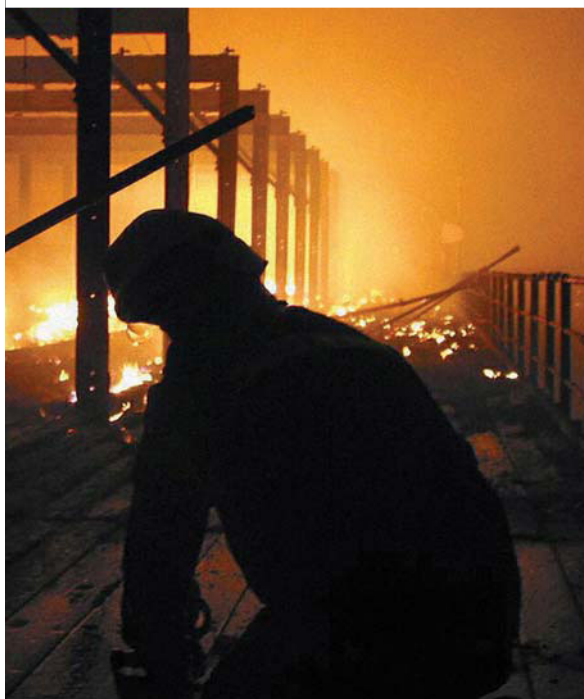


Essex Fire Authority

Integrated Risk Management Plan 2006-2009



Revised July 2006



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FOREWORD

Since the introduction of the Fire & Rescue Service National Framework all authorities are required to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan. The intentions within the plan must seek to identify existing and potential risks to the community, evaluate current response, identify opportunities for improvement and implement arrangements.

This is the third revised Integrated Risk Management Plan from the Essex Fire Authority. It was first published as a consultation document between January and April 2006, seeking your views on our proposals. Over 50 members of the public, staff and other stakeholders responded; we considered each response and made changes to the plan where possible. On behalf of the Essex Fire Authority, we would like to thank all those who took part. You'll find more information about the consultation attached as an appendix to this plan.

Our vision for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is one of growth, increased performance and improved services. We are already good at what we do, but we intend to get better. We hope that you find this Integrated Risk Management Plan to be reflective of the direction we have set out for the Service and one which meets the ever-growing demands placed upon us.

The fire and rescue service nationally is under mounting pressure to deliver a wider range of services than ever before. New legislation such as the Fire and Rescue Services Act, Working at Height Regulations, Confined Spaces Regulations and the soon-to-be-introduced Working On or Near Water Regulations all mean that the Service must

train and equip itself to deal with an increasingly diverse range of incidents. This, combined with the impact of legislation raising our profile as a response agency in the event of disaster, and our expanding role in protecting our communities in the fight against terrorism, combine to create the multi-functional service that we are today.

Our intentions, as set out in this document, are designed to deliver a service that takes advantage of the latest developments in technology. You will notice that we intend to deploy more resources within the communities we serve to ensure that Essex is a safer place to live, work and visit.

In response to the demands placed upon us, we are going to provide more fully trained personnel for front line duties. These will be supported by a new generation of operational appliances with multi-role capabilities. We intend to develop specialist rescue units within the County to perform an Urban Search And Rescue role. This Integrated Risk Management Plan also outlines our arrangements to respond to the pending Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, due to come into force in April 2006. All this, coupled with our drive to develop a service culture that identifies and responds effectively to change, presents an opportunity for us to develop a world-class service.

As an organisation, we intend to modernise the way we work to create a supportive environment in which our staff are motivated and given the opportunity to contribute to the best of their ability. Their efforts in support of our plans will ensure we deliver on our goals and aspirations – preventing, protecting and responding.

Lionel Lee
Chairman, Essex Fire Authority



David Johnson, LLb (Hons), BSc, MA, MSc
Chief Fire Officer



INTRODUCTION

The events of 9/11, the London and Madrid bombings, an increasing number of damaging emergencies such as widespread flooding, and a move to increase capacity to prevent fires and other emergencies, mean that fire and rescue services are operating in a fast-moving world. The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is a means by which Essex County Fire & Rescue Service (ECFRS) can ensure that risk is not only managed, but is also reduced.

The IRMP sits at the centre of our work and therefore aims to:

- reduce the number of emergency incidents;
- reduce loss of life in fires and other emergency incidents;
- reduce the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergencies;
- reduce the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents;
- safeguard the environment and heritage (both built and natural); and
- provide communities with value for money.

This IRMP contains proposals for work streams that support both risk management and risk reduction, and link to the priorities of the Service, and the values by which it operates.

Presenting the IRMP in this way provides an opportunity for our staff, our communities, our partners, and other interested parties, to see the direction in which their fire and rescue service wishes to travel and to make a significant contribution by feeding back their responses. The publication and promotion of the plan forms an important part of a consultation process that aims to keep people informed and engaged in any proposed activities.





1: "OUR DIRECTION - WHERE WE ARE GOING"

As a fire and rescue service our primary purpose is:

To save and protect lives, property and the environment.

To maintain a focus on this, the Essex Fire Authority (EFA) established a group, led by the Chair of the Authority and the Chief Fire Officer, to help everyone understand where we are going as a service, why we are going there and how we intend to get there.

The group identified that ultimately we want to work towards a time when:

- Our people feel inspired to deliver and be part of the best fire and rescue service; and
- We work with other people to do more than we have ever done before to make Essex safer.

To achieve this we have developed a strategy that includes a set of agreed objectives. These fall into four categories: objectives for communities; resources; ways of working; and skills and knowledge. These are illustrated in the diagram overleaf. The arrows demonstrate the way in which the objectives feed into and support each other.

VALUES

A set of national core fire service values has been created based around four key areas; how the organisation should deliver, commitment to diversity, valuing people and learning and growth aspirations.

We will consult on these values as part of our intention to develop a values-centred culture, adopting and adapting those which we feel are most appropriate to us.

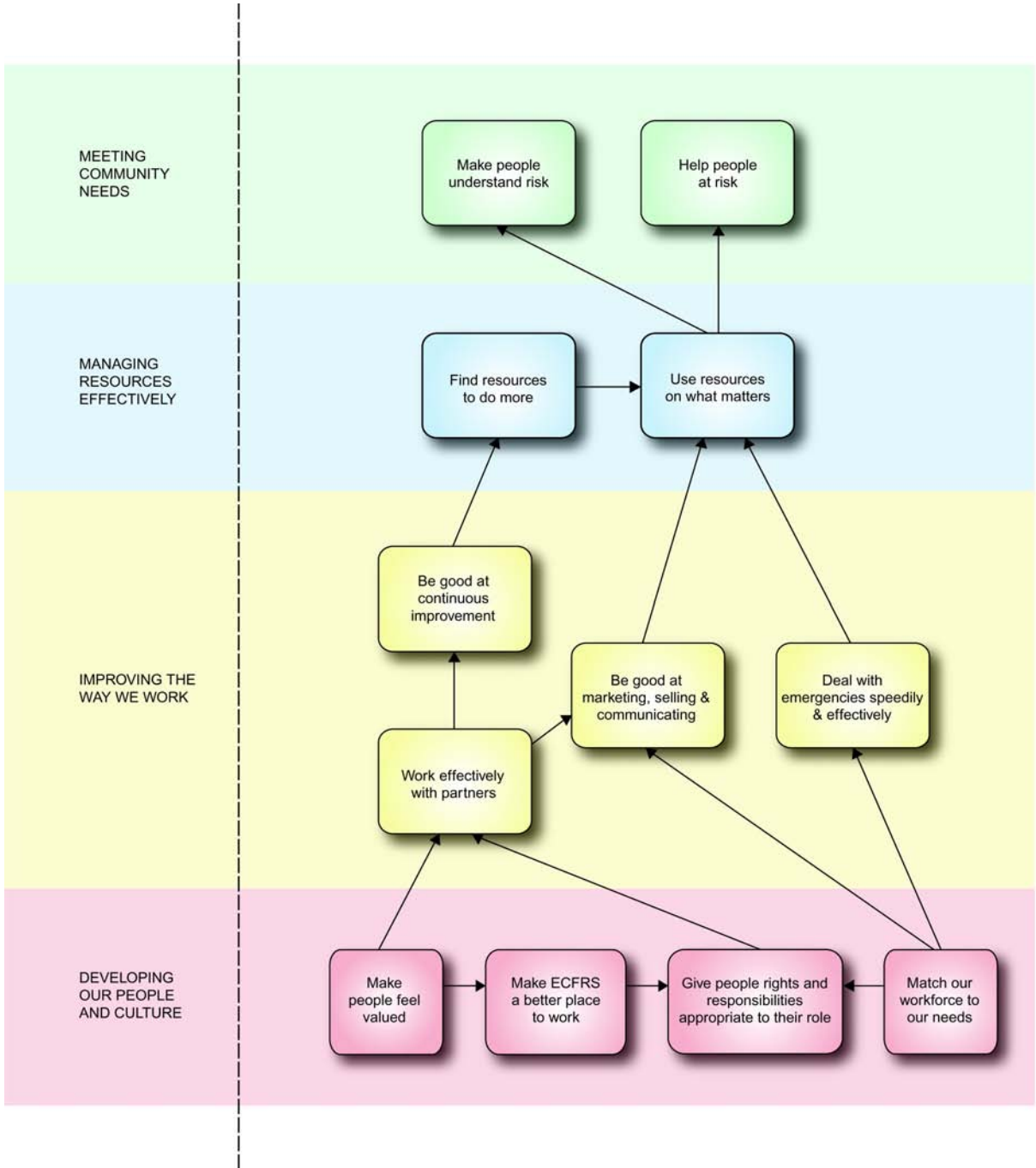
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposals within the IRMP form part of the business plan for the EFA. The financial impact of all the proposals will be included in the EFA's revenue and capital budgets for 2006/07.

Those proposals that are adopted within the IRMP agreed by the Fire Authority may require additional expenditure. Savings in other areas of the Authority's budget, including efficiency savings and cost reductions from previous IRMPs, will be used. Should the overall cost of proposals exceed the savings available then the Authority will consider the overall balance of funding needed as part of its budget setting process.

The cost of specific proposals is not included in the IRMP. This is because the principal driver for these changes is to achieve improvements in the performance of the EFA and a reduction in risk. The cost of the proposals may vary as a result of the consultation, or as a result of decisions affecting the timing of implementation.

Our Strategy





2: "WHY - THE NEED TO RESPOND"

SETTING THE SCENE

Those of us that live in Essex will know it as a County of contrasts ranging from urban to rural, complemented by a rich and picturesque coastline. Our borders include rural and metropolitan neighbours each with its own diverse profile.

For residents and visitors alike the County offers a diversity of people and places that adds to its cultural heritage. This is reflected in the population figure for the County, which shows that 1,635,600 people currently live within Essex, of which 5.5% belong to minority ethnic groups and 27% are aged over 65, with the fastest growth being amongst the over 80s. In 2002, Essex was home to 564,404 dwellings, representing a 9% growth between 1992 and 2002.

Approximately 6,000 people a year move into the County to live whilst a further 5-6 million people a year visit to enjoy the coastal and heritage sites which make Essex such an interesting place in which to live, work and visit.

The London-Stansted-Cambridge Corridor (LSCC) has experienced substantial growth in the last decade with Harlow and the north of Essex identified as sites for substantial housing expansion. The potential for growth in housing provision in the LSCC up to 2031 could range from around a quarter to half a million. With this comes improved and expanded infrastructure. This all

places a greater demand on ECFRS to anticipate, plan for and meet the needs of the current and future communities.

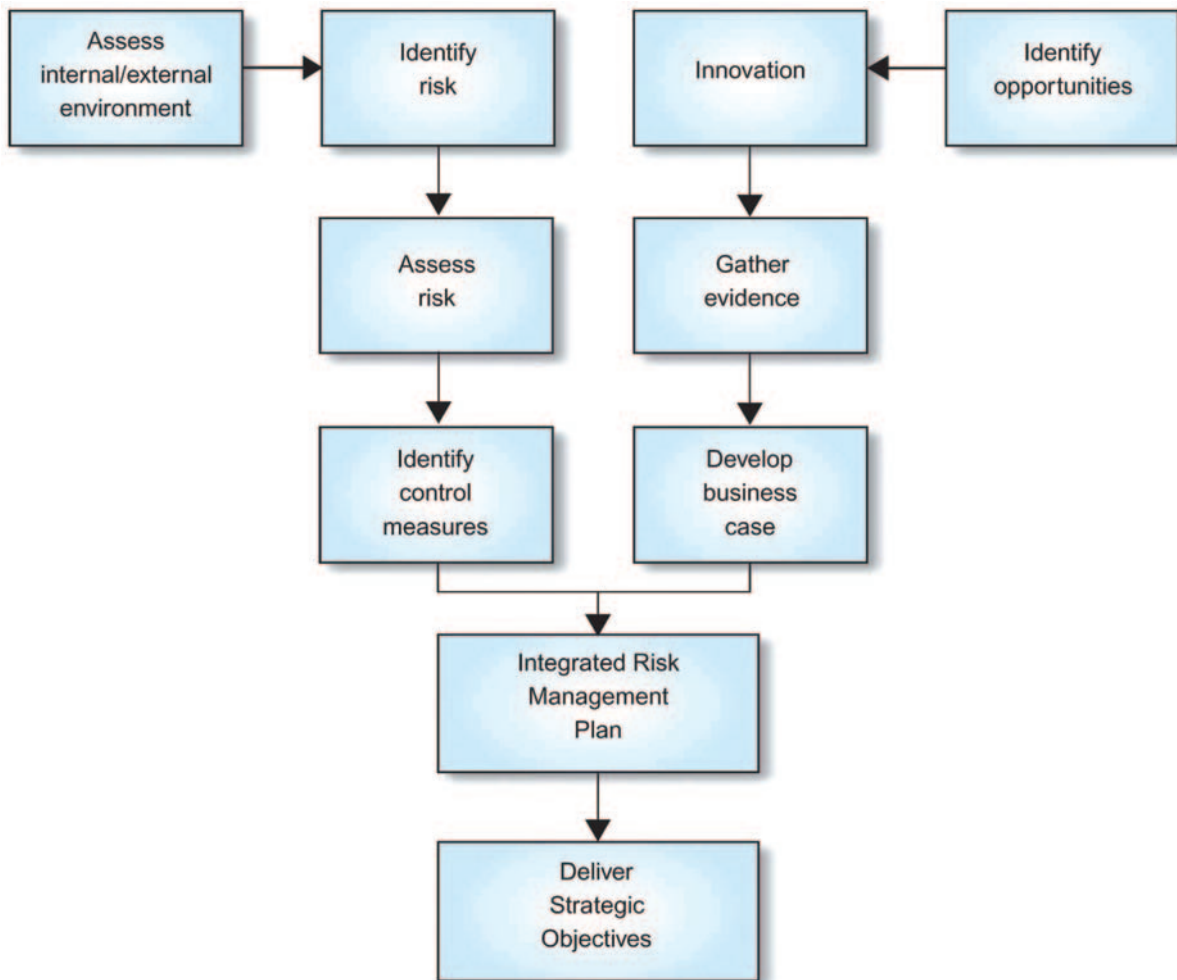
The introduction of the Fire and Rescue Services Act in 2004 has put integrated risk management and planning at the heart of service delivery. It focuses our activities to those areas that require the most immediate attention to reduce risk. This includes aligning resources to deliver a balanced strategy for prevention, protection and response to incidents.

As stated in Section 1, the IRMP is part of a process that ensures that we constantly review the level and nature of risk posed to the lives and property of the residents and visitors to Essex and the environment in which we live. The process by which we do this is known as 'risk management'.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The proposals in the IRMP are based upon an assessment of the current and emerging risks at both local and national level and the ability of ECFRS to prepare and respond to them. Risk, as a term, is not confined to that which is present within the community, but also exists as a threat to the ability of ECFRS to deliver its objectives. This is defined as corporate risk and is identified within the corporate risk planning profiles. These are based upon an examination of existing control measures and current and emerging risk.

The diagram overleaf sets out our developing approach to IRMP. In either instance, whether we are responding to risk or opportunity, the focus of our activity remains on improving the service we deliver.



BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT

Nearly one in five businesses suffer a major disruption every year. It is therefore essential that your fire and rescue service can ensure that it maintains a continuous service provision in all foreseeable circumstances. Business Continuity Management (BCM) is the process that addresses this need. To meet this business need, ECFRS appointed a consultant to assist our Senior Management Team in developing a BCM Risk Register. This work was completed in 2005.

The register identifies the economic, environmental, technological and operational risks that could have an adverse impact on our business continuity. The register also indicates how we control the likelihood of each risk.



The Senior Management Team, with guidance from our Risk Management Group, will ensure that the register is maintained as a living document by assessing, from a BCM perspective, on a regular basis, all planned changes and any emerging threats to our service.




We will build business continuity into all our future plans, making it part of the way that we run our business enabling us to be more prepared and able to offer 'business as usual' in the quickest possible time.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

We have delivered a number of objectives highlighted in the IRMP for 2005/06. These are detailed in the table below.

Objective	Delivery date	Progress
1. Commit to the development of an interactive life safety centre.	Determined by the uptake from local and regional partners.	This project has been included as part of the plan to relocate our Service Headquarters (delivery date 2009).
2. Produce a community safety foundation plan.	July 2005	Complete. 
3. We intend to develop the role and function of corporate communications.	August 2006	Complete.
4. Incorporate those elements of the National Framework that have not already been incorporated and set out a clear time scale for the delivery of the opportunities that it presents.	December 2005	Complete.
5. We intend to consolidate the outcomes of the reviews relating to the roles and functions of special appliances that were identified in the 2004/05 IRMP.	August 2005	Complete. 
6. We intend to create two new posts to deal with civil contingencies and emergency planning.	April 2005	Complete.

Objective	Delivery date	Progress
7. We intend to support the work of the Regional Management Board (RMB) by proactively seeking opportunities to contribute to its agenda and, where possible, underpin its work with resources.	Ongoing	<p>The Service has taken an active role within the RMB and has supported a number of initiatives, including most recently the introduction of an RMB business plan. These focus on integrating the work of specialist and common services, putting in place effective resilience plans for large scale emergencies, introducing regional human resource functions, developing a regional approach to training, establishing a regional Control and introducing regional procurement.</p> 
8. We intend to amalgamate resources currently assigned to implementation of the Integrated Personal Development system (IPDS) with those employed in the facilitation and delivery of training, into a single learning and development department.	Ongoing	This project has progressed and premises are now being sought to accommodate the newly amalgamated department.
9. We intend to assess existing duty systems and where appropriate introduce alternatives that better meet the needs of the Service and its employees and provide best practice for the alignment of resources to the risk to the community from fire and other emergencies.	Ongoing	A consultancy has been appointed to conduct this research. This will be augmented by ongoing national studies. However, until such time that it can be clearly demonstrated, through robust analysis and evidence gathering, that changes to shift systems would improve the quality of our service, no changes will be made.
10. We intend to make improvements to the provision of our financial services.	July 2006	Ongoing.
11. We will deliver a corporate governance framework that ensures the Service has the highest standards of	December 2005	This project is on track to meet its completion date. The project streams are progressing as below:



Objective	Delivery date	Progress
strategic and financial planning and performance measurement/ management, providing the direction and leadership required by the Service.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Profile – Complete • Business Continuity Register – Complete • Performance Management – Phase 1 complete • Overview and Scrutiny – Report complete and gone to action plan stage. • Standards and Ethics – Move to values led culture

EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

A key element of the Service’s role in reducing risk to the communities of Essex is its ability to respond effectively to emergency incidents. The Service has recently undertaken a preliminary review of its arrangements in this regard, and is largely satisfied that the systems in place for monitoring and improving operational performance are robust. Furthermore, in its report of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Essex Fire Authority, the Audit Commission commented that the Service “...is able to demonstrate that it delivers an effective service in key operational areas...”

Notwithstanding the outcome of the preliminary internal review, and the positive opinion expressed by the Audit Commission, the Service intends to strengthen its arrangements for monitoring and improving operational performance. A specific intention has therefore been incorporated into section 3 of this document, which will involve the Service auditing its current arrangements against a national good practice model. The findings of this audit will inform changes necessary to ensure that the highest possible standards of performance at emergency incidents are delivered to our communities.

NEW STANDARDS OF RESPONSE

We have agreed an improved set of standards by which we will measure our operational performance. This was previously dictated by Government standards that set out how many fire appliances should attend a particular type of property risk in a given time.

The nature of community risk and the way in which we address it has evolved since the original standards were set. The Government has since issued guidance that fire and rescue services should create new standards identifying how quickly we should respond to not only property incidents, but to also consider the risk to life, the environment, the social impact and local factors.

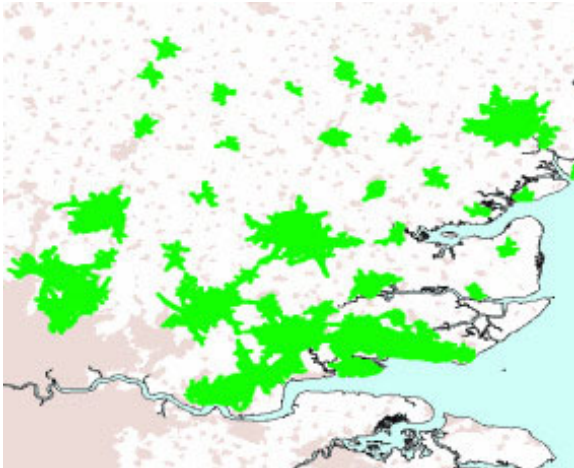
For the time being, any new standard must be based on where our resources are at present. Using existing information we know that we currently respond to fires, automatic false alarms and hoax calls within:

- 8 minutes on 80% of occasions;
- 12 minutes on 95% of occasions; and
- 20 minutes on 100% of occasions (subject to receiving adequate location information, etc).

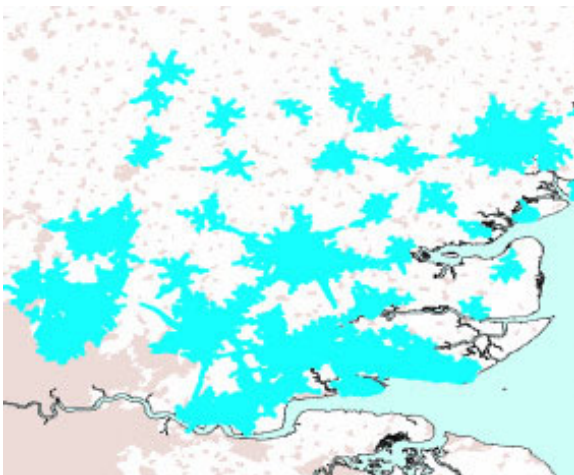
It makes sense to use our existing attendance standards as a good starting point. Therefore, having been approved by the Fire Authority, the Service’s new attendance standards will be:

"The Service will attend an emergency within 8 minutes on 80% of occasions, 10 minutes on 90% of occasions and 20 minutes on 100% of occasions, from the time an emergency response is mobilised."

8 Mins



10 mins



20 Mins



These new standards do not change the number of appliances that are sent to different incidents. Through an assessment of our incident data we are able to constantly review our risks in relation to appliance movements and locations. This information also helps us plan to target our community safety strategies to those areas of greatest risk including those areas within our community, highlighted as being outside our 20-minute response time.

CIVIL PROTECTION

The recently introduced Civil Contingencies Act places new statutory responsibilities on the fire and rescue service to undertake planning for civil protection.

ECFRS is playing a leading role in developing a Local Resilience Forum. The development of such a forum is a requirement in the Act, and its purpose is to ensure that all the civil protection work undertaken by the various agencies is co-ordinated to reduce duplication and to provide integrated emergency planning and response.

One of our main responsibilities under the Act is to assess the risk of a major emergency occurring. ECFRS is participating in a collaborative exercise to produce combined risk assessments for each type of hazard the County could face, such as major flooding, transport accidents or toxic release. These assessments will help inform a Community Risk Register that provides an agreed



position on the risks affecting the County and on the planning and resourcing priorities required to prepare for those risks.

The Community Risk Register is not an end in itself, but serves as a means of ensuring a common approach to developing contingency plans to deal with a major emergency. The Act also requires the fire and rescue service to maintain plans to ensure that it can continue to function in the event of an emergency. This is being achieved through our business continuity planning.

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR)

Essex Fire Authority is providing a key role in enhancing the County's preparedness and resilience to respond to major and catastrophic incidents.

ECFRS provides the interim Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) response for the region. The Essex team consists of fifteen members who are specialist trained to respond to any incident, whether deliberate or accidental, involving unstable or collapsed structures, or following a major transport incident. The USAR team also provides support in the day-to-day operations of the fire and rescue service at incidents involving collapsed structures or transport accidents.

The team has recently acquired a Border collie search dog called 'Darcy'. The collie is now undergoing extensive training in searching and locating trapped people. Darcy is expected to be ready for action next year!



The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), through the New Dimensions Project, has provided a vehicle equipped with a range of search cameras, victim locators, concrete cutting equipment and shoring equipment. The vehicle is currently based at Southend Fire Station.

The search and rescue capability will shortly be upgraded to a full-time team of specialist-trained personnel. Additional specialist vehicles will be provided to increase capability.

MASS DECONTAMINATION

The ODPM has also equipped ECFRS with a dedicated vehicle and mass decontamination equipment to deal with the threat of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) incidents.

The specialist vehicle is referred to as the Incident Response Unit (IRU) and is based at Chelmsford Fire Station. The vehicle carries two structures and associated equipment for public mass decontamination: an emergency services decontamination structure, and a large number of gas-tight chemical protection suits.

All operational members of the fire and rescue service have received specialist training on operating and managing the mass decontamination equipment.

The Service will soon have the ability to detect, identify and monitor hazardous contaminants through the provision of specialist equipment provided by the ODPM's New Dimensions Project. The equipment will be operated by our highly trained Hazmat Officers.

COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTIVITIES

We have been working on your behalf to deliver safer communities for all. This has included a number of initiatives to reduce risk. In particular, we have delivered customer focused improvements by developing a Community Safety Foundation Plan, which has delivered more community safety initiatives than ever before. In particular, our achievements include,

- **3000 home fire safety visits conducted within the County.**

All fire stations have now been equipped and trained to carry out home fire safety risk assessments. These visits include the provision of free smoke alarms and specialist fire detection installations for those with hearing and sight impairments.

- **123 young people have attended Firebreak/Young Firefighters since January 2005 with a further 280 young people booked for this financial year with more in the pipeline.**



In line with our 2005/06 Annual Plan commitment to expand our work among young people, we have substantially increased our Firebreak programme. The seven-day course encourages respect for others, the promotion of self worth and the integration of young people into the local community, thereby supporting the concept of sustainable communities.

The comments of this Colchester parent reflect the impact the course can have on young lives:

"I simply cannot believe the difference in my daughter since attending this course. I now have a motivated, confident and polite child. Firebreak has achieved what I thought was impossible, thank you all so very very much."

We have modified the Firebreak programme so that youngsters who complete it can be transferred to new or existing Young Firefighter schemes. We are pleased to report that these schemes have recently received Duke of Edinburgh Award accreditation. We are confident that, by extending our contact time in this way, we can further increase the already significant impact we make



on these young people. We also plan to include new groups for Harlow, Grays and Orsett in the future.

- **17,000 young people have received the "Backfire" intervention package.**

Our Backfire intervention package is targeted at year 7 school children and is specially aimed at reducing incidents of arson and hoax calls.

- **50 of our staff have been trained as 'Youth Trainers'.**

These personnel are receiving training in drug awareness, behavioural management, child protection and training skills in order to equip them for their challenging new roles of assisting in the provision of youth initiatives across the County.

- **The first domestic sprinkler system has been commissioned within the County.**



The Service has been proactive in responding to specific risks by supporting the installation of automatic sprinklers in domestic properties; one has been installed in Colchester, a second is under way and further schemes are being evaluated for Harlow, Braintree and Thurrock.

- **152 Junior Firesetters visits have been carried out with 97.8% of children not re-offending.**

Members of the JFS team, accompanied by Peter Martin from Roehampton University



We have recognised the greater complexity of cases being referred and, in response, have employed the services of Peter Martin from Roehampton University to give us a greater insight into how to modify this dangerous behaviour. We are rightly proud of this success and of our Junior Firesetter staff, who work hard to convince children of the dangers that fire can pose.

- **We have improved resource management**

We have improved the way we manage our financial, equipment and personnel resources by:

- developing a 'Corporate Governance Framework', which will maintain a continuous focus on improving the what, why and how of our activities;
- appointing a new Director for Finance who also provides the role of Treasurer to the EFA, thereby streamlining financial management process;
- conducting a review of our asset management programme to better inform our future plans;
- taking an early opportunity to work on a regional approach with other fire and rescue services on a number of initiatives to reduce costs of shared resources; and
- responding positively to the recommendations in the CPA report by implementing new

processed policies to better manage our workforce and improve our capacity to deliver improved services.

- **We have developed our organisation and the people that comprise it by:-**
 - investing in technical and managerial training;
 - introducing new systems for identifying, developing and promoting the best personnel to take the organisation forward; and
 - commissioning a review to establish where our focus should lie to ensure sustainable organisational growth.

But we intend to do more, be even better at what we do, and seek further opportunities to make Essex a safer place in which to live, work and visit.

The next section details the initiatives that will take priority for the next three years. These have been identified from assessing current and emerging risk within the community and organisation, along with a drive to improve efficiency and raise performance in line with government and local performance standards.





3: ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE INTENTIONS FOR 2006-2009

The intentions outlined here are those that we have identified as a priority for the next three years. These have been arrived at from an examination of the environment in which the Fire Service operates and are seen as those that have the most potential to reduce risk at both customer and corporate level and address those areas of highest risk. The objectives fall into one of four categories as detailed in section 1.

Public consultation on the intentions took place between January and April 2006. A summary of responses and the outcomes of the consultation are detailed in the appendix to this plan. The revised plans are set out below.

OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUNITIES

We need to:

Make people understand risk

Help people at risk

To achieve this we will,

Reduce road traffic collisions (RTCs).

What and why	We intend to support initiatives to reduce the number of RTCs within the County. The drive comes from statistics that show that the risk of dying in an RTC is ten times that of the risk of dying in a fire. The Essex road network is also expanding and the Service must respond to the current and developing risk. This is also set out as a requirement for the FRS in the national framework document for 2005/6.
How and when	We will work in partnership with the police, local authorities and other agencies on joint initiatives to improve road safety. We will evaluate our contribution to these partnerships. This will identify how we may best align our resources to reduce this risk. We will complete

What and why	We intend to support initiatives to reduce the number of RTCs within the County. The drive comes from statistics that show that the risk of dying in an RTC is ten times that of the risk of dying in a fire. The Essex road network is also expanding and the Service must respond to the current and developing risk. This is also set out as a requirement for the FRS in the national framework document for 2005/6.
	this as part of the development of a strategic partnership register for 2006. We will also seek to reduce road risk caused by our activities. We will develop and monitor performance measures for our activities and desired outcomes in this area.

Put in place a community outreach worker.

What and why	We intend to appoint and support development of the role of a community outreach worker. This is vital to support our strategic objectives to reduce risk in the community, whilst at the same time reaching out to those communities that least know how to have influence over our service delivery and planning. The post will also serve to assist us in developing a workforce that is more reflective of the communities we serve.
How and when	The person appointed will work closely with minority groups to increase trust between communities and the Service, increase access to the Service and raise awareness of fire safety issues. We intend to appoint someone to this post by June 2006.



Publish and implement an educational safety programme to reach every child in Essex.

What and why	We will expand our safety education programme to deliver fire and road safety messages to all children. This is part of an overall strategy to raise awareness of risk to achieve safer communities. By promoting awareness at an early age we may also reduce the risk of antisocial behaviour, such as hoax calls and firesetting.
How and when	We will utilise specialist school workers and trained firefighters in partnership with agencies, to achieve a rolling programme of activities. This process will be established by January 2007. Success will be measured through outputs and outcomes delivered against locally arrived-at performance indicators. We will work towards the national targets of reducing the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20% by 31 March 2010, and to achieve a 10% reduction in deliberate fires by the same date.

Implement the forthcoming Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

What and why	The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, due to come into force in October 2006, will simplify Fire Safety law for thousands of businesses and other premises. At the same time it will place a greater responsibility on the employer or 'responsible person' to act in a way that keeps them; and those they are responsible for, safe from fire. The Service has a duty to enforce the order by carrying out fire safety audits of selected premises to ensure that they provide safe places to live and work.
How and when	<p>The Service will act to reduce risk within the County by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuing to act as a resource for Fire Safety advice and guidance.• Actively enforcing Fire Safety standards in premises and using information collected during our inspection/audit process to inform us as to where we can most effectively concentrate our future efforts. <p>We are now working to fully discharge our responsibilities by October 2006. This will include the provision of new guidance for employers, training for our own staff and improved information technology to help us manage this change and to reduce risk to the community. The Service will implement a process that will ensure a continuous reduction in the risk from fire through a combination of education and active enforcement.</p>

RESOURCE OBJECTIVES

We need to:



To meet these objectives we intend to,

Relocate Headquarters and develop a Life Skills Centre.

What and why	<p>We intend to relocate our Service Headquarters. This is driven by the expanding nature of the Service, the restricted space to develop our current site and a change of focus on the way we do business. We need a site that meets our current and future needs and provides opportunities to bring many of our satellite departments under one roof. The new site will be designed to deliver an improved business environment.</p> <p>We intend to incorporate within this the development of a Life Skills Centre that will include life skills and interactive displays for the public to visit, the aim being for young people to gain valuable information on safety in the home and on the road. The move will provide value for money by releasing funds from the sale of our existing site, which can be better deployed elsewhere.</p>
How and when	<p>We are currently conducting a feasibility study of potential sites. We intend to purchase a site within the next twelve months and complete the move by the end of 2009. We will utilise our partnership approach to attract visitors to the Life Skills Centre.</p> <p>Our success will be measured by identifying a site and project that overcome all of the organisational challenges that forced us to consider moving in the first place. We will develop, set and monitor targets for the attraction of targeted groups to the Life Skills Centre and measure the effectiveness of the experience.</p>

Establish an urban search and rescue facility.

What and why	<p>The New Dimensions Project is providing ECFRS with the capability to respond to any incident involving unstable or collapsed structures. We will form part of the national capability to respond to major incidents requiring specialist resources. This will increase our existing Urban Search and Rescue provision through a number of specialist vehicles, equipment and a dedicated USAR training facility. This will better prepare us to deal with our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act and deliver Services to deal with the aftermath of a major incident.</p>
How and when	<p>We intend to explore the feasibility of establishing a dedicated USAR station and training facility, on land adjacent to our Service Workshops at Lexden, Colchester. These plans will be subject to securing additional funding from the ODPM for the building costs and obtaining planning consent for the station.</p>



Improve the Service's rescue and response capability.

What and why	The IRMP for 2005/06 established a review of the Service's specialist functions and appliances. This year we will seek to identify and implement innovative solutions to satisfy the proposals for change. These proposals will ensure the Service responds speedily and effectively to all emergencies. These innovative solutions will ensure that risk is mirrored by the provision of resources; the Service complies with new statutory duties; the provision of specialist services and appliances are used in an efficient and cost-effective manner; and short, medium and long-term planning requirements are met. This will also allow us to take advantage of advances in equipment technology.
How and when	The Service will establish project teams to address the principal work streams identified. These include project teams to review off-road appliances, specialist rescue, foam capability, etc. These teams will work in partnership with appropriate representative bodies to ensure effective and appropriate consultation is undertaken throughout. This rolling programme started in late 2005 and will continue through to 2007. This will incorporate the replacement of appliances that have been identified in the capital budget from 2005/06 through to 2008/09.

Develop resources to meet the operational demands placed on the Service.

What and why	New legislation has expanded the role of the fire and rescue service. We now need to be equipped to deliver a greater volume of safety services, across a wider range of activities. In addition to being assigned a very welcome statutory responsibility to help prevent fires and improve general fire safety standards in all buildings, we are also now required to respond to emergencies associated with major flooding, road traffic collisions, major search and rescue events, major transport incidents (including at sea), and terrorist attacks. These new responsibilities combine to create a substantial additional demand on our resources. It is important, therefore, that we endeavour to both establish new resources to do more, and to use existing operational resources as efficiently as possible.
How and when	We will, over the next three years - with support from the Department for Communities and Local Government - continue to improve our preparedness for responding to large-scale incidents at a local, regional and national level. In addition, we will actively seek efficiency savings - through the use of flexible working patterns, and evolving technology - that can be invested in doing more than we have ever done to make Essex safer.



Carry out an assessment of firefighters and equipment mobilised to emergency incidents.

What and why	We will carry out an assessment to ensure that the correct number of firefighters and equipment are mobilised as part of the initial attendance to emergency incidents. This arose from consultation with, and is supported by, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) as part of a new partnership approach. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 has also introduced new statutory duties that considerably increase the scope of emergencies the Service must attend. In order to satisfy these duties the Service must review its response to all emergencies to ensure that incident commanders have adequate resources available to maintain safe systems of work.
How and when	The Service will establish a task and finish project team to identify the wide range of emergencies the Service attends and address the principal work streams. Consideration will be given to the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST) work already undertaken by the FBU. These teams will work in partnership with appropriate representative bodies to ensure effective and appropriate consultation is undertaken throughout. This project team will start in 2006 and make recommendations before the year end. Our measurement for success will be to have arrived at a set of attendance standards agreed with all stakeholders that provides an effective response and safe systems of work.

Review strategic sites.

What and why	We intend to establish a programme to improve and maintain our fire stations in accordance with current legislation and risk identification and to create a pleasant working environment for our personnel. We will look to not only improve the quality of our sites, making them better places to work, but also ensure that the locations remain appropriate to serve the needs of the community.
How and when	We intend to build upon the existing stock condition survey with a full review and action plan ready by the end of 2007.



PROCESS OBJECTIVES

We want to:

Be good at continuous improvement	Work effectively with partners
Be good at marketing, selling & communicating	Deal with emergencies speedily & effectively

It is therefore our intention to:

Introduce a strategic approach to partnership working.

What and why	We intend to develop a strategic approach to working in partnership with others that allows us to focus our resources towards those that are the most effective, healthy, and risk critical partnership arrangements, particularly where we are an equal partner. Noting those partnerships already operating, we need to ensure that partnerships entered into do not compromise our values and that we are able to evaluate the effectiveness of these partnerships. All partnerships will be assessed for added value and their contribution to our corporate aims.
How and when	We will develop, maintain and manage a strategic partnership register that will allow us to assess our partnerships regularly and establish clear criteria for entering into and terminating any arrangements. We intend to do this by the end of December 2006.

Consider and take responsibility for our impact on the environment.

What and why	We will set up systems that ensure that we are able to consider what impact our activities and processes have on the environment. We will do this in order to remain consistent with our values and protect the environment.
How and when	We will set up an environmental impact group consisting of key stakeholders from across the organisation and encompassing external stakeholders, and set terms of reference and objectives for the group. This will be completed by December 2006.

Improve Attendance Management.

What and why	We intend to improve the health and welfare of our staff. To support this aim, we will seek to refine and further develop our attendance management systems. We will aim to ensure that we are able to maximise on the potential for our staff to deliver services to the public and release resources for additional operational, community safety and support roles. Moreover in line with our values and organisational growth objectives we intend to achieve a working environment which ensures that our staff are happy, healthy and here delivering effective focused services to the communities we serve.
How and when	We will try to improve staff health by providing a support system for health improvement whilst building on the already established systems for monitoring attendance by conducting further reviews of crewing, annual leave and the way in which we manage our staff. We will work flexibly to deliver working patterns and systems for operational deployment that meet not only the needs of the community but also encourage maximum contribution from our workforce. We intend to start this work in 2006 and implement changes by the summer of 2007. We will develop locally arrived at performance indicators to measure our success in these areas.

Improve the Service's IT infrastructure.

What and why	We will implement the outcome of the recent IT Service Review that resulted in a new IT Strategy and Service Review Document. This made several recommendations for improving IT Service Delivery and future investment. Effective IT systems ensure that we are able to manage our information and use it as best we can to focus activities, support efficient decision making and effective communications.
How and when	An Action Plan is currently being drawn up prioritising and scheduling each of the recommendations within five business streams. Timescales for delivery vary between immediate and March 2007.



Develop performance management in order to ensure effectiveness and provide a balanced approach to protection, prevention and response.

What and why	We intend to develop further our performance management framework. This will ensure that we maintain our focus on those areas that we have identified as priorities for the Service, that our resources are used efficiently and that we maintain a cycle of continuous improvement. We will introduce a system for effectively monitoring our performance at incidents and utilise this information to develop improved operational performance and reduce risk to our personnel and the public.
How and when	In 2004/05 we introduced an umbrella framework known as a 'Corporate Governance Framework'. To build on this we will introduce policies and procedures to ensure organisational objectives are met. The performance management process includes an element of review to ensure that the process is kept live and activities are aligned to Service priorities. We will implement operational performance monitoring by July 2006.

Maintain and improve operational effectiveness.

What and why	We intend to undertake a detailed self-assessment of the Service's operational assurance arrangements - which will be reviewed by external auditors. The output from this assessment process will inform improvements to ensure that the highest standards of performance are delivered when we respond to emergency incidents. We will carry out this assessment to build upon our current high performance in this essential area of service delivery, and also to inform an annual Statement of Operational Assurance.
How and when	The self-assessment process will be completed by August 2006, with a Field Work Team from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) formally reviewing the assessment between August and September. The judgements made through the DCLG review process will form an important component of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process that the Service is undergoing during 2006. The outputs from the self-assessment and DCLG review will inform the contents of an Operational Assurance Improvement Plan, which will be delivered as a matter of priority.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

We need to:



To deliver these objectives we intend to:

Develop a strategy to enable us to respond more flexibly to change.

What and why	We need to develop a strategy to further our ability to respond to a fast changing climate and be able to adopt and embed change at all levels. This will improve our ability to deliver services that reflect the current and developing needs of our communities and to effectively reduce risk within the County.
How and when	We are raising our understanding of the internal barriers to change through staff consultation and a process of cultural mapping. We are introducing an audit process to inform our decision making process and help identify internal risks, which may reduce our ability to respond effectively to change. We are devolving decision-making responsibility to local managers to enable them to respond effectively to change.

Develop a values-centred culture.

What and why	We intend to encourage an organisational culture that is underpinned by a set of shared values. This will assist in ensuring that personnel feel valued and improve our approach to business both internally and externally. It will serve to mitigate the impact of the high risk associated with potentially poor employee and industrial relations within the fire and rescue service.
How and when	We will adopt a set of corporate values linked to the National Framework for 2005/06. We have undertaken a staff survey, the results of which will further inform development of values that are common to all.



Set up workforce planning and development boards.

What and why	In partnership with key stakeholders, we will establish workforce planning and development boards to work within the framework offered in the guide 'Workforce Planning in Local Authorities'. This will assist with succession planning to provide continuity to the Service through periods of change.
How and when	We have developed a scoping document for the project and plan to implement in 2006. This will be a long-term project that, once established, will be reviewed regularly to ensure the boards are able to respond to the dynamic needs of the Service.

Encourage flexibility in management decision making.

What and why	We intend to devolve appropriate budgetary responsibility to local managers to allow flexibility to manage staffing costs across a group of stations. This will allow resources to be aligned to risk locally rather than centrally, therefore allowing flexibility to meet the varied needs of our diverse communities. This will be replicated in support functions to encourage local and more effective management of funds.
How and when	Responsibility for maintenance and resource expenditure will be devolved from central budget holders to local managers with the objective of full local involvement in budget setting and expenditure commitment for the financial year 2007/08. Options for local accountability for staffing budgets will also be developed with the objective of delegating decision making to the lowest possible level commensurate with efficient operational response. IT systems to support this have been introduced for staff on the retained duty system in March 2006. A system for local decisions on levels of community safety activity has been introduced from April 2006, together with watch and station plans linked through to our corporate objectives.

Introduce effective measures for working safely.

What and why	We intend to reduce risk to our personnel by addressing a range of legislative Health and Safety issues, including working at heights, confined spaces and working on or near water.
How and when	We are taking a phased approach to the introduction of control measures that will ensure that all our personnel have effective, safer systems of work.

Develop work streams to prepare for the transition to a regional Control.

What and why	As a function within the National FiReControl project we are developing work streams, within the Civil Contingencies Directorate, to prepare the Service for the move to a Regional Control Centre (RCC) in 2009. The scale of this project requires that we set out now the details of the data and information that requires collation. This work is essential to ensure organisational resilience during the transition period and thereafter.
How and when	We will prepare for this by ensuring all our procedures and systems are compatible with the new RCC. A post will be established to facilitate our managers and staff to review and amend business processes as necessary.



APPENDIX

Summary of Responses to IRMP 2006-2009 Consultation Document

Introduction

In January 2006 Essex Fire Authority published a consultation document seeking views on the proposals detailed in its new Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2006-2009. The consultation period ran for twelve weeks, closing on 3 April 2006.

The document was posted in hard copy format to every member of the Community Consultation Group (CCG) comprising 661 members of the public, trades union representatives, all Service locations, a range of public buildings such as libraries and doctors' surgeries, fire and rescue services, other emergency services, government offices and a number of organisations such as Age Concern, minority groups and local media. It was also uploaded onto the Service's intranet and website. Promotional posters were displayed at a range of public venues explaining how the document may be accessed. The document was promoted internally using *Team Brief*, *Smoke Signals* and the intranet.

Poor response rates had been achieved in previous consultation exercises. In order to engage a wide range of internal and external stakeholders for IRMP 2006-2009, the following methods of consultation were offered.

- Freepost slip detachable from the centre of the plan (new)
- Online consultation via an interactive web version of the IRMP (new)
- Internal feedback forms (new)
- Internal anonymous noticeboard (new)
- Email
- Post
- Phone
- Fax

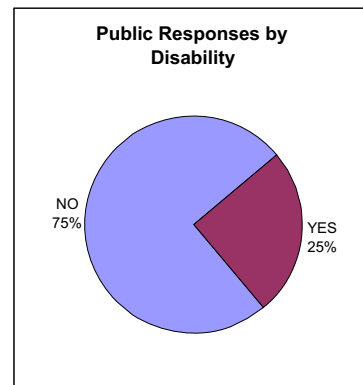
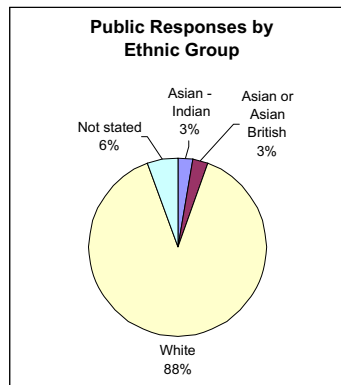
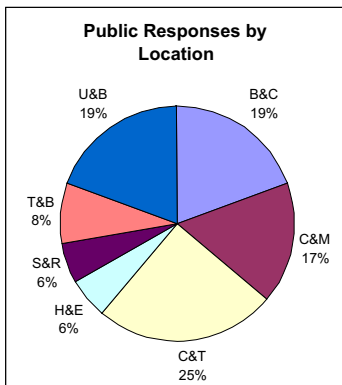
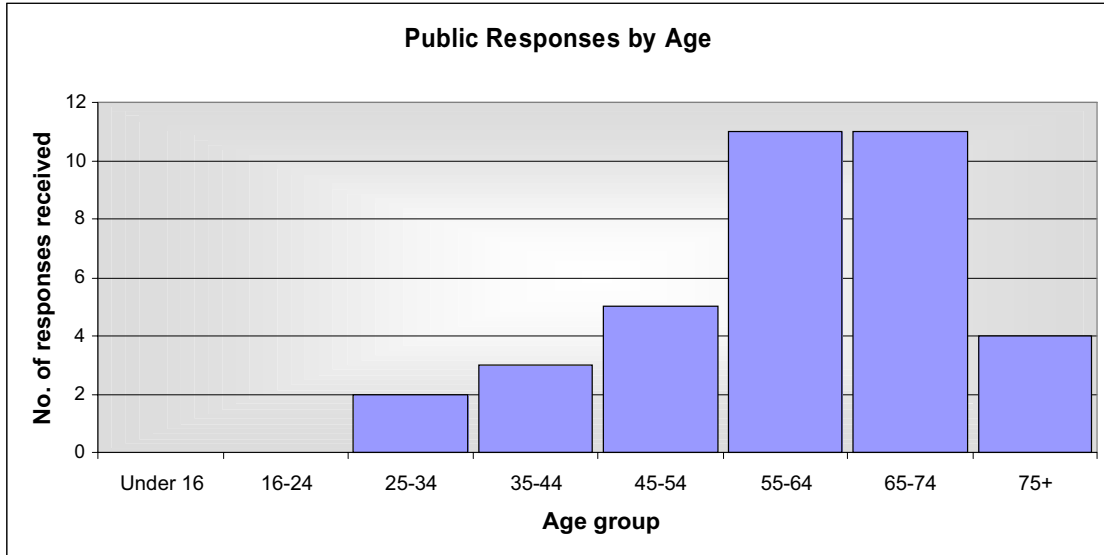
Copies of the internal feedback form were sent to all watches and departments; each team was invited to conduct a 'focus group' style discussion and complete one feedback form together, to promote awareness and encourage staff involvement.

The main points from the consultation responses are summarised later in this report. The majority of the responses received from members of the public were largely supportive of the Fire Authority's proposals. While the response rate from internal stakeholders could be described as disappointing, those members of staff that took part in the consultation contributed informed and constructive feedback.

Breakdown of Responses

The majority of external responses were submitted using the freepost return slip. Internal responses were submitted via the internal feedback forms, email and the anonymous intranet noticeboard. No comments were received through the online consultation facility. Factors that could have contributed to this include the siting of the link in our own website, the complexity of the system and the fact that registration was required prior to submitting comments.

Breakdown of Public Respondents



Of the 661 members of the Community Consultation Group, 30 submitted feedback, representing a response rate of 5%. Five additional respondents requested to join the CCG.

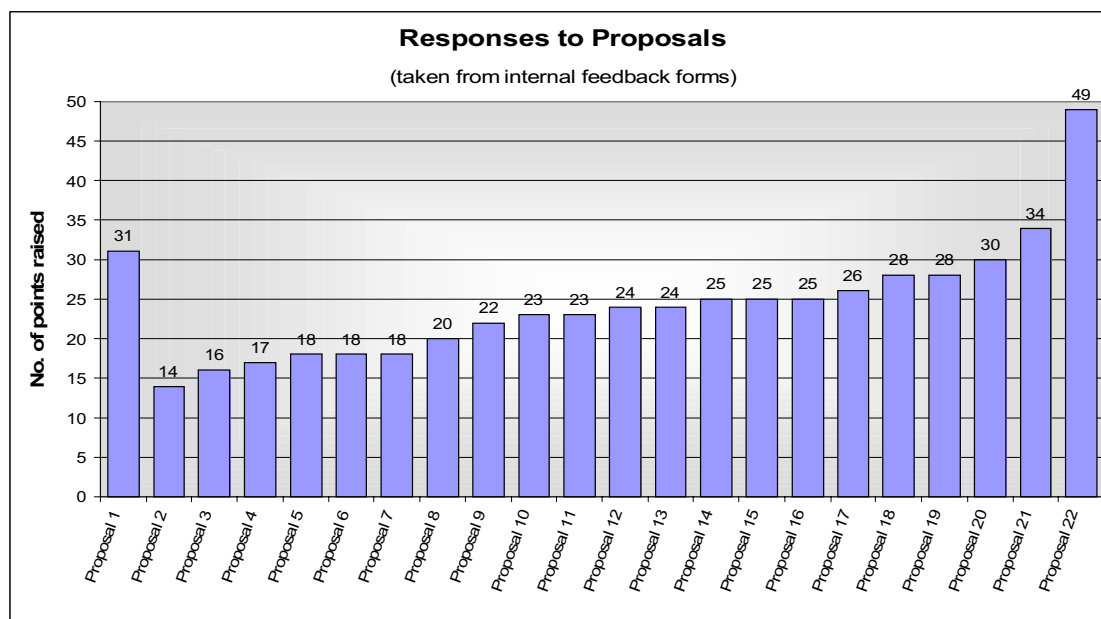
Internal Responses

A total of twenty responses were received from internal stakeholders. Fourteen internal feedback forms were submitted, representing just two watches and seven departments. Four comments were presented on the intranet, while one member of staff participated via email and one by post.



Summary of Responses

The internal feedback forms allowed comments to be made against each proposal. The graph below shows the number of statements received for each proposal. The intention to prepare for Control regionalisation generated most statements, while the Community Outreach Worker received the least.



A summary of the opinions expressed in response to the proposals begins on the next page. Feedback and suggestions not directly related to the proposals can be found on Page 36.

Proposal 1

Reduce road traffic collisions (RTCs)

While the majority of respondents agreed that this was an important and welcome intention, several wanted to know specific details such as how we intend to reduce RTCs and whether or not sufficient resources would be allocated to this work. The Police and local driving instructors were identified as potential partners, and it was suggested that extra resources could be sought from speed cameras. Internal respondents recommended targeting awareness programmes at young people, undertaking blue light training for Service drivers, reducing unnecessary vehicle movements and adopting a road risk management plan.

Proposal 2

Put in place a community outreach worker

This was largely supported as a way to engage local communities and hard-to-reach groups. Some felt that the role was not clearly explained or linked to the work of the existing Community Safety Liaison officers. Three respondents proposed that a team or “pool” would be more effective than a single worker and would help build trust and continuity. Internal stakeholders also called for stronger policies and information for those working with minority groups.

Proposal 3

Publish and implement an educational safety programme to reach every child in Essex

The vast majority of respondents agreed that safety initiatives targeted at young people are important and worthwhile, although one objected to “fun” events being offered to young offenders at the taxpayer’s expense. While the proposal was fully supported by internal departments, some highlighted issues such as training implications and the fact that the Service could not reach those children not attending school. It was suggested that this work should be carried out by staff on secondary contracts rather than on-duty crews, and that the proposal should be more explicit about what we intend to achieve.

Proposal 4

Implement the forthcoming Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

This proposal was supported as a way to stress the importance of legislative fire safety and reduce time ‘wasted’ on the inspection of businesses already adhering to regulations. However, several concerns were raised, mainly the danger of fire safety standards slipping, loss of local knowledge, and the difficulty in policing organisations. There was also call for more information and training for those personnel expected to provide advice and guidance on the RRO. Where our proposal claimed that the Service would reduce risk from fire during the next three years, it was suggested that to aim for continuous improvement would be a more positive goal



Proposal 5

Relocate Headquarters and develop a Life Skills Centre

This proposal received mixed reactions. The consensus on the Life Skills Centre was that it would be beneficial in promoting risk understanding, particularly among families and young people. The proposed location was criticised by some as being inaccessible for those who need it most; a town location central to Essex was considered more appropriate.

In terms of the Headquarters move, the majority of internal respondents expressed concern at a range of issues. These included access to Kelvedon via the A12, distance from the existing SHQ and therefore loss of existing support staff, recruitment, flood potential, capacity, redundancy, parking, cost implications, provision of welfare facilities and the impact of the Control regionalisation. Only one potential site has been communicated, leading staff to believe that relocation to Kelvedon is a “done deal”.

Proposal 6

Establish an urban search and rescue facility

Respondents were broadly supportive of this proposal and felt that it was necessary to develop specialist appliances, equipment and procedures to address the New Dimensions agenda. Staff raised issues including the impact on the existing Service Workshops, integration with the remainder of the Service, mobilising time and the perceived disadvantage to members of staff living outside the catchment area.

Proposal 7

Improve the Service’s rescue and response capability

While public respondents expressed confidence in the Service’s ability to adapt to meet new challenges, they also stressed the need for adequate funding. Staff acknowledged the link between this proposal and Getting Back to What Matters and was felt by some to be overdue. Some interpreted this proposal to mean cutbacks and called for sufficient funding and training for the project to be successful.

Proposal 8

Develop resources to meet the operational demands placed on the Service

Several respondents agreed with the notion of adapting our Service to meet new challenges in an “everchanging world”. The need to plan for large-scale emergencies and an increasing range of demands was accepted and supported. Half of the internal respondents challenged the proposal description as being too vague and “concealed”.

Proposal 9

Carry out an assessment of firefighters and equipment mobilised to emergency incidents

The joint approach to this proposal was acknowledged and supported by internal respondents, although two members of staff pointed out that other unions appeared to have been excluded from the consultation. Following on in this theme, it was suggested that the project team must comprise a proportion of operational personnel. The link between this proposal and “Develop resources to meet the operational demands...” was identified. Though this proposal was seen to be ensuring safe, optimum attendance standards, one respondent was concerned that it would not be possible to act on the findings within current levels of resources.

Proposal 10

Review strategic sites

Many saw this as an opportunity to improve the working environment and boost staff morale in line with Getting Back to What Matters. The importance of welfare facilities, particularly on retained stations, was emphasised. Members of support service departments questioned the intention to review only fire stations, highlighting issues in departments such as Workshops and Training that require attention. It was suggested that priority should be given to ensuring that all existing stations meet the minimum requirements, with equal opportunity and welfare facilities. In this respect it was felt that 2007 was not soon enough to agree plans.

Proposal 11

Introduce a strategic approach to partnership working

It was widely acknowledged internally and in the community that partnership and joint working could help us to achieve more. Several respondents highlighted the advantages of working more closely with other emergency services. For example, combining home fire safety visits with those carried out by the Police. One respondent questioned whether insurance companies could support our safety initiatives by building a clause for fire safety preventative measures into their policies. It was also suggested that ECFRS should approach seek extra resources from private sector organisations.



Proposal 12

Consider and take responsibility for our impact on the environment

This proposal generated little feedback from the public. It was suggested that ECFRS should liaise with other agencies to tackle issues such as litter and fly tipping, which could be seen as a fire and road safety hazard. Internal respondents fully supported the principle, offering ideas such as fuel and paper consumption, recycling, application of a quality standard and environmentally-friendly vehicles, in consultation with Service personnel. The timescale was questioned; one member of staff considered this proposal to be a lower priority than the review of strategic sites, yet the environmental target was sooner.

Proposal 13

Improve Attendance Management

Public respondents did not comment on this proposal. However, the majority of staff who responded agreed that an improvement in attendance management was needed. More than half referred to the current issue with sickness absence. One response questioned the link between this proposal and a change in shift patterns. It was felt that attendance would be improved with the introduction of family-friendly policies, crèche facilities, medical support and rewards for good attendance.

Proposal 14

Improve the Service's IT infrastructure

No strong opinions were expressed regarding IT. However, it was agreed that the Service should take advantage of new technology and explore the potential to share systems with other emergency services.

Internal respondents broadly accepted the proposal and added specific suggestions regarding the improvement of IT. For example, developing key documents such as FB forms, FDR1s and IPDS from paper-based into electronic systems, improving the intranet and ensuring that IT systems are supported 24/7. It was also suggested that the IT Department had not been taken into consideration throughout strategic planning, and that IT and other stakeholders should be more involved at the planning stage.

Proposal 15

Develop performance management in order to ensure effectiveness and provide a balanced approach to protection, prevention and response

Respondents generally supported the principle of managing performance to achieve continuous improvement, but expressed concern about the time that would be devoted to “policing” performance management and the introduction of a new type of audit. One group viewed the July target for operational performance audits as “optimistic” considering the need for training.

Proposal 16

Maintain and improve operational effectiveness

No strong opinions were stated in relation to operational effectiveness. A number of respondents commented that the proposal’s description had been vague and required further clarification. It was also recommended that the term ‘operational assurance’ be defined for the benefit of “lay” people. All five internal respondents noted the potentially positive impact of the audit on performance and front-line response.

Proposal 17

Develop a strategy to enable us to respond more flexibly to change

It was suggested by a member of the public that officers should be educated in flexibility to change. This was echoed by the views of an internal stakeholder, who suggested a robust training/development system was needed to give managers the skills and confidence to make decisions. Two respondents commented on the negative effects of the current speed of change, one stating “Change overload will lead to a non-flexible workforce” and the other calling for a period of stability and less emphasis on audits. There were several mentions of “change for change’s sake” and the perceived expectation to do more with fewer people.

Proposal 18

Develop a values-centred culture

Six out of seven internal respondents supported this proposal, believing it could break down barriers and foster motivation, respect and ownership of the direction of ECFRS. The most important points fed back included encouraging a fair, open and blame-free culture, demonstrated by leaders throughout the Service. It was not clear to the seventh respondent how this intention would improve morale.

Members of the public emphasised the importance of “team spirit” and looking after personnel. It was pointed out that the backing of personnel would be vital in developing the Service.



Proposal 19

Set up workforce planning and development boards

Two of the five members of staff did not fully understand the proposal. However, the majority were in support due to the way it could help to maintain a consistent service throughout periods of change. It was suggested that to increase the proportion of staff from ethnic minority groups to reflect local communities would help break down barriers with those communities.

Proposal 20

Encourage flexibility in management decision making

This was largely approved, although one respondent felt the issue to be irrelevant, and another indicated that the “What and why” description did not agree with the “How and when”. Training and support were considered key to the success of this proposal and to guard against inconsistency.

Proposal 21

Introduce effective measures for working safely

Little feedback was received from the public. Service personnel agreed with the principle and the need to address safety issues, stressing the need for control measures to be researched and implemented properly by fully trained staff. One commented that to promote a working safely culture across the Service would gain more support than compliance with legal requirements.

Proposal 22

Develop work streams to prepare for the transition to a regional Control

Both internal and external stakeholders held mainly negative views about the regionalisation of Control, believing it to be in the best interests of neither the public nor ECFRS. While members of the public feared the loss of local knowledge, staff expressed concern about issues such as the changeover in IT systems, lack of communication, moving timescales, Control staff morale and the potential for further regionalisation in future. However, it was acknowledged that work streams would need to be developed to ensure consistent quality of service throughout the process.

General Comments

- A common concern was that wide-ranging plans would “dilute” front-line services and cause a loss of focus on our core business.
- Several responses revealed concern about the cost implications of our proposals.
- While many praised the style and presentation of the document, the use of language and “political speak” was criticised by some, who would prefer plain English.
- The idea that feedback will influence the proposals is not convincing (“done deal”).
- Concern that front-line services are being diluted and focus on core business will be lost.
- Internal feedback form was time-consuming and not best use of resources, although the premise was well received.

General Suggestions

- Provide costings for IRMP proposals.
- Increase visibility and publicity, eg advertising the Service on television.
- Make fire safety training available for employers.
- Maximise best practice/lessons learned from similar organisations.
- Increase involvement of members of the public.



Outcomes of the Consultation

Overall, the responses were positive with regard to the intentions contained within the IRMP consultation document. Some very good suggestions were made to improve the intended workstreams; these suggestions will be passed on to the relevant department heads for consideration. Where reservations exist, these will be built into the review process for each of the intentions.

A number of internal stakeholders requested that several of the proposals be described in more detail. Similarly, several respondents expressed an interest in the cost implications of the proposals. This highlights the need to engage members of staff and other stakeholders with regular communication and consultation related to the Authority's plans.

The Authority has considered the feedback detailed in this document and, in response, has amended the following proposals.

Proposal 4 'Implement the forthcoming Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005'

The target will be changed to one of continuous improvement.

Proposal 5 'Relocate Headquarters and develop a Life Skills Centre'

Some respondents have taken this intention to apply to one site only, and not as an intention to look at the feasibility of establishing a new Headquarters site and Life Skills Centre. As stated above, this illustrates a need to communicate more effectively.

Proposal 8 ‘Develop resources to meet the operational demands placed on the Service’

The “What and Why” and “How and When” descriptions of this proposal have been revised as follows:

What and Why

“New legislation has expanded the role of the fire and rescue service. We now need to be equipped to deliver a greater volume of safety services, across a wider range of activities. In addition to being assigned a very welcome statutory responsibility to help prevent fires and improve general fire safety standards in all buildings, we are also now required to respond to emergencies associated with major flooding, road traffic accidents, major search and rescue events, major transport incidents (including at sea), and terrorist attacks. These new responsibilities combine to create a substantial additional demand on our resources. It is important, therefore, that we endeavour to both establish new resources to do more, and to use existing operational resources as efficiently as possible.”

How and When

“We will, over the next three years – with support from the Department for Communities and Local Government – continue to improve our preparedness for responding to large-scale incidents at a local, regional and national level. In addition, we will actively seek efficiency savings – through the use of flexible working patterns, and evolving technology – that can be invested in doing more than we have ever done to make Essex safer.

Proposal 16 ‘Maintain and improve operational effectiveness’

The “What and Why” and “How and When” descriptions of this proposal have been revised as follows:

What and Why

“We intend to undertake a detailed self-assessment of the Service’s operational assurance arrangements – which will be reviewed by external auditors. The output from this assessment process will inform improvements to ensure that the highest standards of performance are delivered when we respond to emergency incidents. We will carry out this assessment to build upon our current high performance in this essential area of service delivery, and also to inform an annual Statement of Operational Assurance.”

How and When

“The self-assessment process will be completed by August 2006, with a Field Work Team from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) formally reviewing the assessment between August and September. The judgements made through the DCLG review process will form an important component of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process that the Service is undergoing during 2006. The outputs from the self-assessment and DCLG review will inform the contents of an Operational Assurance Improvement Plan, which will be delivered as a matter of priority.

**Proposal 19 'Set up workforce planning and development boards'**

Details of this proposal will be communicated to members of staff as they become available.

Proposal 20 'Encourage flexibility in management decision making'

The "How and When" description of this proposal has been revised to read the following:

"Responsibility for maintenance and resource expenditure will be devolved from central budget holders to local managers with the objective of full local involvement in budget setting and expenditure commitment for the financial year 2007/08. Options for local accountability for staffing budgets will also be developed with the objective of delegating decision making to the lowest possible level commensurate with efficient operational response. IT systems to support this have been introduced for staff on the retained duty system in March 2006.

A system for local decisions on levels of community safety activity have been introduced from April 2006, together with watch and station plans linked through to our corporate objectives."

Conclusion

The level of response achieved in this IRMP consultation period was more successful than that of the previous year; however, there is still much room for improvement.

The interactive consultation website, produced and hosted externally by a professional design and communications agency, had been introduced as a new initiative to boost responses, but failed to obtain any. Factors that may have contributed to this disappointing result include the following:

- Siting of the hyperlink on our website.
- System not user friendly.
- Registration of personal details required before feedback can be submitted.

At the time the IRMP was produced, there were no options to create a similar consultation website in-house. However, since the expansion of the Media team it is likely that this will be possible in future. To produce a consultation site in-house would be cheaper and is likely to be more fruitful taking into account the lessons learnt from our recent experience.

The internal feedback forms had been intended for completion in teams during watch/department meetings. Given that only fourteen were completed, it would appear that increased promotion and support will be necessary throughout the consultation period to gain a better response rate in future.

Other ideas to be explored for future consultation exercises include: targeted communication with, for example, minority groups, Help the Aged and youth organisations; holding an event in public venues such as Lakeside; displaying posters in a wider range of public areas; distributing consultation documents at every home and organisation visited by the Service; arranging formal focus groups with internal and external stakeholders; and increasing communication with local media.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

There are many documents that support the work of ECFRS and this plan. Details can be found below.

Title	Information
Best Value Performance Plan	This is where you can find information on our recent performance and future targets. The plan is a live document and is continually updated; please visit our web site, www.essex-fire.gov.uk , to view the most up-to-date version.
Annual Plan	Following the IRMP consultation period, the agreed intentions for 2006-9 will be set out in our Annual Plan, due for publication in spring 2006. Copies of the 2005/06 are available on request (see 'Contact Us', below), or online.
Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2005/06	Both available online at www.odpm.gov.uk
Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment Final Report	Available on request (see 'Contact Us', below).
Race Equality Scheme	Available online at www.essex-fire.gov.uk
Data Protection Act	Available online at www.opsi.gov.uk
Confined Spaces Regulations	
Freedom of Information Act	
Working at Height Regulations	
Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005	
Civil Contingencies Act 2004	
Workforce Planning in Local Authorities	
The Working Time Regulations	Available online at www.dti.gov.uk



CONTACT US

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MEMBERS OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY

Members of the Fire Authority can be contacted through the Corporate Services Manager, Shirley Potter, on extension 2263, or e-mail shirley.potter@essex-fire.gov.uk, or by sending a letter to the above address.

If you would like to find out more about Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, please visit our website at www.essexfire.gov.uk