

Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Audit Report 2006

Contents

Executive summary	2	Part 5: Management of operational business	27
Introduction	4	Part 6: Communication	30
Part 1: Strategic management	8	Part 7: Improvement agenda	33
Part 3: Financial management	17	Appendix 1	35
Part 4: Workforce management	22	Glossary	35



Executive summary

1. Highlands and Islands 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 the needs of the local communities it serves. The predominately rural area in which the FRA operates and the high proportion of retained firefighters create challenges. However the FRA has been proactive in tailoring the modernisation agenda to meet the needs of the area.
2. A high level of engagement with Board members and partners has helped the FRA take forward its change agenda. The concept of Board champions and the development of a learning and development framework for Board members have encouraged strong elected member involvement.
3. The FRA manages its business through a robust service planning process and performance management framework. The FRA has strengthened its capacity to deliver its strategic objectives by working in partnership with other local organisations and collaborating with other fire and rescue authorities. Partnership working is well developed and effectively managed at a strategic and local level.
4. The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) has been a key driver for change in the FRA. The shift in emphasis from intervention to prevention has resulted in tangible benefits for the FRA, such as the increased professionalism of the service as a result of the upgrade of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status. The FRA has implemented a number of community fire safety (CFS) initiatives and has made progress in the roll out of Home Fire Safety Risk Assessments (HFSRA). The introduction of a number of policies and protocols over the last two years has enabled the FRA to target its resources more appropriately, which has resulted in improved operational efficiency. The FRA is developing tools to assess the effectiveness of key activities stemming from the IRMP, such as the delivery of CFS activities and partnership working.
5. The FRA has tailored its approach to workforce management to accommodate the largely retained workforce. The roll out of IT systems to all 95 retained stations will impact significantly on communication with retained firefighters and will also allow the FRA to roll out IPDS and e-learning to all retained staff. IPDS has been rolled out to wholetime staff, however the implementation of rank to role has been slow compared to most other FRAs, and more needs to be done to identify the training needs of non-uniformed staff¹ on a systematic basis. Progress has been made in mainstreaming the

¹ 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'.



equality agenda although the lack of a dedicated equality adviser has impacted on the level of progress that has been made.

6. The FRA has well developed strategies in place for internal and external communication, and is implementing the National Standards of Community Engagement to ensure it engages effectively with its communities. The FRA also has a well established approach to public performance reporting.

7. Overall, the FRA has made good progress since the 2004 Accounts Commission Phase 2 Verification Audit. It has mainstreamed IRMP into its service planning and delivery, has successfully rolled out IPDS to wholtime staff and has improved communication with retained staff. The FRA now needs to focus on introducing IPDS and IT systems to retained stations, completing the move from rank to role, and putting appropriate mechanisms in place to support a culture of continuous 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 year².
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 (The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005) which provides the statutory framework to enable fire and rescue authorities in Scotland to modernise their services. The 2005 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 the fire and rescue service.
12. With enabling legislation and a new statutory framework in place, the Commission agreed a project brief for a national performance audit of Scottish Fire and Rescue Authorities in February 2006. The overall focus of the audit should be 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

² Accounts Commission (2004) Scottish Fire Services. verification of the progress of modernisation (March) and the second verification of the progress of modernisation (October)



- 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 fire and rescue authorities in Scotland. 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 Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority. A national report summarising our findings for all Scottish Fire and Rescue Authorities will be published in February 2007.
15. In conducting the local audit work, Audit Scotland reviewed the inspection report of Highlands and Islands FRA by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland (HMFSIS). The inspection was carried out in February 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 work.

Local context

17. Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority (the FRA) covers an area of 31,187 sq km – 40% of Scotland – and delivers services to a population of 276,400 – approximately 5.4% of Scotland's population. The FRA spans four local authorities – Highland Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council.
18. The majority of the population of the FRA is centred in the Highland Council area, with a high concentration in Inverness. Only slight increases (1.6%) are predicted for the population between the period 2004 and 2014. The minority ethnic population of Highland and Islands is very small (0.8%).



19. The area covered by the FRA has an extreme geography which can make for poor communication and transport links. In addition, each of the four local authority areas face particular challenges. Highland Council has areas of concentrated deprivation, as 6% of the population live in the 15% most deprived datazones in Scotland. Eilean Siar and the Orkney Islands are home to a growing elderly population, and the Shetland Islands face a less than secure economic future as revenue from the oil and fishing industries declines. The FRA needs to take these factors into account when planning its future service provision.

The Fire and Rescue Authority

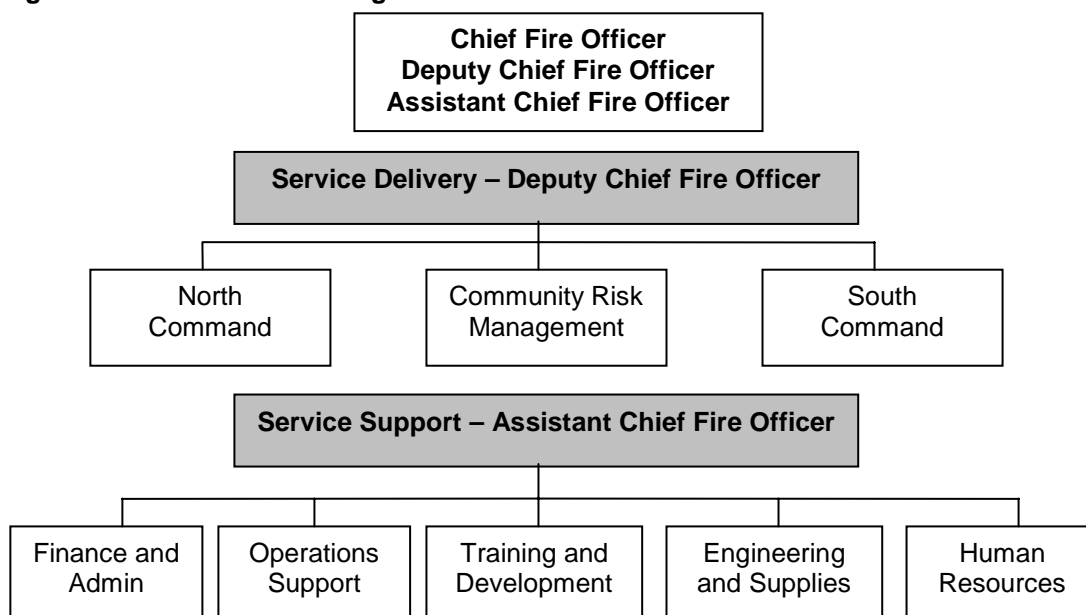
20. Each of the constituent councils in Highland and Islands is formally a fire and rescue authority in its own right. Their responsibilities are pooled and delegated to a Joint Board of 24 elected members, 16 of whom are from Highland Council, four from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, two from Orkney Islands Council, and two from Shetland Islands Council. The Convenor of the Board is an Independent member of Highland Council, he is supported by a Vice Convenor who is an Independent member of Orkney Islands Council.

21. The Joint Fire Board set a revenue budget of £20.0m for 2006/07, and a capital budget of £3.5m. In 2006, Highland Council contributed 70.96% of this revenue income, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 12.09%, Orkney Islands Council 7.31% and Shetland Islands Council 9.64%.

22. The management of the FRA is organised around service delivery and service support (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Organisational structure of Highlands and Islands FRA



Source: Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority



23. The FRA currently delivers services from 127 stations, only one of which is a wholetime station. The majority of stations are retained (95) and there are also 31 Community Response Units (CRUs). The CRUs are based in sparsely populated areas to deliver community fire safety and respond to specific risks facing the local area, such as RTCs or wildfires. CRU staff receive similar payment to retained staff for attending training or incidents, but they do not receive an annual retaining fee.
24. The FRA employs over 1,500 staff. Of these, 213 are operational wholetime firefighters, 1073 are retained firefighters and 141 are staff within the Community Response Units. There are 19 people employed in command and control and 55 non-uniformed members of staff. The FRA employs twice as many retained firefighters as any other FRA in Scotland, which has implications for their approach to workforce management.
25. In 2005/06 the FRA responded to 5028 incidents, an increase of 5% from 2004/05. Over half of these incidents were false alarms. The majority of other incidents were secondary fires (661), primary fires (502) and RTCs (302).



Part 1: Strategic management

Key findings

- Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority has agreed a clear medium-term strategic direction for the service which reflects national priorities and meets local needs.
- The use of Board champions for particular policy areas and the development of a learning and development framework for Board members has encouraged strong elected member involvement.
- The FRA has made good progress in developing a performance management framework, which tracks progress against strategic objectives and operational performance. The FRA now needs to finalise and roll out an appraisal system for all staff which links to the framework.

Strategic direction

26. The FRA has a clear strategic direction which is articulated through the Service Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The Service Plan is the strategic planning document which outlines the strategic aims of the FRA and the objectives and actions required to achieve these aims in the short to medium term. The four strategic aims outlined in the Service Plan provide an overarching vision for the FRA, while five strategic objectives provide a focus for the next three years (Exhibit 2). Appropriate actions to achieve the objectives are set annually.
27. The IRMP is a key driver for the strategic direction of the FRA, and links directly to the Service Plan. Actions from the IRMP are incorporated into the Service Plan under the objectives of modernisation, consolidation and partnership working. These two key documents provide the FRA with a clear strategic direction accommodating both local priorities and national requirements.
28. The FRA needs to ensure it has appropriate structures in place to deliver its strategic objectives. The upgrading of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status and the establishment of 31 CRUs was a major undertaking which had a significant impact on the professionalism of the service. Having done this, the FRA now needs to look at its overall organisational structure to ensure it supports both the IRMP and these new staffing arrangements.
29. The FRA has a clear service planning cycle. Proposals from staff for inclusion in the Service Plan are put forward in September, considered by the Service Support and Service Delivery functions, and discussed at the annual Service Plan meeting in November. These discussions inform a draft plan which is submitted to the Budget sub-committee of the Board along with draft revenue plans, and the Board is asked to approve the final Service Plan and revenue proposals in January. This process allows for a new Service Plan to be published every March.



Exhibit 2

Strategic aims and objectives

Strategic Aims

1. Operate an integrated risk management approach for the delivery of services, covering both fire safety and operations.
2. Provide a service committed to the highest levels of quality, demonstrating best value and sound corporate governance.
3. Ensure that the service meets the requirements of health, safety, dignity and welfare, determined through full and inclusive consultation.
4. Support the development of the workforce so that their range of skills and abilities match the needs of the service and community, as identified by the IRMP process.

Strategic Objectives

Modernisation

Consolidation

Partnership
working

IT and
communications

Improvement
inspections

Source: Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority

Leadership and governance

30. There is a high level of member engagement and involvement within the Board. Members understand the strategic role that the Board fulfils, and appropriate Schemes of Delegation are in place. The FRA benefits from having members who are both engaged and committed to fire service issues.
31. The Board has had to make some difficult decisions in agreeing and implementing the IRMP which has increased member engagement and involvement. The decisions the Board had to make on the future role of the “non-strategic” stations required a clear understanding of the issues being discussed, and involvement and engagement with local communities. The evidence required to inform these decisions was provided by the Fire Service Emergency Cover model (FSEC). Risk maps produced for “non-strategic” stations helped Board members focus on the strategic needs of their service, rather than local ward-based priorities.
32. Members have regular contact with various officers and are not over-reliant on the CFO for information or guidance. There are a number of working groups and sub-committees of the Board, including the IRMP Working Group, the Audit Working Group, the Budget Working Group and sub-committees relating to disciplinary and grievance appeals. The working groups play a major role in the scrutiny and challenge process, as they allow members to examine and question agenda items in significantly more detail before reporting to the full Board. When discussing the roles of the “non-



strategic” stations, for example, the Board raised concerns about the strategic provision of road traffic collision (RTC) resources throughout Badenoch and Strathspey, and agreed that Newtonmore CRU be enhanced to include a RTC intervention role, as recommended by the IRMP Working Group.

33. The FRA has been creative in developing the role of champions within the Board. Currently there are champions for training and development, fairness and equality, and community engagement. The role of these members is to increase knowledge and understanding of their ‘championed’ issue within the Board. Some champions also contribute to discussions on policy development. For example, the two fairness and equality champions have contributed to the development of the Equality and Diversity policy, and one of them chairs the Equality and Diversity Working Group. The Board agreed in August 2006 to draw up development plans for champions to support them in their role. The champion concept is working well and extending the role to other key areas, such as Community Fire Safety, would help to ensure Board members remain well informed of current issues.
34. The FRA has made considerable progress in the training and development of Board members. A learning needs analysis was undertaken in May 2006 which gave Board members the opportunity to identify areas where they would benefit from training. The findings from the analysis have been used to inform a learning and development strategy for Board members, which will be complemented by role maps and personal development plans. A seminar for members has been organised for November to help fill any gaps in knowledge in the short-term.
35. In the longer-term, a two day induction programme for new members has been drafted and will be delivered within six months of the formation of the new Board. This induction, in addition to the learning and development framework for members, will put the FRA in a strong position for ensuring that any new members on the Board following the 2007 elections will be informed and adequately prepared to make the difficult decisions that will be required of them.
36. The FRA benefits from strong and effective leadership and management, which has progressed change within the service. The management team works well together and there are also good working relationships between members and officers.
37. A Joint Consultation Group (JCG) exists, which provides a forum for consultation between the Board and staff. However the JCG has not met for over two years. Representative bodies feel that this does not create enough opportunity for regular formal dialogue with management.

Performance management

38. The FRA has made good progress in introducing performance management arrangements, which are flexible enough to deal with changing priorities and demands within the service. The Service Plan provides the structure to underpin these arrangements, and it is complemented by the Public



Performance Report (PPR) which reports progress against the actions in the Service Plan. There is a clear performance management framework, with reporting and feedback mechanisms in place. SMART objectives are used appropriately as part of the FRA's performance management arrangements.

39. The FRA reports quarterly on performance against Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs), Local Performance Indicators (LPIs), and Service Local Performance Indicators (SLPIs). 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 1st April 2006, so no annual comparable data is yet available. SLPIs are set by the FRA and reflect local priorities in each service department, such as the processing of fire certificate applications, the reduction in Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs), and the delivery of breathing apparatus training. This quarterly performance reporting process provides senior managers with a clear overview of how the FRA is performing against its objectives and targets.
40. There is currently no staff appraisal system in place which links into performance management arrangements. The FRA is currently developing this and a phased pilot, using a draft policy and guidance, is planned to commence in a selection of Service Support and Service Delivery functions by April 2007. Finalising and rolling out this appraisal system, in line with national guidance from CFOA, should be a priority for the FRA.
41. The FRA has been slow in developing its approach to managing corporate risk but is now progressing in this area. A Corporate Risk Register and Risk Strategy were approved by the Board in April 2006. The Risk Register is reviewed quarterly by the Service Support and Service Delivery Forums to ensure it reflects current risks facing the FRA. Since the Register was approved in April it has undergone amendments as a result of both quarterly reviews.



Part 2: Fire prevention and risk management

Key findings

- IRMP has been a key driver for change within the FRA. It has been effectively implemented and mainstreamed into the service planning process.
- There have been tangible benefits resulting from year one of IRMP and the FRA is moving the emphasis of its work from intervention to prevention.
- Good progress has been made in the roll out of Home Fire Safety Risk Assessments (HFSRA) across the Highland and Islands region.
- The FRA recognises the need to measure the effectiveness of different community fire safety (CFS) activities to ensure resources are targeted appropriately, and work is underway to progress this.
- Partnership working is well developed in the FRA and is managed effectively at both strategic and local levels.

Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP)

42. IRMP has been a significant driver for change within the FRA. The IRMP takes full account of the national legislative framework, but has been tailored to meet the specific local needs of Highland and Islands.
43. The IRMP Working Group of the Board has played an integral role in the development of IRMP. The Group continues to inform the approach the FRA takes, and FSEC has been a key tool in providing the evidence to inform their decisions.
44. The FRA has exploited the full capabilities of FSEC to develop and take forward its IRMP. FSEC has been a vital tool in informing decision making, and the appointment of a data analyst has allowed the FRA to use this tool to its full effect. Presentations on the capabilities and use of FSEC have been given to interested parties such as Board members, community planning partners, and councillors and members of the public in areas affected by the changes made to the “non-strategic” fire stations.



Implementation of IRMP

45. IRMP has been mainstreamed into the service planning process and the focus of services has moved from intervention to prevention. There are tangible benefits resulting from year one of IRMP, including:
 - The upgrading of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status.
 - The establishment of 31 Community Response Units (CRUs).
 - The completion of 3038 Home Fire Safety Risk Assessments (HFSRA).
 - The delivery of Community Fire Safety (CFS) training to operational staff.
 - A new working routine for wholetime staff to allow more time to carry out CFS activities and training.
46. The implementation of IRMP continues to progress. Whereas year one of IRMP saw significant changes to the structure of the service, year two marks the beginning of a 5-7 year sustainability review of all stations. The IRMP Action Plan for 2006/07 builds on the action plan for year one (2005/06) under the same core headings of prevention, protection and intervention.
47. Changing the culture within the FRA has been an important element of the successful implementation of IRMP. There was some initial resistance to Community Fire Safety (CFS) activities by operational staff, but the appointment of a retired retained firefighter to support CFS training has resulted in a willingness and commitment to deliver CFS activities. This was evident in interviews with retained and wholetime firefighters, and further demonstrated by the number of HFSRA completed in 2005/06 - 3038, which equates to 2.5% of households in Highland and Islands. Now that all operational staff have been trained to undertake HFSRA, the FRA has set a target for a 20% increase in the number of HFSRA completed in 2006/07, with a 10% increase in following years.
48. A revised working routine for wholetime staff has been introduced as a result of IRMP. Rather than standing down earlier at the weekend, wholetime staff now work until midnight, as they would during the week. This has increased the amount of time available to wholetime staff for carrying out CFS activities and training.
49. The FRA has introduced targeted community safety initiatives to address specific risks. For example, the FRA identified that alcohol was a contributory factor in all fatal dwelling fires in 2004/05 in Highland and Islands, and as a result launched the Alcohol Fire Death Initiative. This was undertaken in partnership with the Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs) in the four constituent authorities, and involved increasing public awareness of the increased risk of a dwelling fire following excessive alcohol consumption.



50. There are early indications that the work undertaken through IRMP is starting to have a positive impact. Since the implementation of IRMP the number of accidental dwelling fires has decreased from 8.0 per 10,000 population in 2003/04 to 7.1 in 2005/06³. The number of incidents resulting in casualties has also decreased from 2.0 per 10,000 population in 2003/04 to 1.2 in 2005/06⁴. However, the total number of incidents attended by the FRA increased by 5% between 2004/05 and 2005/06, so the FRA needs to ensure it is targeting CFS resources appropriately.
51. The FRA is progressing a risk reduction analysis project, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of its CFS activity. All CFS activities undertaken by the FRA have been assigned a value, and these values are currently being mapped against historic CFS activity. The resulting maps will help the FRA to measure the impact of its CFS work in terms of risk reduction (i.e. reduction in the number of incidents), and target CFS resources appropriately.
52. 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 inspection framework. HMFSIS is planning an impact survey of the new legislation in relation to workloads and competency in 2008.
53. Planning for the introduction of Part 3 of the Fire Scotland Act is an action within the FRA's Service Plan. Updated Terian software has been purchased to enable the FRA to meet recording and monitoring requirements, and a four day training programme covering the legislation, enforcement, guides and data gathering has been drafted. While the FRA has begun preparation for the new legislation, it now has to start implementing its plans.

Effectiveness of partnership working

54. Partnership working is well developed in the FRA, and is managed effectively at both strategic and local levels. The FRA recognises the benefits of working with partners and is currently involved in over 50 partnerships, from Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) to informal joint working

³ Accounts Commission Statutory Performance Indicator

⁴ Accounts Commission Statutory Performance Indicator



arrangements with one other partner. It is well represented on the four CPPs which fall under its remit, on both the strategic groups and community safety groups.

55. The FRA is using its links with partner organisations to target CFS activities at those at most risk of fire, especially harder to reach groups. For example, working in partnership with Highland Council Deaf Services, the FRA identifies the need for smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and gives advice on the installation and maintenance of the alarms. The FRA is also involved in a deaf awareness project which involves staff being trained in basic British Sign Language, including CFS messages.
56. The First Responder Scheme is an example of a formalised joint working venture which is suited to, and benefits, the geography of the area. Volunteers, who agree to answer call outs when medical attention is needed, are trained as First Responders by the Scottish Ambulance Service so they can administer initial aid before an ambulance arrives. Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority is successfully involved in this scheme in Helmsdale, and there is interest in rolling it out to other areas which would benefit.
57. The FRA has developed a partnership policy and partnership register. The policy, 'Working Together to Achieve a Common Goal', outlines the FRA's approach to partnership working. This includes the specific criteria that need to be considered before new partnerships are entered into, and the process for ensuring the Partnership Register is kept up to date. The Partnership Register is an important tool for monitoring and managing partnership work. It links each partnership to relevant strategic objectives in the Service Plan, and lists the group's current work outputs. This allows an overall view of how the partnership contributes to the strategic direction and service delivery of the FRA.
58. A tool to assess the effectiveness of partnerships is currently being developed by the FRA in partnership with Northern Constabulary, through the Intelligence and Monitoring Group of the Highland Wellbeing Alliance. A 'productive partners' risk assessment form has been produced, which is designed to score partnerships against criteria for an effective partnership. Those with a low score will be deemed high risk partnerships and will be prioritised for a fuller qualitative evaluation. The risk assessment form has been piloted and is ready to be circulated to all partnerships on the partnership register. Due to the workload associated with the qualitative evaluation of high risk partnerships, this will be done in a phased process over the next three years, commencing January 2007.
59. The FRA recognises that it does not have the capacity to work effectively with all the partnerships on its register. If a partnership is deemed to be adding little value to the work of the FRA the FRA tends to focus on ways to improve the effectiveness of the partnership. However, a decision can be made at the quarterly Service Support and Service Delivery meetings to disengage from ineffective partnerships. If the partnership risk assessment identifies a number of high risk partnerships, the FRA may need to reconsider this approach.



60. The results of the risk assessment will be complemented by a questionnaire which will be distributed to partners, asking them to evaluate the FRA's contribution and commitment to partnership working. A draft questionnaire has been piloted by a small number of partners, and will be further developed once work relating to the risk assessment tool has been completed. This approach will offer the FRA a full 360 degree assessment of its contribution to each partnership.



Part 3: Financial management

Key findings

- The FRA has a well managed budget setting process, which is directly linked to the service planning cycle.
- The most significant financial risk to the FRA is that current levels of expenditure exceed GAE, and constituent local authorities may not continue to fund this in the longer term.
- Capital expenditure is a significant challenge for the FRA, and it is adopting a range of approaches to meet its needs in both the short and medium term.

Financial position

61. The FRA's net expenditure in 2005/06 was £22.583 million, which equates to £80.93 per head of population. This is the highest cost per head of any FRA in Scotland. However, the sparsity of population and the unique geography of the area contributes to this cost. The Scottish average is £59.31 per head of population.
62. The FRA is funded by requisitions from the four constituent authorities which make up the joint board. In 2005/06, the contribution from each of the constituent local authorities was revised to more accurately reflect expenditure patterns in each area, with the Board agreeing to set aside strict adherence to the Montgomery formula. The contributions for 2005/06 were Highland – 79.26%, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – 8.48%, Orkney – 5.91% and Shetland – 6.35%. The Board also agreed to increase the funding from constituent councils by £800k above GAE in 2005/06 to fund the 31 CRUs, as they are not funded by the Scottish Executive.
63. The level of income generation in the FRA is minimal. Excluding pension contributions from firefighters, it amounted to 0.16% in 2005/06. This is a smaller percentage than most other authorities. The main source of other external revenue income is from partnership working, for community safety initiatives for example.
64. The GAE income was significantly uplifted by £4m in 2004/05 through Transitional Funding following the Scottish Executive agreement to fund the upgrade of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status.
65. The level of reserves at 31 March 2006 was £919k, the maximum permitted under the Police and Fire Services (Scotland) Act 2001.



Financial pressures

66. 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 £68.2 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 FRA's and the Scottish Executive is currently reviewing a number of different options for funding.
67. A significant financial pressure for the FRA is that current levels of expenditure exceed GAE. While the constituent local authorities have indicated they will continue to fund the FRA over GAE until the IRMP process is completed, there are potential financial risks arising from the financial position of the Councils and the pressure upon them to achieve efficiency savings from their budgets. Indefinite increased funding from the constituent authorities is unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term.
68. The impact of Transitional Funding on the FRA has been significant. The upgrading of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status involved revising the contracts of over 800 firefighters. This was funded by Transitional Funding and has become a permanent feature in the GAE.
69. There is a risk to the FRA, as it is working on the basis that the sum fixed permanently in their GAE in respect of Transitional Funding for the retained parity and upgrade programme will not be subject to recovery at a later date. This amounts to £3.0m in 2004/05 and is on an increasing basis (2005/06 - £3.3m, 2006/07 - £3.5m and 2007/08 - £3.7m). The FRA calculates that the maximum amount of Transitional Funding which will be recovered by the Scottish Executive in 2008/09 is £277k. In addition, the FRA has identified a potential funding gap from 2006/07 to 2008/09.
70. In the short term, the FRA plans to use reserves to meet the shortfall in 2006/07 and in the longer term by efficiency savings (as evidenced in the efficiency log and included in the 2008/09 draft budget). The potential efficiency savings arise from a variety of measures, mainly identified through the IRMP, for example changes to working routines in the Training and Development department, extending 75% contracts to retained employees, and reduced attendance at AFAs. However, in future years, the FRA will need to consider how to balance the pressure to restrict rises in constituent authority contribution levels with the need to hold sufficient reserves to meet emergencies.



Budget setting and monitoring

71. There is a clear process for financial and budgetary planning. A three year financial strategy, derived from an initial zero-based budgeting approach, is an integrated part of the service planning process, and the Service Plan includes a specific appendix on financial planning.
72. The overall approach of the FRA to financial strategy and governance is sound. In terms of governance arrangements, there is adequate consideration of the risks and changes that may affect the FRA in coming years and indications that necessary controls are in place to ensure sound financial management. Finance features in all areas of service planning, and there is a concerted effort to keep it at the top of the agenda, with the Head of Corporate Services raising financial awareness among officers in the FRA. A Local Code of Corporate Governance has been adopted, which assigns responsibilities to relevant officers along with the actions to demonstrate compliance with the Code.
73. There are clearly identified lines of accountability for financial matters and good arrangements are in place to devolve financial management to District Officers, though the approved scheme of delegation does not detail the items delegated below Chief Officer level. The decision on whether to devolve financial matters further is currently under review and although there is flexibility to extend budget delegation this will only be done where it can be demonstrated that efficiencies can be achieved. Budget management training is refreshed at the bi-annual Wholetime Officers meetings with additional training being held for new budget holders. In addition the Finance Department encourages budget holder participation through the operation of an 'open door policy' which provides access to advice and guidance on any financial issue on request.
74. The strategic aims and objectives of the FRA, derived as part of the service planning process, form the basis for the preparation of the annual and medium term budgets. The FRA has a reasonable expectation of the funding likely to be available and of the cost of its services. Resources are then allocated on the basis of affordability and value for money to meet the agreed strategic aims identified by the Board. A prudent approach is adopted in that the FRA only factor in known funding, even where additional funding has been requested from the Scottish Executive. In terms of expenditure, provision is made to incorporate a more pessimistic approach where possible to ensure that sufficient resources are available to meet known and potential expenditure. The financial process forms an integral part of service planning assisting in the prioritising of resources to meet strategic aims and objectives. The final plan is only approved and agreed once the necessary funding has been assessed and allocated.
75. Monthly budget monitoring statements are produced and identify expenditure to date, the budget, the budget holder and the proportion spent. These are issued to budget holders and monitored by the Finance Manager with variances being discussed and the reasons for the variance ascertained. The



focus is mainly upon the expected outturn at any point in time to identify any potential overspends to allow prompt corrective action to be taken where appropriate and on any underspends which may be used elsewhere or provide indications where efficiencies may be gained in the future. Variances are reported to the Board and agreement is sought on the proposed utilisation or action to be taken on estimated underspends or overspends identified. Finance staff and the Board also monitor capital expenditure on an ongoing basis.

Internal audit

76. Internal audit services are provided by Highland Council through an agreed Service Level Agreement which is reviewed and approved annually by the full Board. Internal audit plays an important role in the FRA's governance arrangements and reports are considered by the Board's Audit Working Group, which was established during 2004/05 and is led by an independent member of the Board.
77. In 2005/06, the internal auditors concluded that the FRA has a sound system of internal control in place.

Procurement

78. The FRA has a formal procurement strategy in place. Savings have been delivered through changes to procurement, for example the introduction of 'undress' uniform realised a saving of £42,531. The partnership with an external private company to supply an IT network to 95 retained stations has resulted in a capital saving of £215,000 on the outright purchase cost and an ongoing revenue cost of £78,000, when compared with alternative providers.
79. Future procurement savings will accrue from a recently undertaken value engineering exercise. It is estimated that approximately 7.1% of design costs will be saved on the new build programme. A follow up value engineering exercise on substructure has now been commissioned and initial indications are that savings of up to 10% could be realised.

Capital planning

80. The FRA's capital expenditure in 2005/06 totalled £4.005 million, of which £2.402 was funded by Scottish Executive capital grant. Assets were valued at £35.486m.
81. Capital expenditure is one of the biggest challenges facing the authority. For example, the newly established CRUs have no capital costs associated with them. This is recognised by the FRA and is reflected in future financial plans.
82. The FRA has a large capital requirement arising mainly from the need to undertake a major upgrade of its building stocks, although vehicles also play a significant part in the capital programme. The



routine capital grant is £1.8m and extensive representations continue to be made to the Scottish Executive to provide additional funds through top slicing. There has been some success in this; £1.7m was obtained for a regional training facility to be incorporated in the new fire station at Fort William for example. The Capital Asset Strategy is comprehensive and there is evidence that the FRA has a real grasp of the issues facing it in respect of capital.

83. The FRA adopts a prioritised approach using efficiencies to produce further funds for capital expenditure. The use of the Prudential Code has been considered but there are no foreseeable plans to use this as a means of funding capital expenditure. Over the last six years, the FRA has completed a number of capital works and managed to remain within the available capital budget.
84. The Board is continuing to develop asset management planning in order to inform and drive its capital planning decisions. A comprehensive asset register is being populated and the Board has identified the condition and upgrade requirements of all of its properties, including costing these at 2006 prices.
85. A number of alternative and innovative solutions are being considered to address the challenges of capital expenditure, such as the joint build with Bernera Community Association . Value engineering exercises have been undertaken to look at alternative methods of accommodating the needs of the FRA and an additional member of staff is being sought to concentrate on this area. The in-house build programme for new vehicles provides further evidence that the Board are vigilant and conscious of the challenges arising from the capital requirements facing them.
86. Future capital programmes are based upon the basic allocation in recognition that top slice funds cannot be taken for granted. A review of the capital programme for 2006/07 to 2008/09 shows marginal overspends predicted. However further discussion with the FRA confirmed that this has been a deliberate budgeting exercise to allow for slippage and that the in-year programme is constantly being reviewed and revised when project start dates and progress is assessed.



Part 4: Workforce management

Key findings

- The FRA's HR Strategy provides a clear focus for workforce management and planning and links to the strategic direction of the FRA. The FRA is progressing work to harmonise human resources (HR) policies between uniformed and non-uniformed staff, but a number have still to be finalised.
- The FRA is making reasonable progress on the rollout of IPDS. It has been implemented for wholetime staff and a programme for the roll out to retained staff is scheduled for 2007/08, by which time all retained stations will have access to IT. The lack of a structured approach to identify the training needs of non-uniformed staff is impacting on the morale of some staff.
- The FRA has implemented a flexible working policy, but awareness among staff of the options available is variable.
- The FRA has been proactive in addressing issues of diversity and equality, but the lack of a dedicated equality adviser has impacted on the level of progress that has been made.

Workforce planning

87. The FRA has an agreed HR Strategy which is linked to the strategic direction of the FRA through the Service Plan and IRMP and monitored in line with the performance management framework. The strategy covers the period 2006-2008 and provides a clear focus for workforce management and planning within the authority.
88. HR became a separate function within Service Support in 2005, and the FRA committed resources to the department by recruiting two additional HR staff to support the HR Manager. The FRA is in the process of recruiting an Equality and Diversity Adviser which will enable the Head of HR to concentrate on implementing other policy areas.
89. There is some overlap between the HR department and Training and Development department, such as responsibility for developing an appraisal system for staff. While staff in the two departments work together closely and the Heads of both departments meet fortnightly at the Service Management Team meetings, there may be scope for the authority to review this arrangement to clarify responsibilities and reduce duplication.
90. A number of existing HR policies have been reviewed in the past year to harmonise policies between uniformed and non-uniformed staff. Two of these policies (Maternity / Adoption and Flexible Working) have been implemented, but ten policies are still in draft. A plan to finalise and roll out these draft policies has been put in place, with six due to be rolled out by December 2006 (Equal Opportunities,



Bullying and Harassment, Discipline, Absence Management, Occupational Health, Disability), and the remaining four (Stress Mental Health and Wellbeing, Substance Abuse, Leave, Exit / Induction) to be rolled out by March 2007. It is important that plans to ratify these policies over the next few months are not delayed.

91. Only 15% of firefighters in the FRA are wholetime staff, which presents many challenges in terms of workforce management. The FRA has tailored its approach to accommodate the largely retained workforce, and has made significant moves in professionalising the service. The upgrading of 61 auxiliary stations to retained status involved revising the contracts of over 800 firefighters, and placed a requirement on them to agree and record their hours of availability in a central system. It also ensured that the firefighters developed specific skills through training packages.
92. The FRA has shown an understanding of its changing workforce and is beginning to plan for it. For example, an age audit has been undertaken in order to compile a profile of the existing workforce. This will provide a useful tool for succession planning in the future. The FRA intends to use this information to inform policies which may impact on older workers, such as occupational health policies.
93. Sickness absence is being managed through a policy on controlling and monitoring absence. Absence data is monitored on a quarterly basis and reviewed at departmental and Service Support and Service Delivery Group meetings. These meetings provide the opportunity for continued or repeated absences to be flagged up, and decisions on how best to address them made. The percentage of rider shifts lost due to sickness has decreased from 7.1% in 2003/04 to 5.6% in 2005/06⁵. In order to continue this trend and meet its target of 5%, the FRA intends to introduce a revised policy by December 2006. This revised policy will reflect the new contractual arrangements for former auxiliary operational staff. The obligation for these staff to record their availability will now allow the FRA to monitor and manage absence levels among them.

Support and development of staff

94. A key strategic aim of the FRA is to support the development of its workforce so their range of skills and abilities match the needs of the service and its community, as identified by the IRMP. To progress this aim, the FRA is starting to deliver targeted training and development programmes for staff throughout the service. The presence of a training and development champion on the Board reflects the importance placed on the learning and development agenda by the FRA.

⁵ Accounts Commission Statutory Performance Indicator



95. IPDS has been introduced at Firefighter, Crew and Watch Manager levels to wholetime staff, and PDR-pro is being used on the wholetime station. Given the make up of the FRA, rolling IPDS out to retained stations will be a much greater challenge. The FRA has started this process by piloting an IPDS implementation plan in three retained stations (Kirkwall, Fortrose and Lochcarron). IT equipment has been installed in these pilot stations and the Training and Development department have delivered IT training as well as a running programme of IPDS training. The pilot exercise will be completed in April 2007 and will feed into the roll out programme for the remaining retained stations, which is scheduled to commence in the 2007/08 financial year.
96. The roll out of IT systems to all stations (scheduled for completion by the end of the financial year 2006/07) will enable the FRA to deliver the e-learning modules provided by the Fire Service College to all operational staff. In anticipation of this, stations have been asked to do a local risk assessment and prioritise the modules according to local needs. For example, there would be no need to deliver training on dealing with rail transport in Orkney as the islands do not have a rail network. Tailoring e-learning modules to local needs will ensure that retained firefighters receive the most relevant training in the time available to them.
97. Focus groups with non-uniformed staff indicated that they feel their development needs are seen as less important than those of uniformed staff, and that their skills and expertise are not always recognised by management. There is currently no structured approach to identify the training needs of non-uniformed staff, but the introduction of a 'universal' appraisal system for all staff may go some way towards addressing this.
98. Although in line with national guidance, progress on the roll out of rank to role in the FRA has been slow compared to most other FRAs. The FRA worked in collaboration with Grampian, Tayside and Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authorities to agree common standards for the job 'sizing' process, including the questions to be used and a weightings matrix. This process is now complete and the FRA is entering the second stage of its appeals process with a view to fully implementing rank to role by December 2006.

Flexible working arrangements

99. Following a period of consultation, a finalised overarching policy on flexible working has recently been introduced, which is applicable to all staff. The policy outlines the flexible working options available, including home working, flexitime working and staggered hours. Such arrangements have been implemented in some sections of the FRA, however interviews with staff showed that knowledge of the options available varied between departments. The success of flexible working throughout the FRA will require staff being made aware of the options available to them.



100. The positive impact of flexible working has already been realised in the area of training and development. A flexible working system has been introduced in the Training and Development team, and staff are now available to deliver training in the evenings and at weekends. This allows for the delivery of critical training to the retained sections of the FRA in a much more coherent and regular way. It has also had a positive effect on budgeting, as the Training and Development Department no longer need to try to budget for overtime to meet training needs.
101. In line with these efforts to introduce more flexible working arrangements, a policy for job sharing is in place for control room staff.

Equality and diversity

102. The FRA still has a lot of work to do to increase the diversity of its workforce, but it has been proactive in addressing issues of diversity and equality and progress is being made. As at March 2006, women in uniformed posts represented 6.8% of the FRA workforce. This is not representative of the community the FRA serves, although it is higher than most other fire and rescue authorities. Less than 1% of FRA employees are from minority ethnic communities which reflects the demographics of Highland and Islands.
103. Work on mainstreaming diversity and equalities within the service has been driven forward by including it as a strategic aim in the Service Plan. Two initiatives in particular have started to raise the profile of equality and diversity within the FRA. They are the establishment of the Equality and Diversity Forum and the introduction of two equality and diversity champions on the Board. A number of other initiatives have been put in place, which demonstrate an underlying commitment to the equality agenda, including diversity awareness training and the inclusion of equality and diversity as a standing agenda item at management meetings.
104. The Equality and Diversity Forum is an important element in the mainstreaming of equality and diversity issues throughout the FRA. Members of the Forum, which includes representatives from across the FRA, act as First Contact Advisers and 'champions' for equality and diversity issues. As well as organising the roll out of diversity training, and commenting on draft HR policies, the Forum has established working groups to progress a number of important issues (eg the cultural audit, racist incident monitoring and disability equality duty).
105. The workload generated by the equality agenda is significant but the FRA does not have a dedicated equality adviser to take it forward. To date, the HR Manager, supported by the Equality Forum, has led much of the work on equality and diversity. The risk of not having a dedicated equality adviser is that the work being done to advance the equalities agenda is short term and dependent on the time and resources available to the HR team. This has been recognised by the FRA, and a recruitment process is underway for an Equality and Diversity Adviser on a two-year fixed contract. Although not a



permanent position, this post will allow the FRA to continue the work they are doing in relation to equality and diversity in the medium term.

106. The FRA has been slow in delivering equality and diversity training to staff. To address this in the short term, the FRA has secured the skills of the Equalities Officer from Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authority to deliver diversity awareness training in a rolling programme between September and December 2006. This training will be delivered to all wholetime and non-uniformed staff, but training for staff at retained stations and CRUs has not yet been scheduled.
107. The Race Equality Scheme and Diversity Strategy outline actions for ensuring that the FRA's recruitment process is aligned to its equality and diversity agenda. As a result, all staff involved in recruitment and selection have been trained in equality and diversity. The strategies also task the FRA with developing positive action initiatives and reviewing recruitment materials and the media in which vacancies are advertised, to ensure under represented groups are targeted. The FRA has not recruited wholetime staff in the last three years, although the establishment of the CRUs has provided an opportunity to recruit people from under represented groups. In 2005/06 10.3% of applications for vacancies in the FRA were from females, and 0.1% were from minority ethnic applicants⁶.
108. The FRA monitors the diversity of its workforce in line with legislative requirements. Monitoring processes have recently been updated to reflect the new suite of LPs which measure the percentage of employees who are female, minority ethnic and deemed operationally unfit. The FRA reports against these indicators quarterly as part of its performance management framework. Forms issued by the HR department include tear-off strips asking for profile information. This helps the FRA monitor the profile of staff applying for flexible working or lodging a grievance, for example. The FRA is also building a workforce profile based on information collated from personnel records. The new Equality and Diversity Adviser will be responsible for ensuring compliance with legislation and monitoring requirements continues to be met.
109. Staff responsible for developing policies have received training on Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and there is a policy in place outlining why and how EIAs should be undertaken. All new policies are being impact assessed, and the process of assessing existing policies is underway.

⁶ CFOA Local Performance Indicator



Part 5: Management of operational business

Key findings

- The FRA has improved operational efficiency through the introduction of a number of policies and protocols over the last two years.
- The reduction in the number of appliances being mobilised to false alarms, and increased confidence levels in retained stations and CRUs have allowed the FRA to target its resources appropriately and ensure an appropriate intervention response is available.
- The FRA has realised efficiency savings by collaborating with other Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Operational management

110. Although the FRA is moving the emphasis of its service towards prevention, intervention remains one of the three core 'building blocks' of the IRMP Action Plan 2006/07. Clear objectives for intervention are outlined in the Action Plan and are monitored as part of the performance management framework. Operational performance is also measured against SPIs, LPIs and SLPIs.

111. Objectives for intervention in 2006/07 include:

- Commencing a risk review in compliance with the Board's Risk Review Framework.
- Continuing to review appliance crewing levels and firefighter safety.
- Monitoring and continuing to develop the revised response to unwanted fire signals.
- Continuing to review RTC provision to ensure it matches the incidence of risk.
- Continuing to develop collaborative ventures with other agencies.

112. Over the last two years, the FRA has introduced a number of policies and protocols aimed at improving operational efficiency. Among these is the protocol for projecting and recording the availability of retained staff. When new contracts for retained (formerly auxiliary) and CRU staff were introduced, they included a requirement for staff to agree to a contracted period of availability (either 90 or 120 hours) and record their hours of availability. The aim of this was to improve confidence levels on these stations, and the FRA has already experienced an increase from 74.7% in 2003/04 to 91% in 2005/06. This new arrangement will help ensure an appropriate intervention response is available.



113. The FRA has had a formal policy on pre-planned overtime in place since 2004. The policy clarifies the instances when overtime is appropriate and identifies the process through which it is both arranged and recorded. This policy gives the FRA flexibility to respond to changes in the way it delivers services, especially given the make up of staff. For example, overtime payment arrangements are in place to pay retained and CRU staff for undertaking CFS activities out-of-hours.
114. In 2005/06 over half of the incidents attended by the FRA were false alarms. The introduction of a call reduction strategy has resulted in a decrease in the number of appliances being mobilised to false alarms. As part of this strategy, a pilot scheme in Inverness was carried out which involved one appliance (rather than three) being sent to AFAs in low and medium risk premises between 8am and 10pm. Following the pilot, the Board agreed to extend the policy to the rest of the service area in a phased manner. The FRA estimates that this has resulted in 300 fewer appliances being mobilised to AFAs compared to the same period last year. There has also been a 2% reduction in AFAs between 2004/05 and 2005/06⁷.
115. A call challenge policy has also been developed in partnership with Northern Constabulary and Telecoms providers. To date 56 callers have been challenged, resulting in non-attendance or reduced attendance at 32 of these call outs. These initiatives help the FRA target its resources in an appropriate way so operational staff are available to deal with incidents safely and effectively.
116. Since the national standards of fire cover were removed the FRA has continued to monitor operational response times for its own business planning purposes, but does not report publicly on them. Response times are of significant public interest and the FRA should consider how its performance can be publicly reported within the context of the IRMP.
117. The FRA recognises the importance of delivering an intervention service which targets areas of greatest risk. In order to achieve this, the FRA is currently undertaking a three stage sustainability review of all stations and CRUs in Highland and Islands. The aim of the review is to provide information for future risk modelling, to ensure the FRA has appropriate resources available in the relevant places when they are needed. The Board will receive a paper in March 2007 presenting the findings of this review. Area Commanders will receive copies of the findings at each stage, and will be expected to work with station managers and staff to address any areas where improvements can be made.
118. The FRA has appropriate policies in place to manage health and safety in the workplace. The Health and Safety Management Policy is contained within Service Orders and stored on the shared IT

⁷ Highlands and Islands FRA Service Local Performance Indicator



network. Staff are also kept informed of any specific risks or health and safety issues through a safety bulletin which is issued by the Health and Safety Manager. Health and safety training is cascaded through officers who are IOSH and NEBOSH trained. The effect of these measures is monitored through LPIs and SLPIs. The total number of reported injuries among staff increased from 40 to 43 between 2004/05 and 2005/06.

119. The FRA recognises its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the importance of multi-agency working when responding to major incidents. It is therefore represented on the Highland and Islands Strategic Co-ordinating Group and Emergency Planning Group, along with officers from other emergency services, local authorities, government agencies and utility companies.

Collaborative working

120. The FRA is involved in a number of collaborations with other fire and rescue authorities. As well as working with other services through the CFOA forums, the FRA has collaborated with individual services in the areas of recruitment, training and community fire safety.

121. The FRA collaborated with Grampian Fire and Rescue Authority on the recruitment of a data analyst for each of their IRMP Departments. This joint recruitment process resulted in efficiency savings, as well as building links between the two FRAs and the two data analysts, and paving the way for future joint working ventures.

122. Collaboration is also ongoing with Central Scotland Fire and Rescue Authority, whose Equalities Officer has delivered training to the Equality and Diversity Forum and is in the process of delivering a three month programme of diversity awareness training to staff. This collaboration has led to efficiency savings and the freeing up of resources in the HR Department, as well as the sharing of expertise and best practice between both authorities.

123. In 2005/06 the FRA attended 375 deliberate fires, an increase of 15% from 2004/05. To help reverse this trend, Highlands and Islands and Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Authorities are taking a joint approach to tackling the issue of young fire setters. Working together, the FRAs have trained specialist officers who work with young offenders convicted of fire setting in an attempt to prevent re-offending. It is too early to assess the impact of this work.



Part 6: Communication

Key findings

- The FRA has well developed strategies in place for internal and external communication. It is putting appropriate mechanisms and channels in place to improve internal communication, but will need to ensure that their effectiveness is assessed over time.
- The FRA is implementing the National Standards of Community Engagement to ensure it engages effectively with the communities it serves.
- The FRA has a well established approach to public performance reporting. As well as reporting on performance measures, the FRA uses its PPR to inform the public on future plans, initiatives and community fire safety activities.
- IT is an under utilised resource in the FRA. The current rollout of IT systems to all stations should lead to significant improvements in communication and training in retained stations.

Internal communication

124. The geography of the area covered by the FRA, the fact that the majority of staff are retained firefighters, and the lack of IT systems in retained stations makes internal communication with staff challenging. To increase the effectiveness of communication with staff an internal communication strategy, 'Talkback', has been developed and a one-page summary posted on station notice boards.

125. Emphasis in the strategy is placed on communicating the right information to the relevant people. The strategy recognises four types of information - core, general, management and executive - and outlines who needs to know this type of information to undertake their role effectively, how it will be communicated, and the timeframe in which this will happen. An internal communication workplan has recently been devised so that staff with responsibility for the effective implementation of 'Talkback' are clear about the actions required of them.

126. The establishment of the Communication Forum is a key driver for continuing to improve internal communications. Members of the Forum represent a cross section of the FRA and provide a channel through which staff can make suggestions for improving internal communications. Recommendations suggested by the Forum, such as quarterly 'Evenings with the Chief' question and answer sessions, have been taken forward.

127. The Communication Forum has recently taken a 'snapshot' of internal communications, by asking a sample of staff to complete an anonymous questionnaire. The majority of respondents felt that internal communications are improving. This is a view which was reflected in interviews with staff, with the



newsletter being identified as a particularly effective communication tool. However, staff in some parts of the organisation felt that they are not always listened to by management.

128. The launch of 'Talkback' and the establishment of the Communication Forum are recent developments, and it will be important for the FRA to evaluate their impact over time and ensure that core information is reaching all staff and that there are opportunities for staff to feed back to the management team.

External communication

129. The FRA recognises the importance of effective communication with stakeholders and informing and engaging local communities on developments and changes in service delivery. The development of IRMP, and changes to the FRA structure which accompanied it, required the FRA to prioritise communication and consultation with local communities and stakeholders. A consultation strategy was developed during this period, in line with national guidance, and this is now applied to all external consultations, ensuring a structured and consistent approach to the process.
130. Board members, in particular those whose constituencies were affected by changes to their local fire service, were fully involved in community consultation during the development of IRMP and associated Action Plans. This was demonstrated through their attendance at public meetings and their responses to letters from local councillors and residents affected by the changes.
131. The FRA recognises the need to target a range of people when communicating with the communities it serves. The Gaelic Language Plan highlights the importance the FRA places on reaching communities whose first language is Gaelic. The FRA uses partner organisations such as the Highland Alliance for Racial Equality, Age Concern and Deaf Highland to engage with 'hard to reach' groups.
132. Following a recommendation in the Audit Scotland review of community planning, published in June 2006, the FRA undertook a review of its approach to community engagement against the National Standards. In August 2006, the FRA produced a 'Statement of Intent' which highlighted how the authority intended to adopt the National Standards and use the associated indicators. The FRA also agreed to develop a community engagement strategy and policy based on the Standards and appointed the convenor as a champion for community engagement on the Board. Implementing the National Standards is a significant advance for the FRA in ensuring it engages effectively with the communities it serves.
133. Section 13 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 imposes a duty on local authorities to make arrangements for reporting to the public on the outcomes of its performance. The performance of Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority is reported annually in the Public Performance



Report (PPR). As well as reporting performance against a range of indicators, the report outlines achievements against IRMP and Service Plan actions, and invites comment on the services the FRA is delivering. The document is also used as a vehicle for the FRA to put forward its CFS messages to key stakeholders and the wider public.

Information technology

134. IT is an under utilised resource in Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Authority. Currently only the two Inverness sites (including the wholetime station) and 13 District Offices have IT equipment and access to the IT network. The current lack of IT facilities in the retained stations impacts heavily on the training and communication needs of retained staff. However, the FRA is addressing this and a rollout of IT systems to all 95 retained stations is currently underway.
135. The FRA is delivering this IT network in partnership with Highland Council and an external private company. After an unsuccessful bid to the Scottish Executive for funding to expand the IT network, the FRA entered into partnership with a private company, who were already delivering a managed IT service to Highland Council. This company has committed to deliver comprehensive network facilities to all 95 retained stations by the end of the financial year 2006/07, and to create an intranet site. This will strengthen communication, support improved data sharing, and provide distance and e-learning facilities for retained staff. The FRA has been creative in taking forward this initiative and has developed an option that provides value for money and a transfer of risk to the private company.
136. The rollout of IT systems is aligned with the implementation of IPDS in all retained stations. IT equipment has been installed in each of the three IPDS pilot retained stations, plus Inverness retained station. An IT Implementation Training package has been put together by the Training and Development department, and delivered by FRA staff to the four IT pilot stations. As the IT network is rolled out to the remaining 91 stations, the training will be delivered by an external provider. The installation of IT equipment in stations will follow the timeframe for the delivery of IT training, so that access to the IT network is accompanied by the relevant training. The FRA aims to deliver IT systems and training to every retained station by the end of the financial year 2006/07.



Part 7: Improvement agenda

137. 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.
138. 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.
139. 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 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

- Review the organisational structure to ensure the appropriate arrangements are in place to deliver the strategic objectives of the FRA (paragraph 28).
- Introduce ways to improve formal and regular dialogue between representative bodies and the management team (paragraph 37).
- Finalise and roll out an appraisal system for all staff which is aligned with the performance management framework and takes account of national guidance from CFOA (paragraph 40).

Fire prevention and risk management

- Ensure CFS resources are being targeted appropriately, using data from the risk reduction analysis project (paragraph 51).
- Finalise and implement plans to ensure the requirements of Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act are met (paragraph 53).
- Continue to roll out of the evaluation of partnerships and develop procedures for either disengaging from or improving the effectiveness of those partnerships identified as less effective (paragraph 59).

Financial management

- Develop longer term financial planning which addresses future financial pressures (paragraph 67).



- Develop a strategy to ensure there are sufficient reserves to meet emergencies in future years (paragraph 70).
- Complete the population of the asset register (paragraph 84).
- Continue to develop solutions to address the challenges of future capital expenditure (paragraph 85).

Workforce management

- Clarify the responsibilities of the HR and Training and Development departments, to reduce duplication of workloads (paragraph 89).
- Finalise and roll out revised HR policies (paragraph 90).
- Implement a structured roll out of IPDS to retained staff (paragraph 95).
- Once rolled out, use the new appraisal system to identify the training needs of non-uniformed staff (paragraph 97).
- Increase awareness among staff of the options available for flexible working (paragraph 99).
- Consider how the FRA will continue to take forward the equality and diversity agenda once the Equality and Diversity Adviser has fulfilled their two year contract (paragraph 105).
- Develop a programme of equality training for staff at retained stations and CRUs (paragraph 106).
- Target under represented groups in future recruitment campaigns to try to make the workforce more representative of the community it serves (paragraph 107).

Management of operational business

- Ensure the actions for intervention and emergency response outlined in the IRMP Action Plan are completed to demonstrate continued effective use of resources (paragraph 111).
- Review the approach to the public reporting of response times within the context of IRMP (paragraph 116).

Communication

- Put mechanisms in place to assess the effectiveness of internal communications over time (paragraph 128).
- Ensure core information reaches all staff and staff are given opportunities to feed back their views to the management team (paragraph 128).
- Embed the use of IT for communication and training, and ensure staff receive relevant levels of training and support to use the IT systems available (paragraph 136).



Appendix 1

Glossary

AFA	Automatic Fire Alarm
CFO	Chief Fire Officer
CFOA	Chief Fire Officers Association
CFS	Community Fire Safety
CRU	Community Response Unit – a unit of firefighters based in a sparsely populated area to deliver community fire safety and respond to local risks such as RTCs or wildfires.
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
HFSRA	Home Fire Safety Risk Assessment
IPDS	Integrated Personal Development System
IRMP	Integrated Risk Management Planning
LPis	Scottish Local Performance Indicators – a set of CFOA indicators designed to allow Scottish FRAs to benchmark their performance against each other.
PPR	Public Performance Report
RTC	Road traffic collision
SLPIs	Service Local Performance Indicators – indicators set by the FRA which reflect local priorities in each service department.
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound
SPIs	Statutory Performance Indicators – statutory indicators set out in the Accounts Commission's annual Direction, under the Local Government Act 1992.