is contributed by 10 volunteer firefighters.
26. The Joint Board agreed a review of the FRA's corporate management arrangements in April 2005, and the current Chief Fire Officer (CFO), in post since February 2006, introduced a new organisational structure from July 2006 aimed at streamlining and simplifying management arrangements. The Director or Service Delivery is responsible for Operational Intervention and Community Safety, while the newly-appointed Director of Service Support is to head up a range of enabling and support functions (Exhibit 1).



**Exhibit 1**

**Organisational structure**

The structure was introduced in July 2006 and is still bedding in, especially in the Service Support side.



Source: Central Scotland Fire & Rescue Service

27. The Senior Management Team (SMT) comprises the CFO, the Director of Service Delivery, the Director of Service Support, and the tier of staff which reports to them, consisting of the Heads of Operations, Community Safety, Human Resources, and Business Support.
  
28. Central has 17 stations of which four are wholetime, eleven are retained and two are staffed by volunteers. There are a further three retained units based at wholetime stations. A fleet of 57 fire appliances is complemented by urban search and rescue (USAR) equipment, and other specialist response and service delivery units.
  
29. In 2005/06, the FRA responded to a total of 5,175 incidents of which 31% (1604) were secondary fires, 23% (1190) arose from false alarms with good intent and a further 15% of incidents (776) were due to false alarms caused by faulty apparatus.



# Part 1. Strategic management

## Key findings

- The FRA has a clear vision and has set a strategic direction that generally balances the requirements of the national framework with the diverse needs of varied local communities. However, the FRA needs to continue to develop its service and business planning processes to support delivery of its objectives.
- The new CFO has boosted the capacity of the Senior Management Team to progress the FRA's strategic objectives and the flatter organisational structure, when fully staffed up, has the potential to deliver further progress.
- Individual Board members are personally committed to the FRA, but robust scrutiny of FRA performance could be improved. The FRA has undertaken a training needs analysis of members and is developing this in preparation for the 2007 local elections. Some of the Board's governance arrangements predate service reform and could be reviewed.
- Performance management is underdeveloped. The FRA cannot yet assess progress systematically against the IRMP or Service Development Plan and further work is required to develop a personal appraisal system which is aligned with strategic objectives.

## Strategic direction

30. The FRA has set out its vision in the form of a mission statement in its Service Development Plan (SDP) 2006, namely that: "*CSFRS exists to help create safer communities, to provide an effective emergency service and to protect local economic, environmental and community interests*".
31. This vision is supported by four objectives concerned with identifying and reducing risk; responding effectively to emergency incidents; developing the workforce; and improving performance and delivering value for money
32. The SDP is founded on the second Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP2) and hence underpins the national direction as set out in the Fire Scotland Act 2005 and reflects the FRA's local priorities and strategic vision. The over-arching approach is to rebalance the efforts of the FRA towards a greater emphasis on preventative work and community safety, and to refocus emergency interventions towards seeking to minimise loss of life, rather than property alone.
33. The FRA has recently developed an annual planning and performance cycle, but overall there is some way to go before service and business planning processes are fully embedded and integrated. There is limited coordination amongst key corporate processes and documents, for example between the

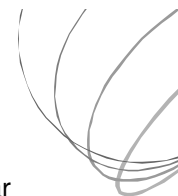


SDP and the revenue budget, and between IRMP2 and the approach to training. However, the SDP is now supported by an agreed set of targets and standards, which are SMART in nature.

34. The organisational instability over the last few years, coupled with staffing shortages in non-uniformed functions, has hampered progress in delivering service reform. However, the new CFO has clearly communicated his personal vision to the SMT, which supports his ambition to drive the FRA forwards. The new organisational structure should boost capacity and enable the service meet its strategic objectives more effectively.

## Leadership and governance

35. The FRA has published a Corporate Governance Plan which sets out its approach over the period 2005/08 against principles defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in conjunction with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). The Plan covers the FRA's community focus, service delivery arrangements, structures and processes, risk management and internal controls, and standards of conduct.
36. The Board has a number of sub-committees; the terms of reference for the majority of these have remained unchanged since 1996 and predate the philosophy behind IRMP by almost a decade. There is scope for a review of the roles and remits of the various sub-committees and working groups to ensure they support the FRA's strategic objectives. For example, the Best Value & Audit Committee has only met twice in the 2006 calendar year and could have its remit extended to encompass risk management and closer scrutiny of FRA performance. Ideally, the Board's structural arrangements and terms of reference should be refreshed in time for the May 2007 local government elections. The CFO and the Clerk to the Board recognise this and have produced an action plan to review corporate governance arrangements on behalf of the Board.
37. Individual Board members are personally committed to the FRA and support it locally by, for example, visiting fire stations and bolstering staff morale through attending long-service awards. However, as in any joint board, members come from councils with differing political complexions and local priorities. There is therefore some potential for disunity to influence strategic decision making in a way that may not best serve the area's longer-term strategic interests. In the run-up to the May 2007 elections, uncertainties over the Board's collective views on priorities for the FRA are already impinging on the confidence with which the FRA's senior management can plan.
38. Elected members are engaged in decisions on the future strategic direction of the FRA and aware of the strategic challenges facing the Board. However, the current governance arrangements and lack of structured performance information presented to the Board means that they are not always able to fulfil effectively the scrutiny role expected of them through the requirements of Best Value and the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.



39. The FRA is aware of the need for members to be trained in their duties arising from their particular role as members of a Fire and Rescue Board. The FRA undertook an analysis of the training needs of all Board members recently which identified opportunities for training and development of existing members, as well as providing the basis for a toolkit supporting the induction of any new members following the May 2007 local government elections. The FRA also assists Board members by offering briefings on technical issues and more strategic considerations such as the implications of IRMP.
40. The FRA is actively developing the concept of individual Board members becoming 'champions' for specific issues, in particular in relation to service reform. One member has become the Board's champion for diversity and equality issues and the FRA has identified further scope and capability for other Board Members to take the lead in a number of areas such as risk management.
41. Board members are well supported by senior officers, who have an 'open door policy'. The CFO has regular meetings with the Convener between formal Board meetings, and there is good use of email to communicate with other members. Board members are also assisted by the offices of Clerk and Treasurer, provided by senior officers of Falkirk Council.
42. Industrial relations have improved since the national dispute, and generally representatives of operational firefighters consider the current CFO to have a constructive, pragmatic approach. Overall progress in this area is hindered by the absence of a consultation forum for all representative bodies. Such a forum would assist in developing and sustaining productive working relationships with senior management.

## Performance management

43. Performance management is not systematically applied throughout the FRA. The only structured reporting is on performance against Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) and Local Performance Indicators (LPIs). SPIs are set out in the Accounts Commission's annual Direction and are reported on by all Scottish FRAs. LPIs are agreed by CFOA and allow fire and rescue authorities in Scotland to benchmark their performance against each other. These indicators measure performance in areas such as fire prevention, the diversity of the workforce, attacks on firefighters and Freedom of Information requests. A new suite of LPIs was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006, so at present no annual comparable data is available.
44. Individual departments routinely collate volumes of detailed data on activity and, to some degree, the performance of individual services and functions; however, this information is not structured and presented in a coherent, consistent manner that allows accessible management information on the performance of the organisation as a whole to be presented to the SMT and Board for scrutiny. As things stand, it is hard for the SMT to gauge the performance of the authority against the IRMP and the SDP.



45. For example, the style and content of performance reports pre-date the development of IRMP2 and the SDP. They contain detailed information on topics such as the number of secondary fires, but scant coverage of more challenging, higher-level questions such as the impact of community safety initiatives; questions whose answers may better assist the Board to hold the Service to account.
46. The SDP and current performance management arrangements are not congruent with the financial management and personal development systems. There is no explicit linkage of personal objectives to corporate objectives, or embedded personal appraisal / review systems to enable the monitoring and management of individuals' performance. Consequently, the contribution of individuals to overall corporate aims cannot be determined. The FRA is aware of this weakness and is in the early stages of developing improvement plans. Similarly, the FRA's objectives do not cascade to a business plan for each station, although they are under development and expected to specify measurable outcomes.
47. Arrangements for corporate risk management and business continuity have been slow to develop but were accelerated in the latter half of 2006, when the Board endorsed proposals developed by the FRA in association with a risk management consultancy. These proposals resulted in the development of the FRA's first corporate Strategic Risk Register and provide for:
  - ownership of risks by nominated senior officers
  - existing risks to be tracked and new risks identified
  - ownership by the Board of risk management at both strategic and operational levels.
48. The FRA is supporting its strategic approach to risk management through a structured training programme that covers both tactical and strategic managers. However, this has only recently begun and it could therefore be some time before risk management is fully embedded across the FRA. The FRA also needs to consider appropriate risk management training for Board members.
49. The FRA is a lead agency in the regional civil contingency structure at both strategic and tactical levels, and has led in a number of issues following the advent of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. It chairs multi-agency progress on one of four risk assessment streams and actively contributes to partnership working on the other three streams. This process is now embedded within the corporate risk register and business continuity plan.



# Part 2. Fire prevention and risk management

## Key findings

- There have been some tangible benefits arising from the FRA's first IRMP, and the FRA is starting to move resources from intervention to prevention. The second IRMP builds on the foundations of the first and underpins the corporate objectives set out in the SDP.
- The FRA undertakes a broad range of constructive community safety initiatives. However, many of these pre-date IRMP and are not directed by it; they have not been assessed against the IRMP or recently evaluated so there is little data on their impact.
- The FRA has made slow progress on home fire safety checks, and the full range of community safety services are not provided by retained or volunteer stations.
- Partnership working plays an important role in the provision of community safety, and the FRA is an active partner in community planning partnerships. The FRA has developed a partnership register, but needs to do more to evaluate how partnership working is contributing to achievement of strategic objectives.

## Integrated risk management planning (IRMP)

50. The FRA has developed an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that meets the requirements of the national framework for Scottish Fire & Rescue Services and recognises the needs of local communities. The second IRMP, IRMP2, builds on IRMP1 and is a logical development of it.
51. The FRA is gradually shifting its efforts towards a greater emphasis on prevention. Under the new structure, the Director of Service Delivery will have responsibility for both intervention and prevention, making the interaction between these strands of work more explicit. An officer-member steering group on IRMP has promoted awareness of IRMP issues. The group has cross-cutting representation comprising the Convener, the two Vice-Conveners, the Treasurer, two backbench councillors, FBU and Unison representatives, the CFO and other senior officers.
52. After a faltering start, the FRA boosted the size of its FSEC team which has worked hard to capture clean datasets from a wide range of internal and external sources and to provide a modelling resource for the SMT. For example, Census data is complemented and updated with data from local authority development plans on proposed housing developments; and by geo-coded data from the police. The FRA is beginning to use FSEC to inform a review of the location, resourcing and activity of stations across the region. Information from FSEC has helped to support plans which have been developed for new and modified stations.



53. Risk maps generated by the FSEC system have been distributed to all wholetime stations and have enormous potential to sharpen how corporate priorities for preventative community work cascade to the targeting of initiatives in specific local communities.
54. There is scope to make more and better use of FSEC, for example by using the same system to capture information on (and target) community safety activity, and to provide for new duties falling from Part 3 of the Fire Scotland Act. The use of data overlays in FSEC, already in use in some other FRAs, would allow the security and integrity of the FSEC system to be maintained, whilst generating added value from the generic tools it can offer. Further opportunities could arise from closer integration of FSEC modelling with corporate risk management and the management of the community risk register.
55. The FRA's Community Safety Strategy (CSS) identified a large number of risk groups but the subsequent SDP does not articulate how the FRA plans to address these groups' differing needs with tailored services. Mainstreaming the IRMP and Community Safety Strategy within arrangements and documents supporting corporate management could reduce the number of parallel processes that need to be managed.

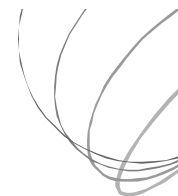
## Implementation of IRMP

56. The FRA's first IRMP has yielded a number of tangible benefits for the FRA, including:
  - The development of policies to provide greater flexibility for resources to be channelled into areas such as community fire safety, for example on changes to the duty systems, new work routines, pre-arranged overtime, wholetime retained crewing, and flexible working.
  - The development of a policy on Automatic Fire Alarms, providing the potential to generate resource efficiencies for redeployment in the FRA.
  - Rationalising the number of station officers, which has funded two new posts in the Community Safety function and enabled the appointment of eight Crew Managers without increasing costs.
  - More cost-effective crewing arrangements for the Bronto skylift and mass decontamination unit.
  - The purchase of two new multi-purpose appliances (supported by the Scottish Executive), combining the roles of pump appliance and an aerial platform, which are expected to yield cost savings whilst providing enhanced firefighting and rescue capabilities.
  - The redeployment of a wholetime appliance from Falkirk to Larbert retained station during the day, which has improved operational cover and allowed crews to undertake more fire prevention and community safety work in the Larbert area.
57. The CFO anticipates that the next year of IRMP will be a period of consolidation as well as further progress, in which the new organisational structure will be bedded in and staffed up, proposals in the



SDP will be implemented, and a period of relative organisational stability will promote an environment whereby the many systems that are lacking or in development can be progressed.

58. The FRA undertakes a range of community safety initiatives aimed at reducing risk from fire and raising awareness of fire safety issues, many of these aimed at children and young people. For example, Crucial Crew is an interactive learning programme which involves children visiting a series of safety scenarios, each designed to provide them with the opportunity to develop life skills. The FRA also provides safety education in schools through class visits by both operational crews and the Community Education Officer. Through an agreement with the three councils in Central, every primary school pupil now has classroom jotters whose covers carry fire safety messages.
59. The delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSCs) has been very limited. During 2005/06 the FRA completed 150 checks, which equates to only 0.1% of the 124,550 households across the region. The FRA's approach is to deliver HFSCs to those most at risk of fire. It is working in partnership with other organisations, such as the NHS and constituent councils to identify the residences of vulnerable people, including those using oxygen cylinders at home and elderly persons known to social services. It has also used promotional leaflet drops in local areas highlighted within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, the take-up of HFSCs through leaflet drops is known to be poor, and the FRA should continue to seek other means to improve the targeting of HFSCs.
60. The FRA has not yet made any significant use of retained staff to deliver HFSCs, and it has yet to deliver risk maps to retained stations or undertake relevant training. However, the Senior Management Team has recently agreed options for training and delivery of HFSC across the whole of the area. Each station is being asked to develop community safety action plans, highlighting the activities they plan to undertake to reduce risks in high risk areas or to vulnerable households.
61. Many of the FRA's community safety activities pre-date IRMP and the SDP, rather than being directed, focused, prioritised and coordinated in light of the FRA's agreed strategic priorities. The FRA has recently taken steps to review the effectiveness and impact of community safety initiatives. An Intranet database captures information on community safety activities, such as the location of premises where a HFSC has been made, the number of FRA personnel involved, and the target risk group (eg elderly person). As this is developed it should enable the FRA to track and model how HFSCs in particular are impacting on the risk of fire and the need for emergency interventions. However there is little systematic evaluation of other community safety initiatives to assess the extent to which they are contributing to the achievement of strategic objectives, and whether they represent value for money.
62. This is of particular importance as the FRA cannot yet demonstrate a correlation between trends and its fire prevention activity or a sustained improvement in the reduction of risk. For example, the number of secondary fires increased by 6% (92) between 2004/05 and 2005/06 (from 1,495 to 1,587), and the number of incidents resulting in casualties rose from 38 to 44 in the same period.



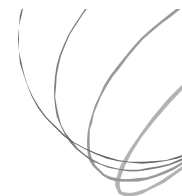
63. In October 2006, Part 3 of the Fire Scotland Act brought in new responsibilities and potential workloads relating to fire risk. The new legislation puts a statutory responsibility for ensuring the safety of people in their workplaces or other non-domestic premises (such as residential care homes or houses of multiple occupation) in the event of a fire to the owners or managers of the relevant properties. Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for enforcing the new legislation and ensuring owners are adequately fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. This has implications both in knowing which premises within their area are subject to the new legislation and in establishing a new audit and inspection framework.
64. Under Part 3 of the Act, Central is considering the implications of new responsibilities deriving from over 400 Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and acquiring responsibility for a large number of premises from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The FRA is waiting for the Scottish Executive to provide guidance on Part 3 to FRAs, and for the HSE to provide detailed information on the premises they were responsible for. Hence, while the FRA has contacted all its 'special premises' and is in the process of arranging initial contact, it has been unable to plan an inspection programme, and still has further work to do to meet fully the requirements of the legislation.

## Partnership working

65. The benefits of partnership working are well recognised by the FRA, which is actively involved in a wide range of local and national partnerships.
66. The FRA is an active partner in the Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) of the three constituent councils and plays a significant role at both strategic and tactical levels. The FRA plays a leading role on local community safety partnerships, where the FRA has a particular interest in partnerships' policies on anti-social behaviour, regeneration and the wider issues of community safety. The targets developed by the FRA for the reduction of fire fatalities, casualties and fire-related crime have been adopted by the three community safety partnerships.
67. Partnership working extends well beyond engagement in community planning and community safety partnerships, to encompass liaison with a wide range of national and local bodies to deliver specific initiatives and service improvements. Examples include:
- training Community Wardens in fire safety issues
  - support for drama projects with the Community Learning Team in Falkirk Council and the 7:84 Theatre, to disseminate community safety messages.
  - work with the Prison Service's '*Prison me? – no way*' project, to deter young people from committing crime.
  - engagement with the Prince's Trust, to assist in the development of young people from difficult backgrounds.



68. The FRA is proactive in sharing risk and incident data with local agencies, and in exploring potential new data sources. For example, using police data on the location of RTCs has helped the FSEC team to accelerate progress in cleansing its own data, which has in turn enhanced the FRAs risk-modelling capacity. FRA staff also participate in any 'problem-solving partnerships' which may arise out of the community planning process. These identify safety risks impacting on particular neighbourhoods through the use of shared data, and personnel have received corresponding training via local authorities.
69. The FRA is the early stages of working in partnership with the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) over the introduction of a co-responder scheme. This could have particular value in remote and rural communities where the slower response time to a typical incident could present a risk to life. The SAS is also co-located at a number of fire stations across the region.
70. Overall, the FRA recognises the need to work with a range of partners to achieve its strategic objectives. However, it has yet to develop a strategic approach to partnership working to ensure it is using the resources involved to best effect and in accordance with corporate priorities.
71. The FRA has just developed a partnership register but it is of limited value in evaluating the performance of each partnership and the FRA finds it hard to assess whether each partnership adds value. Though the FRA has not comprehensively evaluated the merits of partnerships, it recognises the need to do so and anticipates conducting a phased programme of impact analyses into 2007/08, to include an option appraisal of the means by which certain community safety services are delivered through partnership working.



# Part 3. Financial management

## Key findings

- While budget setting processes, governance and control are robust, the links between the corporate planning framework and budget setting processes need to be improved.
- The FRA faces increasing financial pressure from the projected increase in pension costs, and holds significant reserves, but lacks a clear strategy on the use and purpose of its reserves.
- The FRA lacks a single, over-arching asset management strategy linked to service planning priorities and achievement of strategic objectives, although elements of asset management practice are in place.

## Financial position

72. The FRA's net revenue expenditure in 2005/06 was £15.39 million, which equates to £54.56 per head of population, the third lowest in Scotland. In 2005/06 the Scottish average was £59.45.
73. The FRA is funded by requisitions from the three constituent authorities which make up the Joint Board, in proportions which approximate to their relative sizes. In 2005/06, the percentage share borne by each council was: Falkirk —52.3%; Stirling —29.9% Clackmannanshire —17.8%.
74. Approximately 7% (£1.2 million) of the FRA's expenditure is funded from income generated during the year, the majority of which comes from firefighter pension contributions. The most significant other source of income is industrial and commercial training, an activity which has been conducted for over 10 years. Partnership arrangements with the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) and Central Scotland Police have also realised some additional income.
75. The FRA has not been funded to GAE for several years. GAE is a methodology for grant distribution and not an absolute measurement of service needs and it is the Board's responsibility to agree a budget for the provision of fire and rescue services within their area. However, there appears to be scope for the FRA to consider its budget requirements relative to GAE and the FRA's strategic objectives.
76. The FRA held reserves of £1.698 million as at 31 March 2006, representing 11.0% of the FRA's net expenditure in 2005/06. Some use of reserves has been identified with around £0.5 million being earmarked from 2005/06 to 2007/08 for the appointment of staff to support the FRA's strategic objectives and service reform. The FRA has yet to adopt an overall strategy for managing its reserves, setting out in greater detail their purpose and intended use, and this should be a priority for the FRA.



## Financial pressures

77. The main financial pressures faced by the FRA relate to the rising costs of pension payments for firefighters and the end of transitional funding.
78. The FRA has been allocated £1.5 million of transitional funding for the financial period 2004/05 to 2007/08. All transitional funding provided by the Scottish Executive has been relayed to the Board by its constituent councils. In common with other FRAs this has not been treated as a separate income stream but has instead been added to other resources available in setting annual budgets. It is anticipated that the costs thereafter will be funded through the normal budgetary streams, where efficiency gains will have been identified through the outcome of the IRMP process.
79. The FRA has started to identify a series of both cashable and non-cashable efficiency gains which have materialised as a result of IRMP. However, an important weakness lies in the FRA not matching anticipated budgetary pressures with its overall financial strategy and, in particular, a strategy on the use of reserves—especially since the FRA may need to call upon reserves to assist in absorbing the ending of transitional funding.
80. The firefighters' pension scheme is administered by the FRA. It is unfunded and, therefore, has no assets to be valued. The cost of existing pensions is met from serving firefighters' contributions and contributions from constituent authorities, through the revenue budget. At 31 March 2006 the present value of scheme liabilities was almost £97 million. The increasing cost of maturing pension liabilities is in danger of outstripping the operational cost of service provision, and this situation will worsen over the next few years as the large number of firefighters who joined the service in the late 1970's approach retirement. Firefighter pension liabilities are an increasing financial risk for all FRAs and the Scottish Executive is currently reviewing a number of different options for funding.

## Budget setting and monitoring

81. The FRA has the expected governance and control arrangements in place, relying largely on systems in Falkirk Council. Audit work over the last few years has not identified any significant weaknesses in control arrangements.
82. The Board's Best Value and Audit Sub-Committee's remit is to discuss issues such as the annual report and accounts, guidance on audit committee principles, corporate governance and planning and consultation on the IRMP.
83. However, the Sub-Committee only meets twice a year, once to endorse the FRA's budget and propose it to the Board, and once mid-year to take a high-level financial progress report. While the Board receives quarterly probable outturns from the Treasurer, the value the Board is deriving from the Sub-Committee in assisting it to scrutinise the financial performance of the FRA is limited, due to



the infrequency of meetings. A review of the Board's structures and processes could usefully consider the role of the Board's Best Value and Audit Sub-Committee.

84. The FRA follows a three-year rolling budget for both capital and revenue expenditure. The annual financial planning cycle is integrated into the overall corporate planning cycle. However, the revenue budget structure has not been reviewed since the introduction of IRMP. Instead, growth items and savings are built onto the previous year's budget. As a result, ambitions set out in the SDP have not all been transparently costed. The FRA is in discussion with the Treasurer to address this important issue and anticipates its budget for 2007/08 will be more closely aligned with current corporate objectives.
85. There is minimal delegation of budgets outside HQ. It is the FRA's view that, once staff costs are removed, the sums available to delegate are so minimal that financial delegation is not worthwhile and could restrict the development of effective procurement within the organisation. The downside is that station managers have limited control over expenditure incurred at their stations and this could curb enthusiasm for more creative thinking about the flexing of budgets towards a greater emphasis on preventative community safety work.

## Procurement

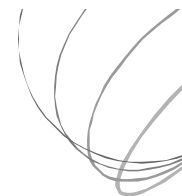
86. In association with the CFOA(S) Procurement Group, the FRA has developed a corporate procurement strategy, which recognises the importance of sustainability. This FRA should now focus on its practical implementation across all departments. The FRA is also involved in joint procurement of services (e.g. energy and fuel) with local authority partners which bring benefit from economy of scale.

## Capital planning and asset management

87. Capital expenditure totalled £1.8 million in 2005/06 and was funded by Scottish Executive capital grant of £1.7 million, and receipts from the disposal of fixed assets of £100k. Over the past few years, the FRA has funded part of its capital programme through capital receipts from the sale of one fire station, of which approximately £595k remained held as at 31 March 2006.
88. It has been FRA policy to take the capital grant provided by the Scottish Executive and split it across areas of capital spend in what the FRA considered to be a broadly 'fair' manner, rather than identifying needs and prioritising areas for spend initially before considering how this could be funded. The capital programmes for 2005/06 and 2006/07 appear to be based on historical, planned spending levels. Capital budgets tend to be devolved to Heads of Function, who control and report to the Head of Business Support on any likely variance during the year.



89. The FRA's external auditors noted delays in the capital expenditure programme in 2004/05 in relation to projects spreading across 2004/05 and 2005/06, but some of this lag appears to have been made good in 2005/06.
90. As part of converging its financial planning and corporate management arrangements, the FRA could also review management arrangements for capital planning; the extent to which the IRMP and SDP map priorities for capital expenditure; the use of review and option appraisal techniques in consideration of specific project alternatives; the revenue implications of capital expenditure; and reporting to the SMT and Board on progress made.
91. There is no overarching, comprehensive asset management in place, linked to service planning priorities and the achievement of strategic objectives. Separate asset management plans are in place for vehicles and property, but the plan for property expires in 2007/08, and there is no formal replacement programme for ICT or operational equipment. Staffing shortages due to sickness absence and vacant posts have constrained the FRA's progress on asset management. Now that the new organisational structure is being staffed up, the main priority will be to update the Property Asset Management Plan, with particular reference to planning for the new station at Stirling and upgrading of Larbert station, jointly expected to cost £2.8 million.



# Part 4. Workforce management

## Key findings

- The FRA has developed a draft people management strategy. It is currently waiting final agreement on a Scottish strategy for human resources before finalising the draft, in order to ensure it meets national requirements. As the national work is finalised, implementation of the draft strategy should a priority.
- The FRA has made good progress with the provision of training and support for wholetime uniformed staff. Support for retained and non-uniformed staff has been less developed, but the FRA has recently invested significant resources in improvements.
- The FRA has introduced number of specific policies on flexible working arrangements. The FRA is currently finalising a more holistic and comprehensive policy, covering all staff groups with anticipated implementation in early 2007.
- The FRA has made good progress on the equality and diversity agenda, although, in common with other FRAs, the workforce does not reflect the diversity of the community it serves. In particular, the FRA's delivery of training in equality and diversity has been well-received by staff. However, the FRA has not impact-assessed its policies as set out in the Race Equality Scheme, or mapped its compliance with legislation, statutory guidance and good practice.

## Workforce planning

92. Corporate responsibility for workforce management falls under the Head of Human Resources, who reports to the new post of Director of Service Support. Under the Head of HR sit four separately-managed functions, whose managers are each empowered to take responsibility and lead in their own area: Personnel Management; Learning and Development; Occupational Health and Health and Safety; and Diversity, Fairness and Equality (DFE). However, the HR function is in transition pending the bedding in of the new organisational structure and recruitment to vacant posts.
93. The FRA has a draft HR strategy, but is currently awaiting the outcome of work being undertaken by *CFOA(S) HR strategy working group* in developing a national strategy applicable to all eight Scottish FRAs, before finalising the strategy and seeking formal approval. The national approach is due to be finalised in the near future and, once agreed, implementation of the FRA's draft strategy should a priority, in order to provide a robust framework to take the HR function forward.
94. Although there have been some changes to staffing levels and structures, partly as a result of rank to role, the FRA needs to adopt a more systematic approach to ensure it has appropriate staff to meet anticipated needs, articulated through the IRMP or SDP. In addition, minimal staffing levels among support functions in the past have hampered progress.



95. It has been customary for the FRA to fill non-uniformed posts in support functions with seconded/redeployed uniformed officers but such employees may not always bring the skills, knowledge and experience which a career professional could invest, for example in HR, Diversity and Equalities, procurement or ICT. However, the current Senior Management Team recognise the enhanced role that experienced professionals can play and expect the proportion of career professionals in support services gradually to increase.
96. The FRA is committed to absence management both in the interests of employees' welfare and to maximise the operational efficiency of the organisation. This is demonstrated by providing good access to an occupational health service which helps to promote the safe and early return to work of sick or injured employees. Regular contact with employees on long-term sickness-absence helps to keep them abreast of developments in the FRA and is supplemented by a policy whereby staff can return to work on modified or 'light' duties where appropriate.
97. Comprehensive data on the incidence and pattern of sickness-absence show that the percentage of rider shifts lost due to sickness has consistently been below the average for the eight FRAs over recent years, at 4.6% in 2003/04 (Scotland: 7.0%), 6.0% in 2004/05 (Scotland: 7.4%) and 5.1% in 2005/06 (Scotland: 6.4%). In 2005/06, only one other FRA had a lower level of lost shifts, at 4.6%.
98. Linked with workforce planning is succession planning, where there is scope for the FRA to enhance links with other functions, notably risk management and business continuity. Also the FRA does not yet have a systematic approach to exit interviews when employees leave the FRA—meaning lost opportunities to ensure employees' welfare and to collect insights on scope for improvement within the FRA.

## Support and development of staff

99. Training and development for wholetime firefighters has progressed well in recent years. The roll-out of the Scotland-wide Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) to wholetime stations is advanced and well-supported by good access to ICT equipment and software. Most staff are well-informed about IPDS though there are concerns about the bureaucracy that can be involved.
100. The FRA has played a leading role in developing the Firefighter Development Programme (FFDP) in use across Scotland. The FFDP is available at all wholetime stations in a paper form and on the Intranet. The FFDP leads to each firefighter benefiting from a needs-driven, personalised plan for training and development. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has approved the FRA as a satellite centre for the delivery and award of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), and the FRA has assessors in place at HQ and among stations.
101. The implementation of PDRpro, which caters for the recording, evaluation and review of all training activity, over the past year has progressed well in wholetime stations following some early glitches with ICT.



102. There is scope for the FRA's Maddiston HQ to make better corporate use of the monitoring and management information which the nationally-developed IPDS and PDRpro systems could generate, and take early steps to address any major gaps between provision of learning and development, and the needs of staff. Uncharted skill gaps may exist in aspects of services supporting community safety, legislative fire safety, and the Control Room. Operational needs identified by PDRpro are met largely by local facilities, expertise, equipment, etc.
103. Arrangements for the support and development of retained firefighters have progressed in the same policy direction as for wholetime operational staff, and using the same tools for learning and development, though at a slower rate. However, the FRA has invested significant funding in training facilities for retained staff over the past year. PDRPro has been rolled out to all retained stations, and all retained staff have received presentations on learning and development opportunities. All retained stations have an allocated training officer to plan, deliver and support training on a regular and consistent basis.
104. However, our interviews found that some retained staff would benefit from more training in the use of available IT facilities and assistance with aspects of administration. For example, PDRpro records are in part kept on paper only, if at all, running contrary to the system's design principles and obviating the ready monitoring, collation and analyses of employees' training records.
105. The FRA makes provision for redeploying retained firefighters in wholetime stations without automatically sending them to the Scottish Fire Service College at Gullane for retraining. Instead, a transitional programme allows the FRA to deliver elements of the basic training in-house after a skills assessment, permitting firefighters to focus on filling only those skill gaps which apply to them personally.
106. The FRA's approach to learning and development has traditionally been targeted at supporting operational firefighters, and there has been no comprehensive training needs analysis for non-uniformed staff. In addition, some non-uniform staff consider there is limited personal appraisal or career development. However, the FRA is now undertaking a Development Review process to identify specific training needs across all the roles within the FRA. To support this process, the FRA has agreed an annual budget of £60,000 for the development of all staff, at least half of which is being used for the development of non-uniform staff, in addition to in-house training.
107. The FRA has almost completed the transition from rank to role with only a limited number of appeals outstanding. The FRA worked in collaboration with three FRAs —Grampian, Highlands and Islands, and Tayside —to agree common standards for the job 'sizing' process, including the questions to be used and a weightings matrix.



## Flexible working

108. The FRA is committed to supporting a flexible approach to employees' working arrangements, as evidenced by policies covering issues such as:

- Wholetime/retained dual contract of employment policy—the policy dissolves barriers to wholetime employees also working extra shifts in retained stations.
- Recall to work policy—the policy applies to all FRA staff and provides for them to be called up for duty in exceptional circumstances, such as a large fire or protracted emergency, to ensure continuity of operations.
- Flexible working arrangements for retained personnel—greater use is being made of retained employees in situations which were formerly the locus of wholetime firefighters, for example in crewing the Command Unit, New Dimensions Vehicles, Urban Search and Rescue equipment, and the Mass Decontamination Unit.
- Career break scheme—this provides for all employees to take a period of unpaid leave, with a guaranteed return to work at the end of the period.

109. However, there is no formal monitoring procedure for flexible working, not all flexible working policies in force apply across the FRA, and there are some gaps in provision which could be filled. Following successful consultation with employees and the FBU, the FRA has developed a comprehensive policy including a standardised, coherent set of arrangements for all employees, whether uniformed or non-uniformed, which is due for completion by the end of 2006.

110. An overtime policy is in place for wholetime personnel and for Control staff. The objective of this policy is to ensure that the management of pre-planned overtime is effective, efficient and economic; it also ensures that it is administrated openly and transparently.

## Equality and diversity

111. The FRA has a strong commitment to equality and diversity in the workplace demonstrated through the establishment of a dedicated Equality & Diversity (E&D) Unit of two employees whose work supports associated objectives emphasised in the corporate Service Development Plan. Both members of the unit have had investigation, ACAS and equality training.

112. The Board has a member who is the designated Board Champion for E&D. The member is also represented on the officer-member E&D Forum, and receives additional personal updates from the FRA's E&D Unit advisor. The establishment of the Forum has boosted communication and understanding between the Board and the FRA on this issue.

113. The Unit has delivered diversity training for staff at all levels—including uniformed wholetime, retained and volunteer as well as non-uniformed staff within the organisation. Informal feedback to the SMT

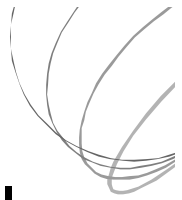


and the Unit, together with interviews by the audit team, suggest the interactive teaching model played a large part in the training being so well received. The feedback provides an early indication that the training is starting to have an impact.

114. The FRA plans to assess the impact of this training more rigorously, and to build on its success by sharing success at cost with collaborative partners. The E&D Unit and the Board Champion jointly attend fire stations to discuss diversity-related matters with personnel, as part auditing the impact of training.
115. Policies on bullying, harassment, discipline and grievance have just been approved by the SMT following consultation with representative bodies. Training on bullying, harassment and grievance/discipline was piloted in September 2006 prior to being rolled out across the workforce.
116. Arrangements for internal complaints and grievances by staff are comparatively well established and all relevant staff have received required training. The Racist Attacks and Harassment Multi Agency Strategy (RAHMAS) allows the FRA to record racist incidents internally and externally on a dedicated form. There are now plans in place (in the HR action list) to roll it out across the FRA. Whilst formal arrangements could be stronger, the small size of our organisation allows it readily to identify the ethnicity of the complainant. This will be reinforced by procedures being adopted in relation to Equality and Diversity Monitoring.
117. The FRA had no hard data on the workforce's ethnic profile at the time of the audit but has developed a database which will cater for reporting of employee ethnicity and as well as the other five diversity strands: age, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion/belief. The size of the FRA and the knowledge base of the staff within the Unit allows the service readily to recognise that, like other major employers within the Central Belt, it is under-represented in terms of the minority ethnic profile of the area. Around 1.1% of Central's population is from an 'ethnic minority'.
118. In common with all other FRAs, the organisation's workforce does not reflect the communities it service, although the number of uniformed women increased by 5 (22%) between 2004/05 and 2006/06, from 23 to 28 employees.
119. The FRA has tried to engage with ethnic communities and to encourage them to apply for jobs, but there are practical barriers to overcome, for example proficiency in written English. The FRA has attempted to market recruitment opportunities to specific minority and hard-to-reach groups, such as advertising in Stonewall publications, running positive action events and occasional adverts in local media. Though part of longer-term ambitions to improve community relations, these have had limited success to date.
120. While good progress has been made in a number of specific areas, the DFE team is alert to the need for further improvements by the FRA, notably to:



- Introduce a Harassment Adviser, to enable employees to express concerns about harassment and bullying outside line management structures and representative bodies.
- Map its compliance with E&D-related legislation, statutory guidance and good practice.
- Conduct formal impact assessments under the Race Equality Scheme.
- Broaden the role of the E&D Unit to address all six strands of equality & diversity.



# Part 5. Management of operational business

## Key findings

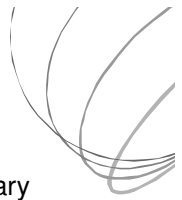
- The FRA is committed to providing and enhancing the delivery of a high quality intervention service which contributes to the overall strategic direction of the service and to community-wide civil contingency planning, and is resilient in the event of a major incident.
- The FRA has deployed a range of policies that enhance its flexibility and improve efficiency in its use of resources—for example, responses to AFAs, call verification, use of overtime, and the employment of retained staff at wholetime stations.
- The FRA could benefit from following a prioritised and coordinated programme of Best Value reviews, making robust use of review and option appraisal techniques.
- The FRA recognises the value of working in collaboration with other services and agencies and can point to early dividends, but could do more to plan engagements and ensure they add value.

## Operational management

121. In developing its IRMP, the FRA has remained focused on providing and enhancing a high quality intervention role. This is clearly emphasised through its 2006-2007 Service Development Plan (SDP) which sets out a number of objectives for intervention:

- To consolidate arrangements relating to the New Dimensions Programme and ensure that policy development and protocols are functional locally and within a national context.
- To revisit the existing protocols and arrangements in place relating to Rural Fire Partnerships.
- To review emergency planning arrangements with regard to the Central Scotland Community Risk Register.

122. The FRA has started to implement a risk-based approach for responding to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) which reduces the pre-determined attendance at premises following a comprehensive risk assessment. If a call from an AFA is received and no back up call to confirm the presence of a fire is made, the FRA only mobilises one appliance. In the first two quarters of 2006/07, this resulted in 156 fewer appliances being mobilised to false alarms as a result of faulty equipment, which freed up approximately 300 wholetime staff hours. This policy has initially been introduced to premises which, over the last five years, have caused the highest number of false alarm calls, and the FRA plans to roll out the approach to a broader range of premises in due course.



123. The FRA also introduced a call verification policy with a view to reducing the number of unnecessary appliance movements. Control Room data confirms that the new policy, which allows control room operators to vary the response sent to suspected malicious or hoax calls, has resulted in 138 fewer appliances being mobilised to malicious false alarms in the first two quarters of 2006/07. The FRA estimate that this has freed up 541 wholetime staff hours, which have been used to carry out additional community safety activities and training. Additional benefits arise from the smaller number of 'blue light' journeys exposing fire appliance crews to travel risk less frequently.
124. The FRA uses daily reporting of 'confidence levels' relating to retained crewing levels and response times in attending incidents that are still recorded against property-based risk categories in place prior to the change in legislation. However, at its September 2006 meeting, the Board agreed to adopt a set of outcome-based standards and targets which will form an element of future public performance reports.
125. The FRA has made good progress with its role in the community risk register, developed with other local agencies as a requirement of the Civil Contingencies Act 2005. The FRA is a member of the Central-wide Strategic Coordination Group (SCG), which harnesses the efforts of major public organisations in responding to the challenges of civil contingency planning.
126. The multi-agency response to a major incident at Grangemouth saw the FRA play a leading role and yielded valuable learning points for all responders centred on the need for more proactive and better resourced interaction with the media; and improved facilities at the Major Incident Control Centre in Grangemouth Police Station.
127. The FRA does not make extensive use of Best Value Reviews. The only mention of Best Value in the IRMP for 2006/07 pertains to the case for reviewing the deployment of appliances at Falkirk and Stirling stations, and there are only a few lines on Best Value in the FRA's annual report for 2004/05. The Community Safety Strategy for 2006-2008 only makes a passing reference to the FRA's commitment to Best Value.
128. The FRA could therefore do much more to ensure that consideration of all the principles of Best Value is evident and integrated within its management arrangements, and to accelerate consideration of review and options appraisal.
129. The FRA has a robust approach to health and safety, which is seen as a personal responsibility for all staff. In 2005/06, there was one formally reported injury among the workforce (including RIDDOR incidents), compared to none the year before.

## Collaborative working

130. Through CFOA, the FRA works effectively with other services throughout Scotland in taking forward initiatives in areas including operations and New Dimensions. Central's CFO is the CFOA lead on



IRMP and fire safety, and Central takes the Scottish lead on procurement and Urban Search and Rescue, in which it played a major role in the Stockwell factory explosion in Glasgow.

131. The FRA works through the South-East Collaboration Group (SECG) of four services —Central, Dumfries & Galloway, Lothian & Borders, and Fife. The SECG is in the early stages of developing policies and procedures which each FRA can contribute to, and share, to yield more benefits than if each FRA worked separately. The FRA acknowledges the need to assess the impact and cost-effectiveness of its time-investment in the SECG. Working groups have now been established to review and examine the arrangements for the following areas:

- Driver training provision
- Health and safety audit and support arrangements
- Specialist personnel / HR support
- Specialist training delivery
- Staff development
- Procurement.

132. The FRA collaborates on recruitment with Fife and Lothian and Borders FRAs. The FRA could not evidence any direct financial savings attributable to this collaboration, but believes the quality and diversity of applicants has improved. The FRA also collaborates with Fife and Lothian and Borders on medical services for employees, sharing both the costs of a doctor and medical facilities.



# Part 6. Communication

## Key findings

- The FRA is committed to improving communication but has made slow progress since 2004. Internal communication uses a range of channels, and will be further enhanced once the draft communications strategy is implemented.
- External communication is ad-hoc, informal, under-developed and largely reactive; little active use is made of the media to market the FRA as a whole or to market services and specific initiatives. Public performance reporting is in the very early stages of development.
- A policy for consultation on the IRMP process has been in place for a considerable time but the approach is not integrated within the draft communications strategy for the FRA.
- Staff have good access to office technology and ICT equipment required for operations. However, there is a case for a more strategic, co-ordinated approach to the provision of IT services in relation to the corporate aims in the Service Development Plan, and the Internet's design and content are notably weak.

## Internal communication

133. The FRA recognises that effective communication is pivotal to delivering the organisation's strategic objectives. Practical barriers include the dispersed location of fire stations, part-time working by retained crews, and the challenge of communicating with staff in diverse roles. Nevertheless, most staff were generally positive about communication. The CFO is considered approachable, and the importance now attached to visiting stations has been well received by front line staff.

134. The FRA is committed to improving communications by introducing its first corporate communications strategy over the coming months. However, the strategy has been drafted without an assessment of the effectiveness of communication techniques already in use and could benefit from insights into communications strategies developed by other local authorities.

135. Pending implementation of the strategy, the FRA continues to use conventional methods to disseminate information, such as information cascades down the organisational hierarchy, team briefings, Intranet postings by the CFO and the '28 day log', emailed news parachutes.

136. A bi-monthly staff newsletter has been produced but the third edition has only just been published, it has received mixed reviews from staff, and there are questions around the effectiveness of its circulation to retained watches and volunteer crews, and the relationship between the newsletter and other communications channels. The FRA has not conducted staff surveys or otherwise reviewed the information requirements of staff at various levels and locations. Consequently, there may be limited



opportunities for staff to express their views to senior management, and for senior management to hear the opinions of front line staff without the filtering of messages by middle management.

## External communication

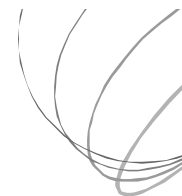
137. The FRA consulted extensively on IRMP2 but encountered limited interest. It has learnt valuable lessons on consultation from this exercise.
138. To date, communication with hard-to-reach groups and ethnic minorities has been promoted and facilitated by the small HQ team responsible for equality and diversity issues. Translating the IRMP into several languages made it more accessible for local minority groups. Multi-language 'flash cards' combining simple graphics and key words in a range of languages help firefighters communicate with people who are hearing-impaired or lack proficiency in English.
139. The draft corporate communications strategy focuses on improving internal communication but has the potential to embrace external communication issues too. It could be strengthened by integrating a consideration of consultation techniques applicable to both stakeholder organisations and service provision partners, together with how best to consult the many communities of interest which FRA staff interact with daily. The case for a more considered approach to consultation was underlined by the FRA's disappointment with the response to consultation on IRMP, suggesting a more targeted and marketing-orientated approach may be worth exploring.
140. The CFO's annual report to the Board, which summarises key achievements during the preceding year, features on the Internet site and is widely circulated among local stakeholder bodies.
141. The FRA needs to take a more considered view of its obligation to publicly report its performance, and develop an approach that meets the requirements of Section 13 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003. This imposes a duty on all local authorities, including police and fire services, to make arrangements for reporting to the public on the outcomes of their performance, known as public performance reporting (PPR).
142. The FRA essentially views its annual report as its main route for reporting to the public, via the Board. However, the annual report serves a variety of functions and audiences, does not mirror the IRMP, and may not be the ideal vehicle for succinctly communicating the performance of the FRA to the Public. As a PPR vehicle, the annual report for 2004/05 contains a large amount of contextual information; extensive description of processes and data on activity levels such as the number of incidents; relatively little information on the performance of services against expectations; and information of marginal interest to the general public, such as the names of personnel leaving and entering employment.
143. Hence, there is scope for the FRA to reconsider both its overall approach to PPR and whether the content of documents intended to inform the public on service performance is easy to understand,



concise, and has regard to Section 13 of the 2003 Act in relation to financial and performance information matters. A partnership approach to external communication in conjunction with other local agencies might provide the FRA with fast-track access to expertise it could otherwise be slow to develop internally, and yield economies of scale, especially in areas such as consultation and PPR.

## Information technology

144. The FRA recognises the valuable role that information and communications technology (ICT) plays in enabling its staff to deliver on the FRA's objectives, as outlined in the SDP.
145. However, the FRAs does not benefit from an over-arching ICT strategy linked to the organisation's strategic and operational objectives. There is scope, too, for more considered and explicit linkages with capital planning, asset management, risk management, provision of training and helpdesk support.
146. There is good provision of office technology, including access for wholtime, retained and volunteer personnel to desktop computers linked to the Internet and Intranet. Personal email addresses are available to all staff, and email communication is well used across the FRA. Users are largely comfortable with the level of support from the IT Department. Home working via a Broadband Internet connection is being trialled and has the potential to support more flexible working arrangements, especially for non-uniformed staff.
147. All full-time and retained appliances have computers and the six most recent appliances have touchscreen computers. Operational information can be distributed to all appliances and stations.
148. The existing website is dated, was not developed by the IT Department, and is not congruent with the Intranet or the day-to-day use of the rolling '28 day log'. However, a new website is presently under development, using technology and data management techniques which are more user-friendly and easier to maintain. This development should also bring a fresh view of the relationship between the Internet, Intranet, and the '28 day log'.
149. With only three staff, the relatively small size of the IT Department may present risks to the FRA's operational resilience, and its capacity to play a reliable role in support of business continuity and disaster recovery.



## Part 7. Improvement agenda

150. Scottish fire and rescue authorities are undergoing a period of significant change, underpinned by new legislation and accompanying statutory guidance. Locally, elected members and FRA officers must focus on delivering more targeted and risk-based services, which should be driven by a desire to achieve the highest possible standards.
151. Continuous improvement in public services and local governance lies at the heart of the statutory Best Value and community planning policy framework. This requires a culture where areas in need of improvement are identified and openly discussed, and in which service performance is constructively challenged.
152. The improvement agenda below sets out a number of actions identified through the audit and is intended to assist the FRA focus on the areas where it should direct its initial efforts. These areas for improvement are designed to build on the momentum for change that already exists within the FRA and will provide the basis for review and monitoring by Audit Scotland in the autumn of 2007.

### Strategic management

- Continue work on integrating service and business planning processes (para 33).
- Review the Board's structures and remits to reflect the service reform agenda (para 36).
- Build on the training needs analysis of members to prepare a development framework and implement plans for further 'champions' for specific issues (paras 39 and 40).
- Improve performance management arrangement to enable progress against the FRA's strategic objectives to be assessed (paras 43-45).
- Introduce a formal staff appraisal system for all staff, aligned with corporate objectives (para 46).

### Fire prevention and risk management

- Maintain investment and training in FSEC to ensure the currency and reliability of its data (para 54).
- Mainstream IRMP within corporate management arrangements (para 55).
- Take steps to deliver community safety services from retained stations, including the distribution of risk maps, and accelerate the delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks (para 60).
- Assess the impact of community fire safety initiatives in relation to IRMP and SDP objectives (para 61).
- Ensure a capacity to discharge all duties on the FRA under Part 3 of the Fire Scotland Act (para 64).
- Develop a strategic approach to partnership working to ensure it is effectively meeting corporate objectives (paras 70 and 71).



## Finance

- Introduce a sustainable strategy for the management of revenue budget reserves (para 76).
- Align corporate frameworks for revenue and capital budgets with corporate plans and processes, (paras 84 and 90).
- Review Board governance arrangements for financial scrutiny (para 83).
- Introduce a single corporate asset management strategy and supporting plans (para 91).

## Workforce management

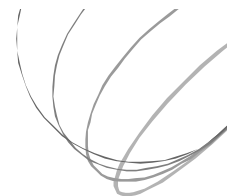
- Implement a single people-management strategy linked to corporate aims and objectives (para 93).
- Develop succession planning measures linked to corporate risk management (para 98).
- Ensure retained staff are fully trained and supported in use of PDRPro (para 104).
- Implement the proposed FRA-wider policy on flexible working, with suitable monitoring (para 109).
- Review compliance with legislation, statutory guidance and good practice on equality and diversity, including equality impact assessments of policies, and the introduction of an Harassment Advisor (para 120).

## Operational management

- Develop a programme of Best Value reviews that directs continuous improvement efforts (para 127).
- Take stock of the added value that collaborative working provides (para 132).

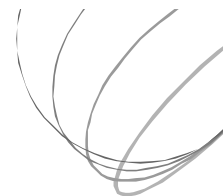
## Communication

- Devise and implement a comprehensive corporate communications strategy which spans both internal and external communication (para 134).
- Enhance the current approach to Public Performance Reporting to ensure it meets the requirements of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2005 (paras 141-143).
- Review the role and performance of all aspects of electronic communication, with particular emphasis on overhauling the FRA's dated website and ensuring it relates to the Intranet (para 145).



# Appendix 1. Glossary

AFA	Automatic Fire Alarm
CFO	Chief Fire Officer
CFOA	Chief Fire Officers Association
CFS	Community Fire Safety
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CS	Community Safety
CSS	Community Safety Strategy
DFE	Diversity, fairness and equality
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
FRA	Fire and Rescue Authority
FSEC	Fire Service Emergency Cover —software issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government to help FRAs carry out the risk mapping required for IRMP
GAE	Grant Aided Expenditure
HMFSIS	Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland
HFSC	Home Fire Safety Check
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IPDS	Integrated Personal Development System
IRMP	Integrated Risk Management Planning
NJC	National Joint Council
PPR	Public Performance Report



RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
RTC	Road traffic collision
SDP	Service Development Plan
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound
Non-uniformed	In this report, the term non-uniformed is used to describe only those staff who are not subject to the NJC Schemes of Conditions of Service Sixth edition 2004. We have used this term in the absence of any nationally agreed description for this group of staff. Some FRAs use 'support staff' and/or 'corporate staff'.