



Llywodraeth Cymru
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Part 1 Guidance to Fire and Rescue Authorities

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Chapter 1 - Integrating Strategy and Delivery

1.1 This chapter sets out how Fire and Rescue Authorities (“FRAs”) should pursue two separate but complementary objectives:

- Achieving service improvement in the short term; and
- Supporting the well-being of communities over the longer-term.

1.2 Neither short-term improvement nor longer-term planning work properly in isolation from the other. Improvement which is not grounded in a longer-term strategic vision, and which does not aim to realise that vision, can become an exercise in chasing performance targets for their own sake. It can lack an adequate sense of what matters most to local people and communities, and what future challenges and opportunities communities might face.

1.3 Conversely, longer term planning which does not generate visible, shorter-term beneficial changes for local areas can fall into a process of formulating vague aims and aspirations that will never be properly realised.

Linking in practice

1.4 There are three key pieces of legislation that interact here:-

- First, the improvement planning duties on FRAs set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the “Measure”) which are covered in detail through out this document;
- Secondly, the priorities for FRAs as set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework (the “National Framework”) (made under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (the “2004 Act”). The National Framework establishes priorities for FRAs to which they must have regard in the development of their medium to long-term planning, as required by section 4(3)(c) of the Measure; and
- Thirdly, the duties to be placed on FRAs by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the “2015 Act”). The 2015 Act specifies seven well-being goals. It requires most devolved public bodies (including FRAs) to set objectives for meeting those goals, and to pursue those objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle. This means that FRAs must act in a manner which seeks to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

1.5 FRAs will also have duties under the 2015 Act as statutory members of Public Service Boards. This requires them to contribute to well-being assessments, and formulating and delivering local well-being plans for each Public Service Board area.

1.6 The Welsh Minsters will issue separate guidance on the duties in the 2015 Act and how public bodies must comply with them. This Guidance does not

pre-empt any of that. However the relationship between the three sets of duties/requirements are set out briefly below:-

Strategic Planning

- FRAs should reflect the priorities in the National Framework in their medium to long-term planning;
- The 2015 Act will require FRAs to publish well-being objectives and a statement explaining how these objectives support the achievement of the well-being goals. FRAs are not expected to introduce new mechanisms for fulfilling these duties. Rather FRAs should look to integrate the duties into their strategic planning and performance reporting systems;
- As such FRAs should use their strategic plans to consult on and publish their well-being objectives; and
- There will be a clear relationship between the priorities in the National Framework and the well-being goals set out in the 2015 Act.

Improvement Planning and Reporting

- Annual improvement planning arrangements should be grounded in developing improvement objectives which support the longer-term strategic vision of FRAs. This means that the priorities in the National Framework and FRAs' well-being objectives should be reflected in FRAs' improvement objectives;
- The 2015 Act will also require FRAs to publish an annual progress report showing the progress they have made against their well-being objectives. FRAs should use their annual performance assessments to report annual progress towards their well-being objectives and those improvement objectives that link to the National Framework priorities;
- There are separate requirements on the Welsh Ministers to report every two years on how far FRAs have acted in accordance with the National Framework. FRAs' annual performance assessments will form part of the evidence used in the production of these reports; and
- To be as accountable as possible to the public, FRAs will need to ensure communities understand what they are responsible for delivering, and what their plans and priorities are across the range of requirements set out above. FRAs should give citizens the opportunity to contribute to these plans in an informed way. This means citizens need to understand the objectives their FRA is pursuing, and how success against these objectives will be demonstrated.

1.7 Linking the objectives in local well-being plans to FRAs' overarching strategic plans and improvement planning, will potentially be a complex process. FRAs cover large and diverse areas and different communities may well have different priorities and objectives. FRAs will need to manage the prospect of such conflicting priorities effectively. It is likely that there will be some common issues leading to consistent priorities across the whole FRA which should be readily reflected in individual FRAs' own well-being objectives set out in their strategic plans. The link to improvement planning will be clear in these circumstances. There may, however, be instances where local well-being plan objectives are confined to a specific Local Authority area, and will need to be reflected in FRAs' business plans for a specific geographical area (e.g. delivery plans for specific commands or fire and rescue stations) rather than as a wider strategic objective in the FRAs' Strategic Plans for their areas as a whole.

Chapter 2 – Fundamental Principles, Coverage and Status

Fundamental Principles

2.1 The Measure is based on a few fundamental principles:

- “Improvement” properly means more than just quantifiable gains in service output or efficiency or in the internal effectiveness of FRAs. Rather, it should mean anything which enhances the quality of life for local citizens and communities;
- Accordingly, FRAs should determine their own priorities for improvement based on a thorough understanding of local needs and their capacity to address them;
- That understanding should inform, and be informed by, the longer-term shared vision of well-being outcomes; and
- Approaches to collaboration, performance management, accountability, regulation and inspection and support and intervention, should sustain and be consistent with the above principles.

2.2 The Measure:

- Uses a wide definition of improvement. This is not limited to traditional concepts of economy, efficiency and effectiveness but rather embraces the following:
 - making progress towards an FRA’s strategic objectives;
 - improving the quality of services;
 - improving the availability of services;
 - improving fairness by reducing inequality in accessing or benefiting from services or improving the social well-being of citizens and communities;
 - exercising functions in ways which contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development;
 - improving the efficiency of services and functions; and
 - innovation and change which contributes to any of the above objectives.
- Allows FRAs to determine their own improvement objectives under any (but not necessarily all) of the above elements of improvement.
- Creates a general power for FRAs to collaborate so as to secure improvement;
- Simplifies the approach to regulation and inspection, requiring co-ordination between regulatory bodies; and
- Creates a general power for the Welsh Ministers to offer voluntary support to FRAs, and requiring the Welsh Ministers to use that power as regards

an FRA which is in difficulties, before they can consider using their intervention powers (except in exceptional circumstances).

Coverage and Status

2.3 This Guidance is aimed at FRAs in Wales and is issued under part 1 of the Measure. The Measure places Welsh improvement authorities under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions (see section 2), and to set improvement objectives (section 3). For these purposes, Welsh improvement authorities are required to consult with representatives of people in specified categories (section 5). Welsh FRAs are defined as Welsh improvement authorities under section 1(c) of the Measure.

2.4 The Measure provides the Welsh Ministers with power to specify performance standards and Performance Indicators (PIs) by order and Welsh improvement authorities are required to make arrangements to exercise their functions so that any such performance standards are met (section 8). Welsh improvement authorities are under a duty to collect and use performance information and to make plans for improvement (sections 13-15).

2.5 The Measure provides powers for Welsh improvement authorities to collaborate with others in the exercise of some of their functions under the Measure (sections 9, 11 and 12).

2.6 The Auditor General for Wales must carry out an audit for the purpose of determining whether a Welsh improvement authority has discharged its duties and has acted in accordance with relevant guidance (section 17). The Auditor General for Wales also has powers to report and make special inspections of Welsh improvement authorities.

2.7 Welsh Ministers have powers to support Welsh improvement authorities and powers to direct them if they fail, or are likely to fail, to discharge their duties under the Measure.

2.8 This Guidance replaces guidance under the Measure which was previously issued in May 2010. It is issued under sections 6, 12A, 14(3) and 15(8) and (9) of the Measure.

2.9 Welsh FRAs must have regard to this Guidance when discharging their functions under Part 1 of the Measure. As Welsh Ministers have no powers to issue guidance to FRAs on the Auditor General's powers of inspection, Chapter 8 is for information only; the Auditor General is not obliged to have regard to Chapter 8.

2.10 In accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the Measure, the Welsh Government has consulted all FRAs in Wales, the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Welsh Local Government Association about this Guidance.

Improvement in the Context of Fire and Rescue Authorities

2.11 This Guidance reflects the terms of the Measure in the specific context in which FRAs operate. This includes specific FRA functions, services and existing planning processes. In particular, the guidance recognises the Welsh Government's vision and priorities for FRAs as set out in the National Framework and explains how improvement planning should contribute to those priorities.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework

2.12 The National Framework is prepared and published in accordance with section 21 of the 2004 Act which states that a framework:

- Must set out priorities and objectives for FRAs in connection with the discharge of their functions;
- May contain guidance to FRAs in connection with the discharge of any of their functions; and
- May contain any matter relating to FRAs or their functions that the Welsh Ministers considers appropriate.

2.13 In carrying out their functions, FRAs must have regard to the National Framework as well as their improvement obligations as set out in the Measure. FRAs should:-

- Build the priorities set out in the National Framework into their strategic plans; and
- Ensure the priorities in the National Framework are considered when developing improvement objectives.

2.14 Section 25 of the 2004 Act requires the Welsh Ministers to publish a report at least every two years which sets out the extent to which FRAs have complied with the National Framework. To discharge this duty, the Welsh Ministers need comprehensive evidence about FRA capability, capacity and delivery, both from FRAs themselves and from other relevant sources. So all planning, reporting and assessment processes used to fulfil either or both legislative requirements (namely under the Measure and the 2004 Act), should be complementary, enabling information and evidence from one process to feed into the other; and allowing the Welsh Ministers to reach an authoritative view about the extent of FRA compliance.

2.15 The core duties of FRAs set out in the 2004 Act are to:-

- Promote fire safety within their area;
- Extinguish fires and protect life and property;

- Rescue people from road traffic accidents and protect them from serious harm in the event of such an accident;
- Respond to particular types of specified emergency other than fires and road traffic accidents as specified by Order.

2.16 The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (Wales) Order 2007 also requires FRAs to:-

- Remove chemical, biological or radioactive contaminants from people in the event of an emergency;
- Rescue people from collapsed buildings, trains, trams or aircraft.

Using FRA planning processes to drive Improvement

2.17 FRAs already play a key role in existing partnership structures and networks, such as Public Service Boards, Community Safety Partnerships and Local Resilience Forums. This existing partnership working should form the foundation of the FRAs' future contribution to wider multi-agency planning to meet the needs of local communities.

2.18 Under section 5 in Part 1 of the Measure, FRAs are required to consult on the arrangements they propose to put in place to secure continuous improvement and the improvement objectives and standards they intend to set themselves. Section 15(6) of the Measure requires each FRA to publish an improvement plan which sets out how it will discharge these duties in each financial year. Chapter 4 of this guidance covers mechanisms for identifying improvements based on risk to communities.

2.19 Part 1 of the Measure focuses broadly on improvement rather than narrowly on risk. However, reducing the risk and severity of fire is a perfectly legitimate aim within the terms of the Measure. Such aims are, of course, fundamental to improvement in a fire context. Prior to 2011, FRAs were required to produce a strategic Risk Reduction Plan covering the medium to long term objectives of the FRA, supported by annual Risk Reduction Action Plans, which were subject to public consultation. The publication of annual improvement plans was timed to enable consultation and publication of both plans simultaneously, and as a merged document if the FRA so chose. This was on the basis that risk reduction objectives formed the clear basis for improvement planning objectives. In 2011, the Welsh Government consulted on fully merging both processes, enabling improvement planning requirements under the Measure and risk reduction planning mechanisms under the National Framework to be merged, enabling one planning, consultation and publication process to be undertaken each year. This revised arrangement is set out in the National Framework.

2.20 This Guidance describes how FRAs should fulfil their duties to consult on and publish an improvement plan under Part 1 of the Measure. FRAs should

publish their plans as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December of the year prior to the financial year to which the plan relates. The policy intention is that FRAs will publish their plans between 1 January and 31 March in each year.

Roles and Responsibilities

2.21 The responsibilities of the key parties that have a role in delivering improvement planning arrangements for FRAs are set out below. The majority of their responsibilities are set out in more detail in subsequent chapters of this Guidance.

Role of FRAs

- Undertake risk reduction planning which takes into account emergency response, and business and community fire safety on an ongoing basis (Chapter 4);
- Undertake self-assessment which will include:-
 - a critical review of an FRA's own performance, against itself over time and compared with others both within and outside Wales using a range of evidence, including PIs and benchmarking data (see Chapter 5 for further details);
 - a critical review of performance against previously established improvement objectives, how far the FRA has taken account of the priorities, objectives and guidance set out in the National Framework, and a review of performance on collaborative work undertaken by the FRA with other partners;
 - consideration the results of peer assessment, audit and assessment reports by the WAO and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, and any report/advice on performance provided by Welsh Ministers or the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- Use information from the self assessment exercise along with community risk assessments and emerging policy and good practice elsewhere, to develop improvement objectives and consult on these objectives;
- Publish an Annual Improvement Plan detailing the objectives and how the FRA plans to implement them (see Chapter 7);
- Publish information on past performance assessments annually (see Chapter 7); and
- Report on findings of peer assessment in annual performance assessments and make the link between recommendations from peer assessment and improvement objectives clear in Annual Improvement Plans.

Role of Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser

2.22 The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser has powers under section 28 of the 2004 Act to obtain information as to the manner in which FRAs are discharging their functions and technical matters relating to those functions.

2.23 The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser will:-

- Provide advice and support to FRAs on all issues relating to their role, function and the delivery of their services;
- Undertake thematic reviews and assessments of FRA operational matters;
- Report to the Welsh Ministers, on the following:-
 - thematic reviews undertaken and resulting recommendations; and
 - improvements being implemented by FRAs as a result of previous and current peer assessments and thematic reviews, and provide a view on the extent of these and other improvement objectives linked to operational/service delivery functions of the FRAs.
- Discuss assessment plans with the WAO to ensure proposals for all audit and assessments are complementary, and share relevant information, reports and data;
- Provide views on, and contributions to, draft WAO reports to ensure Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser's report findings and general views are reflected. Similarly consult with the WAO where appropriate on draft findings of any assessments undertaken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser; and
- Provide input into WAO reports through involvement as a specialist resource in studies/assessments undertaken.

Role of the Wales Audit Office

2.24 Under the Public Audit (Wales) Acts 2004 and 2013, and the Measure, the WAO has functions (delegated by the Auditor General) to:-

- Audit a FRA's accounting statements;
- Review arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of an FRA's functions and the provision of an FRA's services;
- Assess an FRA's arrangements to secure continuous improvement which includes:-
 - An assessment of the performance of the FRA over time, taking into consideration:-
 - the FRA's own published assessment of its performance;
 - information from other assessments undertaken of the FRA including any peer assessment reports relating to operational and other activities;
 - findings from other work undertaken by the WAO;

- findings from work undertaken by other regulators; and
 - findings from work undertaken by, and more generally the views of, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- A audit of the FRA's compliance with section 15 of the Measure which requires it to publish a report on its performance;
- Co-ordinate assessment and regulatory work with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- Undertake special inspections following consultation with Welsh Ministers where the Auditor General is of the opinion that a FRA may fail to comply with the requirements of the Measure;
- Publish an Annual Improvement Report by 31 January each year; and
- Contribute to discussions regarding the performance of FRAs and their support requirements through the Fire and Rescue Authority Improvement Planning Steering Group.

Role of the Welsh Ministers and the Welsh Government

- Set priorities and objectives for FRAs in Wales, and guidance on the discharge of their functions, through the National Framework;
- Monitor compliance with the National Framework through the production of biennial reports, and, on an ongoing basis, through analysis of FRAs' performance as set out in FRAs' improvement plans and performance assessments. WAO reports and analysis undertaken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- Provide detailed guidance on the application of the Measure, through statutory guidance, priorities and guidance set out in the National Framework and supporting Welsh Government Fire and Rescue circulars;
- Introduce and maintain statutory PIs;
- Manage the grant to the WAO for improvement planning assessments and propose areas to the WAO for studies and inspections; and
- Prepare and maintain a support and intervention protocol for FRAs under the 2004 Act and the Measure.

Chapter 3 - Improvement

Defining Improvement

3.1 In the context of the Measure, 'improvement' and 'improvement planning' mean more than quantifiable gains in service output or efficiency or the internal effectiveness of an organisation. Rather it means anything that enhances the sustainable quality of life and the environment for local citizens and communities.

The General Duty

3.2 Under section 2 of the Measure, FRAs are under a general duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions." This wording has been deliberately and carefully chosen, and two aspects of it deserve further comment:

- First, the duty involves 'making arrangements' to improve. There is no absolute duty to improve, nor could there be. Delivering high-quality responsive and preventative services and reducing the incidence and severity of fire is a complex and often difficult business. No organisation, however competent or well-intentioned could guarantee that its efforts would be successful. An absolute duty to improve would therefore either invite failure or risk the setting of unambitious and less relevant objectives. That does not mean that FRAs need only design some processes and leave it at that. Rather, FRAs should put in place arrangements which allow them effectively to understand local needs and priorities to make best use of their resources and capacity to meet those needs and priorities and to evaluate the impact of their actions.
- Secondly, the duty refers to 'continuous improvement'. FRAs should seek continuously to ensure that their improvement objectives remain relevant, that the best arrangements for delivering them are in place and that they are able to understand and demonstrate the impact on the outcomes for citizens.

3.3 In discharging its duty, a FRA must have regard in particular to the need to improve the exercise of its functions in several ways. The Measure refers to these as "aspects of improvement" as follows:-

- Making progress towards the FRA's strategic objectives flowing from the National Framework and Public Service Board plans;
- Improving the quality of services;
- Improving the availability of services;

- Fairness, especially in reducing inequality that may be experienced by some groups in accessing or benefiting from services or in improving the social well-being of citizens and communities;
- Ways that contribute to the sustainable development of an area;
- Improving the efficiency of services and functions; and
- Innovation and change which contributes to any of the above objectives.

3.4 All of these terms are explained in section 4 of the Measure and it is not the intention of this Guidance to change or add to those explanations. What follows is guidance on how to apply the terms in practice.

3.5 The first of these aspects, **strategic effectiveness**, is the key to linking the priorities set out in the National Framework, the Public Service Board plans, the FRA's Strategic Plan and the ongoing processes that underpin them, with a FRAs improvement processes. It follows that the outcomes and objectives set out in an FRA's Strategic Plan should be central to that FRA's improvement activity. Doing so should enable FRAs to develop a clear narrative around their plans for improvement that will resonate with the citizens and communities that they serve.

3.6 The next three aspects, **service quality, availability and fairness** all relate to service provision, by aiming to meet the needs of citizens, and ensuring fair ease of access to services that are fit for purpose and meet their needs. These aspects are particularly relevant to FRAs given their statutory responsibilities to protect citizens and communities. FRAs need to balance their prevention activities with their ability to respond to emergency incidents. Clearly, these objectives can be demonstrated individually or collectively. Fairness can also be demonstrated by exercising functions in ways which reduce disadvantage and improve social well-being, for instance by prioritising individuals, groups and communities at particular risk of fire.

3.7 When carrying out its functions or providing services, an FRA may demonstrate improvement when it does so in a way that contributes towards the **sustainability** of its area. Equally, on-going **efficiency** may also be achieved if fewer resources are utilised while maintaining provision of substantially similar or better services. Clearly, should an FRA choose to alter the manner in which a service is provided, and in so doing it uses fewer resources or more integrated services, it will not only be demonstrating efficiency, but may demonstrate improved sustainability as well.

3.8 The **innovation** aspect is slightly different. It covers any changes to service design and delivery methods that are intended to yield improvement under any other aspect, and are reasonably likely to do so. This allows FRAs to make changes, which may not have tangible effects within the same reporting year, but are likely to have such effects in subsequent years, and still count them as improvements.

3.9 It follows that for an FRA to discharge its general duty successfully it should incorporate the seven aspects of improvement into all of its decision-making processes and its assessments of its functions and services.

Improvement Objectives

3.10 When an FRA contemplates its general duty to improve it should consider:

- The setting of its improvement objectives for the forthcoming year (which may confirm or amend previous years' objectives); and
- Whether the organisation is fit to achieve those objectives.

3.11 When deciding on areas for improvement and the resultant improvement objectives that it will consult upon, an FRA should consider actions that would:

- effectively reduce the incidence and severity of fires and of other incidents to which the FRA responds and/or which contribute to the prevention of fires and other hazards. This should have regard to known and projected patterns of risk within an FRA's area and among its citizens , while ensuring fair and equitable treatment and outcomes for all;
- address known weaknesses (and anticipate likely ones) in an FRA's ability to meet local needs and/or identify gaps between local expectations and capacity to deliver;
- entail efficient, effective and sustainable use of financial, natural and human resources;
- reflect an awareness and understanding of patterns, trends and possibilities within the social, economic and environmental contexts;
- make full use of new and innovative approaches to achieve the above objectives;
- reflect the difficult choices that an FRA may face when agreeing budgets and priorities. An FRA may have to exclude some objectives that would otherwise be desirable. It may also mean some legitimate objectives have drawbacks: they may involve trade-offs between aspects of improvement, or may incur opportunity costs. Such an approach is both legitimate and necessary, especially in the face of resource constraints or where local needs are particularly acute; and
- perhaps most importantly, be challenging but realistic. A 'wish-list' of unattainable and/or unsustainable objectives merely raises expectations unrealistically and is no more desirable than an unambitious set of self-fulfilling actions which do little to address genuine need. FRAs should reflect carefully on their capacity to effect positive change and formulate their objectives accordingly.

Identifying Improvement Objectives

3.12 FRAs should determine their own priorities for improvement based on a thorough evidence-based understanding of the communities they serve, local needs and their capacity to address them. Chapter 4 covers reducing risk in communities in more detail. Each FRA should therefore identify their improvement objectives on the basis of critical self-analysis taking account of a wide range of evidence such as:

- The Welsh Ministers' priorities for FRAs, as set out in the National Framework;
- The outcomes and priorities identified for an area in its Strategic Plan which should contain relevant priorities set out in Public Service Board plans;
- Priorities as identified through the statutory partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnerships, Local Resilience Forums and their associated plans;
- The corporate and service priorities contained within the previous year's Annual Improvement Plan;
- The outcomes of any community risk analysis and resultant risk reduction proposals (including modelling which predicts changing the risk profile for communities using the Fire Service Emergency Cover(FSEC) model and/or other modelling tools used by FRAs);
- The outcome of its assessment exercises of both corporate functions and services provided using the most appropriate performance data. This includes , but is not limited to, statutory PIs and information from other sources such as citizen and user needs and satisfaction information and wider knowledge of community needs;
- Audit, regulatory and inspection reports, especially the Annual Improvement Report issued by the Auditor General for Wales;
- The results of peer reviews and any assessment work undertaken by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- Priorities identified through benchmarking performance against previous years and with other organisations (including other FRAs within and outside Wales);
- Evidence gained from consulting on improvement objectives in the previous year;
- Innovation and best practice elsewhere; and
- The global context – e.g. climate change and sustainability, economic conditions and threats to health.

3.13 Improvement objectives that are chosen as a result of these processes should have credibility with citizens, stakeholders and FRA staff. This should translate into a better sense of “ownership” of the ambitions for communities and the area.

3.14 Developing, adopting and acting on rigorous, robust and comprehensive self-assessment arrangements are essential to understanding actual or potential weaknesses and areas for improvement. Peer challenge is a key element of self assessment and can be used across a range of corporate and operational functions. Peer assessment of FRAs’ capability and effectiveness is crucial, offering an external challenge on issues that often require a level of technical expertise.

3.15 Peer assessment of operational capability and effectiveness is clearly an area which cuts across the performance review and reporting requirements of both the Measure and the 2004 Act. The assessment process should be managed, led and owned by FRAs. However, agreeing proposals for review with both the WAO and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, and involving them in elements of the assessment where relevant, will provide a more co-ordinated and cohesive approach to the wider assessment programme. FRAs should ensure the assessment process is robust and leads to effective action. To do so FRAs will need to:-

- Undertake peer assessments on a regular basis to feed into their own local performance and improvement arrangements including, but not limited to, the improvement planning cycle required under the arrangements set out in this guidance;
- Ensure that an independent external view is provided by using sector competent officers from other FRAs, ideally including representation from outside Wales and representatives from other sectors both public and private as appropriate;
- Ensure transparency in the process by making final peer assessment reports publicly available in a timely manner. Such reports should, clearly reference the outcomes both in terms of good practice and areas for improvement, and set out whether the FRA will deal with the outcomes routinely or in their improvement plans; and
- Provide copies of peer assessment reports to the Welsh Ministers in a timely manner. These will support the Welsh Ministers’ statutory reports on how far FRAs have acted in accordance with the National Framework.

Formulating Improvement Objectives

3.16 By completing the above processes FRAs should be able to draw up their improvement objectives for consultation. The Measure does not require improvement objectives to be set out in any particular form but this guidance suggests a process for formulating such objectives which brings performance and planning cycles together. All improvement objectives should be:

- Legitimate – making a demonstrable contribution to at least one (or, probably, more than one) of the aspects of improvement listed in the Measure;
- Clear – setting out the visible improvement that citizens can expect;
- Robust – with defined terms of success (whether quantitative or qualitative);
- Deliverable – with established links to individual service programmes and budgets; and
- Demonstrable – capable of being supported by objective (but not necessarily measured or quantitative) evidence.

3.17 The aspects of improvement in the Measure are **not** a checklist for drawing up objectives and there is no need to use them as headings under which individual improvement objectives are grouped. Rather, they set out in broad terms the sorts of objectives FRAs will wish to achieve. Many if not most actual objectives will contribute to more than one aspect of improvement.

3.18 How many improvement objectives to set is again a matter for local decision. As long as the objectives taken together adequately address the main local priorities and needs, then the exact number of them is less important.

3.19 Overall, it is probably better in the interests of clarity and accountability to have fewer objectives, with detailed links to service programmes, than to have a larger number of more detailed objectives.

3.20 The Measure requires that FRAs set improvement objectives every year. However, that does not mean that all improvement objectives should change every year, or that they should all be deliverable within one year. It is perfectly legitimate to set objectives which span more than one year, perhaps with intermediate milestones, provided that FRAs review them annually to establish their continued relevance. There should be a clear link between these annual objectives and FRAs' medium term plans.

Consulting on Improvement

3.21 Section 5 of the Measure requires FRAs to consult citizens and communities about their general duty to improve and their improvement objectives. The Measure does not specify how consultation must be undertaken. Consultation should be effective in engaging local communities. This can be achieved by using citizen-friendly approaches including for example, the provision of executive summaries in consultation documents and using community engagement processes and events.

3.22 FRAs should aim to make the process of determining improvement objectives as open and transparent as possible. It is recommended that FRAs should consult the following before setting its improvement objectives:

- Citizens and stakeholders;
- Local businesses;
- Public Service Boards;
- Other FRAs (especially where any proposed improvement objectives may have an impact upon them); and
- Other bodies with whom collaborative working is taking place or is being planned.

3.23 FRAs should retain evidence of their consultations to be able to demonstrate that their improvement objectives and their plans for meeting their objectives have been properly identified and determined. In the interests of scrutiny and accountability this evidence should be retained in an easily accessible form.

Recording and Reporting Progress

3.24 FRAs will need to collect evidence of their progress in achieving their improvement objectives during the year. It is for FRAs themselves to determine what constitutes the best evidence of the progress that they are seeking to make, and that is best done when improvement objectives are set. Evidence will need, however, to meet the requirements of the Auditor General for Wales and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. Most sound improvement objectives will probably need a range of evidence to demonstrate their accomplishment. Such evidence may include one or more of the following:

- PIs; both those set locally and nationally;
- Qualitative information such as user and citizen satisfaction surveys (both surveys conducted by the FRA or by other bodies). This information will be particularly important for FRAs in assessing the success of their community safety activity which focusses on increasing awareness and changing behaviours;
- Progress in introducing or completing programmes, facilities or ways of working which contribute to the attainment of improvement objectives;
- Reports from regulators and inspection bodies; and
- Any other sources of evidence that appear to be relevant.

3.25 Most sound improvement objectives will probably need a range of evidence to demonstrate that they have been accomplished. Certainly, FRAs should avoid using PIs and targets as objectives in themselves. They should be seen as only one of the tools to help demonstrate improvement.

3.26 In collecting evidence such as outlined above, FRAs should seek to collect together a body of evidence that will allow it to provide a narrative

description of how successful it has been in pursuing its improvement objectives. This will enable it to give account for its performance to its citizens, stakeholders and regulatory bodies. It should focus not just on accounting for 'how much' or 'how well' but more importantly on what impact has been achieved. This range of evidence should be collated and communicated in a report or reports, which section 15 of the Measure requires FRAs to publish no later than 31 October in the following financial year.

Chapter 4 - Managing Risk in Communities

Strategic Context

4.1 Part 1 of the Measure focuses on improvement rather than risk. It is however recognised that, in respect of FRAs, reducing risk to communities (in terms of reducing fires and other incidents, and reducing the impact where such events do occur) is the cornerstone of each FRA's improvement agenda. Reducing community risk is clearly an improvement within the terms of the Measure. Whilst the requirement for FRAs to produce and publish separate Risk Reduction Plans has been removed, risk reduction planning will remain a core mechanism for FRAs to support the development and delivery of their improvement objectives.

Reducing Risk

4.2 There is no standard approach to reducing the risk and impact of fire and other incidents, but FRAs should always consider education and prevention, response criteria (based on the Welsh Government's Guiding Principles for Dwelling Fire Response Standards and any future central guidance) and fire-fighter training and development as key aspects of addressing risk.

4.3 In the FRAs' drive for continuous improvement and risk reduction an evidence-based approach is essential. FRAs should utilise a variety of methods to identify options and validate decisions. This will include computer modelling, data and information on activity levels, community intelligence and other data from partners, as well as national guidance. FRAs must consider the diversity of the population they serve and the drivers of risk within it in order to design services that meet the needs of the whole community.

4.4 Whatever method of risk assessment or analysis is used, the outcome of assessment and any proposals emanating from the assessment must be validated, transparent and withstand scrutiny.

4.5 Risk will change with time. Therefore, regular reviewing and monitoring will be required to ensure risk is minimised as far as practicable and remains acceptable to the FRA. Risk management is effective when all material risks are identified, and those risks are avoided, mitigated or controlled to an acceptable level with available resources. Regular review will ensure the strategic direction established by the FRA remains appropriate, proportionate and effective.

4.6 FRA and senior management ownership, support and leadership are critical to ensure risk management continues and develops. Communication throughout the FRA is essential for it to build a risk management culture that promotes innovation. Risk management must be embedded within management decisions and linked to FRAs' Strategic Plans, improvement objectives and consequent corporate objectives.

4.7 FRAs need to recognise their commitment as a category 1 responder to Local Resilience Forums and the need to deliver UK resilience under the auspices of the National Resilience programme.

Chapter 5 - Improvement Information

5.1 FRAs have a duty under the Measure to collect information related to performance in each financial year (section 13) and to use that information (section 14) to compare their performance in previous years and with the performance of other. They are also required to use the information they have collected in relation their performance in the financial year to assess how they can improve. In order to support the setting of improvement objectives, FRAs will need to move from performance management arrangements which just cover the delivery of services they provide to one which is aware of, and informed by, the effects its provision of services and activities have on an area and its communities. This would include the evaluation and management of the impact the FRA has on the wider plans for an area as set out by Public Service Boards.

5.2 Accordingly, FRAs should look to use a wide range of evidence to assess the performance of their services and their impact on the outcomes for citizens and communities. This will necessarily rely on FRAs taking into account a wide range of evidence to use as improvement information. While PIs remain important sources of objective and comparable evidence, they do not necessarily yield a full picture of service quality or of users' experience of it. This range of evidence may include any of the following:

- PIs (whether statutory, sector or local);
- Satisfaction data: citizen surveys, views of users or citizens' panels or juries;
- Service usage levels;
- The outcomes of service assessments and peer reviews;
- The outputs from any FRA scrutiny process;
- Audit, regulatory and inspection findings;
- Levels of accreditation to recognised assessment schemes;
- Modelling of Community risk (FSEC and other modelling tools used by FRAs);
- Intelligence relating to a need for a new or more innovative means of service delivery, including good practice being used/implemented in other parts of the UK or more widely, and advice and guidance from the Welsh Government and Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser;
- Benchmarking with other FRAs within and outside Wales.

5.3 FRAs are required to use the improvement information they collect in order to compare their performance with their own historical performance in previous financial years and, as far as reasonably practicable, with other

FRA's and, where appropriate, other public authorities exercising similar functions (section 14). The small number of FRA's and the different topography within each FRA means comparison across the three Welsh FRA's may not always provide a true indication of performance. FRA's should therefore also benchmark their performance with FRA's outside Wales. This comparative assessment should be on-going throughout the year within an FRA, but a summary needs to be published as part of its improvement report (see chapter 7).

5.4 Conducting comparisons of performance should provide the foundation of an FRA's assessment of its need to improve both the services it provides and the well-being of the communities and areas that it serves. Clearly the wider the range of evidence that an FRA can draw upon the better placed it is likely to be to plan and target its future improvement activity.

5.5 The evaluation of a broad range of data provides FRA's and their partners with the opportunity to assess both past performance and achievements, and also to identify short, medium and long term priorities where improvement is required. Data analysis can help shape the following year's improvement objectives (whilst assisting in the identification and monitoring of actions required in an FRA's Strategic Plan to meet National Framework priorities and the FRA's well-being objectives).

Statutory Performance Indicators

5.6 The Welsh Ministers may use their powers in the Measure to set national statutory PIs and standards which will allow FRA's to quantify and report their contribution to major all-Wales policy objectives. Welsh Ministers must consult with FRA's, the WAO and other relevant bodies before specifying such indicators.

5.7 National strategic indicators are set out in an Order made by the Welsh Ministers. At present, there are three such indicators:

- The number of fires per 10,000 population;
- The number of deaths and injuries from fire per 100,000 population; and
- The percentage of dwelling fires contained in the room of origin.

FRA's are under a legal duty to collect and report on these indicators. They should do so by including the data in their improvement reports (see chapter 7) and should also submit the data to the Welsh Government upon request. As with any performance information, statutory PIs could be subject to external audit if the Auditor General determines it necessary.

5.8 These PIs reflect the Welsh Government's priorities for the FRA's established by the National Framework and subsequent advice and guidance.

Sector Performance Indicators

5.9 The statutory set of PI's should be supported by a set of defined all-Wales sector PIs. The all-Wales sector PIs should be developed by FRAs in partnership with one another. This approach will facilitate consistency in the use of terminology and definitions, recording methods and calculations. The all-Wales sector PIs will:

- provide detailed and comparable information on the outcomes that have been achieved within the services that they cover, on service availability, on quality and on the use of resources to support them;
- support FRAs in explaining and accounting for their performance to stakeholders, and encourage their involvement in performance evaluation and priority-setting via the improvement objective consultation process;
- be designed to meet some of the data needs of regulators and inspectors as far as possible, minimising the need to duplicate data;
- measure performance against the priorities set out by the Welsh Ministers in the National Framework;
- support wider benchmarking with other FRAs outside Wales;
- be capable of disaggregation to reveal differential levels of provision for, and performance regarding different community groups (including groups of people with protected characteristics); and
- be comparable over time and across Wales, allowing FRAs readily to identify where they have room to improve and equally where they have scope to share effective practice.

5.10 Sector PIs data may be audited if this is deemed necessary by the Auditor General, for instance if there are concerns about the robustness of the data collection systems in a particular area. FRAs may request audit of particular PIs if they have concerns about the accuracy of the source data or as a result of particular interest.

Local indicators

5.11 The nationally prescribed performance measures aim to capture performance across all FRA areas. Such measures are not, however, fully comprehensive. They cannot, in particular, measure delivery of specific local policies, priorities or projects to which FRAs are committed nor can they measure progress towards objectives that do not lend themselves to quantifiable measurement. Without a means of measuring those too, performance measurement would be neither comprehensive nor balanced within each FRA.

5.12 FRAs should thus continue to develop and use their own local performance measures which reflect their individual circumstances and

aspirations, as well as supporting detailed management and operational decisions. Moreover, having decided on their improvement objectives, FRAs will need to be mindful of any additional data requirements which may arise and set local PIs for themselves accordingly. They should also use non-quantitative assessment tools as and when appropriate. In some cases such approaches may be relevant to and usable by other FRAs, and FRAs should therefore be willing to share their experiences of developing and using local PIs with their peers. However, section 9 of the Measure provides FRAs with the power to collaborate, and section 12 requires FRAs to consider whether such collaboration would assist in the discharge of their improvement duties. If so they must seek to exercise that power. Sharing experiences and indicator information is likely to fall within these provisions.

Other Improvement Information

5.13 FRAs will clearly require additional contextual data or community intelligence to help them decide on their improvement objectives and support their systems of governance and accountability. This additional improvement information is necessary for FRAs to take into account the external factors that may impact upon different places or communities and will assist them in identifying and understanding the needs and aspirations of all sections of the communities and other stakeholders they serve.

5.14 In particular, it is hard to demonstrate the impact of fire safety and fire prevention work through quantified performance data alone. This is because it is impossible to disentangle the efforts of FRAs in improving safety from wider trends and changes (such as a reduced incidence of smoking or greater use of fire-retardant furnishing materials) which also tend to reduce the incidence of fire. Equally, merely measuring the amount of fire safety work undertaken (such as the number of home fire safety checks) does not necessarily say anything about the outcomes of such work.

5.15 FRAs should therefore also use other, more qualitative sources of information to assess and demonstrate the effects of their preventative work. These might include surveys of fire awareness and perceptions of safety; dialogue with individuals and groups at high risk of fire; or case studies of particular interventions or programmes. When choosing, analysing and reporting such evidence FRAs should be honest and balanced. They should not rely only on more favourable comments, accounts or case studies.

Chapter 6 - Working together (Collaboration)

Collaboration for Improvement and FRAs' powers and duties

6.1 Earlier chapters of this guidance set out the basic principle that improvement should be externally-focused, concerned with delivering better outcomes for citizens and communities. It should not concentrate on strengthening an FRA's internal processes and service outputs so that they become ends in themselves.

6.2 Consequently, FRAs need to consider the delivery arrangements which might best realise those outcomes. They should not assume that traditional or long-established processes are always suitable. In many cases, outcomes may be better, more quickly or more efficiently attained by FRAs acting in collaboration with each other or with other organisations.

6.3 Collaboration is well-acknowledged as a means of driving many forms of improvement. Through working with other bodies, not just other FRAs, an FRA may:

- Improve strategic effectiveness by co-ordinating its operations with those of other bodies to deliver well-being outcomes that are not wholly within a single FRA's control. This is clearly a key priority in both the areas of prevention and response. FRAs will need to continue working with a wide range of public sector and third sector agencies to ensure a joined-up approach to identifying and supporting those most vulnerable in society. Similarly, developing strategic planning approaches with other emergency services should result in a more joined up, cohesive response to emergencies. There is a particular requirement here for FRAs to work more closely with the WAST to co-ordinate and align their strategic and service delivery mechanisms;
- Improve service quality, fairness and innovation by adopting best practice from elsewhere or by sharing scarce managerial, professional or technical expertise;
- Improve service availability by, for example, maintaining existing and developing new arrangements under local reinforcement schemes. On a larger scale improvement may be achieved through mutual aid arrangements, increasing the proportion of front-line staff and reducing the administrative overhead;
- Improve efficiency and sustainability by realising economies of scale and drawing on greater buying power. This could include work via the National Issues Committee or other opportunities to identify savings, efficiencies and economic benefits.

6.4 This may be particularly important in times when there is strain on public finances and FRAs may naturally seek to protect front-line services and maintain a strategic focus. If managed properly, collaboration can both make better use of scarce resources and allow a wide range of services to be

maintained.

6.5 Scope for improvement should accordingly be viewed in terms of what can be achieved through collaboration. It is not limited to what FRAs can provide or achieve by acting alone. Rather, if there is potential for FRAs to achieve improvement through collaboration, section 12 of the Measure requires those FRAs to seek to collaborate. An FRA which does not collaborate will risk failing fully to discharge its general duty to improve, even if it meets most of its improvement objectives and its own services are performing relatively well.

6.6 Putting effective collaboration arrangements in place takes time and resource and the potential benefits need clearly to justify that investment. It is equally important for arrangements to be absolutely clear about respective roles and responsibilities, the governance of the collaboration project and how participants will account internally and externally for their performance.

6.7 To remove the legal uncertainty that can delay or frustrate potential collaborative projects, section 9 of the Measure confers a general power on authorities to collaborate in order to secure continuous improvement; meet improvement objectives, and/or meet specified performance standards. Under this power, a FRA can:

- provide financial assistance;
- enter into arrangements or agreements;
- cooperate with or facilitate or co-ordinate the activities of another person¹;
- exercise functions on behalf of another person;
- provide staff, goods, services or accommodation.

6.8 FRAs are not restricted in terms of who they may collaborate with. Welsh FRAs may collaborate with each other or with other UK authorities or organisations (including third sector, charitable and private-sector organisations based in the UK and/or abroad) as long as there are no legal impediments for doing so.

6.9 Under section 12 of the Measure, FRAs must consider whether the exercise of the power to collaborate will assist them in meeting their duties under Part 1 of the Measure, and if so, they must seek to exercise this power.

6.10 The power to collaborate applies in addition to the power set out in the 2004 Act regarding reinforcement schemes (see section 13 of the 2004 Act). FRAs will of course also need to be cognisant of any priorities for collaboration identified in the National Framework.

¹ Note that “person” here means any entity with legal personality, including public bodies, companies and charities. It does not mean only an individual human being.

Consultation and Reporting

6.11 FRAs should consider from time to time whether the exercise of their power of collaborate would assist in the discharge of the general duty to improve. It is for each FRA to decide for itself when opportunities for collaboration are best considered but the following would seem opportune:

- when identifying where improvement is needed;
- when formulating or consulting upon improvement objectives;
- during the budget setting process;
- when considering service or staffing reconfiguration;
- when considering service delivery options;
- when responding to the outputs of or recommendations from any scrutiny activity;
- on receipt of reports from inspectors and regulators; and
- when invited to do so by other improvement authorities or by the Welsh Ministers.

6.12 FRAs should publish a summary account of their past, present and future collaborative activity which supports the delivery of their improvement objectives. This need not be detailed or extensive. FRAs may choose to use the publication of improvement information on or before 31 October each year as an opportunity to publish a summary of their collaborative activities.

Chapter 7 - Accounting for Improvement

7.1 One of the overarching principles of the Measure is that improvement must be grounded in the actual needs of an area and its citizens. This principle needs to be applied to accounting for improvement activity. The process of accounting for improvement required by section 15 of the Measure falls into two equally important stages relating to the cycle of planning and reporting.

Plans and intentions

7.2 The first stage of reporting should cover an FRA's plans for the following year. That principally means **publishing an improvement plan** detailing how it proposes to achieve its **Improvement Objectives**, as follows:

- A general statement outlining the FRA's intentions for discharging the general duty to improve and its improvement objectives for the year;
- An explanation of why its improvement objectives were chosen and the outcomes that communities should expect if they are achieved;
- A statement on the process followed for the consultation on improvement objectives and any issues that arose from the consultation;
- A description of how the FRA plans to achieve each of the improvement objectives that it has set for itself;
- The evidence (including but by no means limited to PIs and targets) that the FRA has set for itself in order to monitor its delivery of its improvement objectives (See Chapter 5); and
- Information on how communities or stakeholders may propose new improvement objectives during the year.

7.3 Section 15(7) of the Measure requires the improvement objectives to be published as soon as reasonably practical after the start of the financial year to which the objectives relate, or as soon as possible after a date which the Welsh Ministers specify by Order. The Fire and Rescue Authorities (Improvement Plans) (Wales) Order 2012 (No 1143 (W 137) specifies this date as 31 December in the year prior to which the improvement objectives apply. The policy intention is that FRAs will publish their improvement objectives between 1 January and 31 March each year.

Reporting Past Performance

7.4 The second stage of accounting for performance arises when an FRA is in a position to be able to account for the previous year's improvement activity (performance assessment). This would normally be after final outturn performance information becomes available in the second or third quarter of the reporting year. This includes, audited data drawn from statutory PIs, but should encompass all of the sources of improvement information covered in

Chapter 5. At this stage an FRA will be in a position to collate retrospective information relating to its performance during the previous year and to disseminate it to a wide range of internal and external audiences and stakeholders.

7.5 There is flexibility in how FRAs choose to report on their performance but for consistency in reporting and accountability it is recommended that all reports contain:

- Evidence of the processes that the FRA has gone through to discharge its general duty to improve as expressed in the previous year's improvement plan;
- A summary assessment of the FRA's view of its success in achieving its improvement objectives as set out in the previous year's improvement plan;
- A statement of performance as measured by all statutory PIs, whether or not these relate directly to improvement objectives;
- Details of other performance information and its use, including the results of peer review, any assessments made by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and other sources of qualitative information including benchmarking data;
- An assessment of performance by comparison with the FRA's performance in previous years and with other comparable bodies (including other FRAs) so far as this is reasonably practicable;
- Details of the ways in which the FRA has exercised its powers of collaboration during the reporting year including details of whether a collaborative activity has achieved its intended outcomes; and
- Any statements of activity that the FRA has issued as a result of any reports issued under Section 19 of the Measure by the Auditor General for Wales to that FRA in that reporting year.

Publication

7.6 The Measure requires past performance information to be published before 31 October in the financial year after the year to which the information relates.

7.7 Neither the Measure nor this Guidance requires authorities to publish information in a particular way or in a particular format. The duty is to publish all of the information set out in a manner which allows all of it readily to be obtained (which would normally include both hard copy and electronic publications). In making the information available FRAs should consider the various needs of different audiences e.g. Citizens, partner organisations, scrutiny committees etc.

7.8 FRAs should adhere to the terms of their approved Welsh language schemes in publishing improvement information. However, it is recommended that they should publish in both Welsh and English.

Wider public engagement

7.9 While the full range of detailed information will be of close interest to FRAs and their partners, it is unlikely to attract a wide readership within the communities that a particular FRA serves. It is therefore recommended that FRAs should publish a summary version of both their improvement plan and performance information in order to support wider engagement with communities.

7.10 The content of any summary is for each FRA to decide, but it should be fair and balanced, and should provide:

- an overview of the FRA's priorities and improvement objectives;
- a summary of how far the improvement objectives have been met in the past year and an assessment of whether they have improved outcomes for citizens;
- a summary of improvement objectives planned or undertaken to date in the current year;
- a summary of improvement objectives planned for the following year;
- details of how to obtain further information (for instance, copies of the full plan), how to provide any comments on the FRA's performance, and how to influence the planning and delivery of an FRA's services more generally.

7.11 Any summary should be published in hard copy and on the Internet, in Welsh and in English, subject to the terms of each FRA's Welsh language scheme. FRAs may also consider making the summary available in other languages, which are commonly spoken in their areas, and in formats such as Braille, large print and audio tape, which are accessible to those with sensory disabilities. FRAs are reminded of their duties under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

7.12 FRAs should ensure that the citizens and communities they serve are aware of the existence of the plan and summary, and have ample opportunity to obtain copies. FRAs should also actively seek feedback and comments on the proposals the plan and summary contain. Steps that an FRA might consider include publicising them in a newsletter, placing copies in local libraries, making copies available at fire stations where the public have access, and sending copies to partner organisations and community groups.

Flexibility

7.13 FRAs may:

- publish improvement plans which cover a period longer than one year, provided that the plans are updated annually;
- use any title or brand, provided that the text makes clear that it discharges the relevant statutory duty; and
- include a public summary in any other publication, such as an FRA-issued newsletter.

Chapter 8 - Audit, Regulation and Inspection

8.1 This chapter provides a general description of the work of the WAO and relevant regulators in relation to the Wales Programme for Improvement (the Programme). As Welsh Ministers do not have powers to issue guidance to FRAs on the Programme under the Measure, this chapter has no statutory force. We have included it simply to describe the work of the WAO and relevant regulators in a wider context. It is based on their working practices and uses terms (for instance, titles of assessments) that are not used in the Measure but which the WAO and others use when they carry out their inspections. We have though, identified the provisions of the Measure to which they relate.

8.2 The WAO comprises of the Auditor General and his or her staff. The legal functions underlying the work of the WAO are strictly functions of the Auditor General, but we refer here to the WAO unless the context requires otherwise. For FRAs the term “relevant regulators” is set out in section 16(2) of the Measure and, for the purposes of this guidance, means the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and the Welsh Language Commissioner. There are other “relevant regulators” in the context of Local Government, responsible for inspecting education and social services provision, but they have no routine role as regards FRAs. The term “relevant regulators” is used here only in relation to their “relevant functions”, which are set out in section 16 of the Measure.

8.3 The WAO and relevant regulators work to benefit members of the public as they report on services to provide assurance and to enhance accountability, promote improvement and inform government policy to help develop better services. Their work also helps to ensure the transparency that leads to better decisions and better outcomes.

8.4 The primary responsibility for services rests with those who provide them working within policies and performance frameworks set by the Welsh Government. Consequently, while providing independent assurance and support for improvement, the Programme takes account of the fact that service providers are primarily responsible for the assessment of service delivery. In undertaking their work the WAO and other relevant regulators will, without prejudicing their statutory functions, be guided by the principles set out in the Welsh Government’s Inspection, Audit and Regulation in Wales Policy Statement².

Outline of the work of the WAO and relevant regulators

8.5 The main piece of work for the WAO under the Programme is an annual **Improvement Assessment** (conducted under section 18 of the Measure) to determine whether each FRA is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the Measure. The WAO will also undertake an **improvement information and planning audit**, as required under section 17 of the

² Policy Statement on Inspection, Audit and Regulation in Wales – launched 30 September 2009.

Measure, in order to ascertain whether the FRA has discharged its duties under section 15(1) to (7).

8.6 In order to fulfil these requirements the WAO will undertake the following:

- Corporate Assessment – a forward-looking assessment of the likelihood that an FRA will comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- Performance Assessment – a retrospective assessment of whether an FRA has achieved its planned improvements, in order to inform a view as to the FRA's track record of improvement.

8.7 The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out **Special Inspections** (under section 21). Following a Special Inspection the Auditor General will provide a report to the relevant FRA and to the Welsh Ministers. The report may also be published (under section 22).

8.8 An important ancillary activity for the WAO is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators in relation to an improvement authority.

8.9 This includes the work of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser as an Inspector under section 28 of the 2004 Act. In practice, this includes particular responsibility for evaluating how far FRAs have complied with the National Framework, and are likely to continue to do so. This work and that of the WAO complement each other significantly and need to be co-ordinated accordingly. A Memorandum of Understanding has been established between the WAO and Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser setting out a framework for collaborative working which is aimed at optimising skills and experience involved in audit and inspection, avoiding duplication of effort and minimising the burden of scrutiny and assessment.

8.10 This work is described in more detail below. In addition, the Auditor General must prepare a statement of practice (this chapter does not replace or form part of that statement) describing the way in which the Auditor General intends to exercise key functions in relation to the Measure. The underlying principles are that:

- the functions of the Auditor General are to be exercised consistently between authorities;
- appointed auditors should discharge their functions independently;
- functions are exercised proportionately and do not impose an unreasonable burden upon Welsh improvement authorities;

- functions are exercised with a view to helping improvement authorities comply with Part 1 of the Measure.

8.11 The Auditor General's statement sets out how, in accordance with these principles, the WAO will work with the relevant regulators to ensure effective activity planning, collaboration and proportionate and consistent exercise of functions.

8.12 It should be remembered that the Auditor General and relevant regulators also have functions under other legislation that lie outside the Measure. In particular, the Auditor General has duties and powers under the Public Audit (Wales) Acts 2004 and 2013 to undertake studies of authorities, such as studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services. Similarly, the auditors appointed by the Auditor General have duties to audit the accounts of FRAs. While these functions are independent of the Measure, the WAO has a responsibility under the Measure to work with the relevant regulators, to co-ordinate such activity and use it to inform work under the Measure.

Improvement Assessment

8.13 The Improvement Assessment (section 18) will include a forward-looking Corporate Assessment and a retrospective Performance Assessment in order to inform a view of the FRA's track record of improvement. Both assessments will be informed by the improvement information and planning audit (section 17). While sections 17 and 18 each amount to distinct legal functions and are described here as distinct elements, they are linked and will be used together to inform the WAO's assessment of each FRA.

8.14 The WAO works throughout the year to inform both the corporate and performance assessments and reports its findings to the FRA. It will undertake service-wide reviews of relevant governance and management arrangements, supplemented where necessary by reviews of specific functions and activities. Where appropriate, the assessment will involve gathering and reviewing information from members of the public and other stakeholders, as well as information from within the FRA. It will also be informed by the work shared by relevant regulators; including audit work undertaken in relation to the FRA's accounts. The Measure provides a specific information sharing mechanism (section 33) for this purpose and therefore all relevant regulators are required to contribute to the Auditor General's Improvement Assessment and Annual Improvement Report.

Forward Looking Corporate Assessment

8.15 For each financial year, the WAO will assess each FRA in terms of whether it is likely to comply with the requirements of the Measure. The WAO will consider, among other things, the FRA's published improvement plan (section 15(6)) which will contain its improvement objectives and plans for meeting them as well as the general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The WAO will consider the FRA's track record of

improvement and whether its governance and management arrangements effectively support improvement. The WAO will draw upon the work of other relevant regulators in making its assessment.

8.16 The first part of the improvement information and planning audit (section 17) will be a WAO audit of how the FRA has discharged its duties under section 15(6) and (7) which requires it to publish an improvement plan. This audit will inform the corporate assessment.

8.17 For each financial year, the Auditor General will issue a Corporate Assessment Report (section 19) to each FRA. The Auditor General's Report is likely to be issued in April of each year. The Report will state whether the FRA is likely to comply with the statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during the current financial year and may also comment on whether the FRA is likely to comply with its statutory duties in subsequent years.

Retrospective Performance Assessment

8.18 For each financial year the WAO will undertake a Performance Assessment with the main purpose of tracing improvement over time. As part of its improvement information and planning audit the WAO will consider, among other things, the FRA's own published assessment of performance (section 15(2)), together with findings from any work undertaken by the WAO and other relevant regulators to assess service performance. As with the forward looking Corporate Assessment, this work will, where appropriate, involve gathering and reviewing information from members of the public and other stakeholders. Again, the WAO's work will be informed by the work shared by relevant regulators (under section 33 of the Measure), including audit work done in relation to the FRA's accounts.

8.19 The second part of the improvement information and planning audit (section 17) will be an assessment of how the FRA has discharged its duties to undertake an assessment of its performance under section 15 (1) to (5). This will inform the WAO performance assessment which will include a review of:

- the overall level of improvement attained;
- any progress made towards meeting improvement objectives;
- the inclusion of PIs (local and national);
- achievement of both the Welsh Government's specified and the FRA's self imposed performance standards;
- performance over time and against other FRAs (and local government where appropriate in respect of corporate activity);
- collaborative activity; and

- arrangements for data collection and use together with the overall adequacy of performance information.

8.20 The performance assessment will be reported in the Auditor General's Annual Improvement Report (see paragraph 8.24).

Special Inspections

8.21 If the Auditor General is of the opinion that an FRA is unlikely to comply with the requirements of the Measure, or if a relevant regulator informs the Auditor General of such an opinion, the Auditor General may carry out a Special Inspection of the FRA. Such inspections may relate to some or all of an FRA's functions. Before deciding whether to conduct a Special Inspection, the Auditor General must consult the Welsh Ministers. Where the Auditor General has stated in an assessment report that an inspection is likely any response made by the FRA in question must be considered.

8.22 Where the Auditor General undertakes a Special Inspection, a report must be issued to the FRA and the Welsh Ministers. This will set out any matters in respect of which the FRA is failing or may fail to comply with the Measure. The Auditor General may also recommend that the Welsh Ministers should provide assistance to the FRA or issue it with directions.

8.23 Relevant regulators may also, outside the Special Inspection function, take their own action, co-ordinated with the WAO and other relevant regulators as appropriate.

Published Annual Improvement Reports

8.24 By the 31 January each year, the Auditor General will publish an Annual Improvement Report in respect of each FRA. The Annual Improvement Report will:

- summarise the Corporate Assessment report (including commentary on the latest improvement objectives that have been set);
- report on the WAO performance assessment work;
- report on the audit of improvement information and planning;
- summarise or reproduce any Special Inspection reports that may have been undertaken;
- summarise or reproduce any reports undertaken by relevant regulators.

8.25 The WAO will make arrangements locally with FRAs to provide opportunities for communication and discussion about assessment findings and the content of reports as part of the clearance process.

8.26 Annual Improvement Reports will be available on the internet and should be written in such a way as to make them accessible and meaningful to members of the public.

Co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work

8.27 The Auditor General is required to produce a timetable for each FRA setting out the dates and times during which the WAO and the relevant regulators should undertake their work in relation to the FRA. The Auditor General will consult the relevant regulators before setting the timetable. In producing the timetable, the Auditor General will follow the principles of the Statement of Practice. For example, the Auditor General will work with the relevant regulators to ensure that relevant functions are co-ordinated so that they are, taken together, exercised proportionately. Some of the regulation and inspection activity will flow directly from the WAOs improvement assessment and audits. Equally some of the activity will flow from the regulatory and inspection activity of other relevant regulators.

8.28 The regulatory timetable will take all regulatory and inspection activity into account, and attempt to establish a programme of activity that meets the needs of the FRA, the WAO and other relevant regulators to provide public assurance and to drive forward service improvements. The intention is to devise a coherent and efficient programme of activity that fulfils the requirements of the WAO's and relevant regulators' functions. Once set, the WAO and the relevant regulators must take all reasonable steps to adhere to the timetable. Clearly it is in FRAs' interests that the WAO and relevant regulators are able to adhere to this timetable. It is therefore important that FRAs provide any requested support to the process.

Glossary of Terms

2004 Act	- Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
2015 Act	- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
FRAs	- Fire and Rescue Authorities
National Framework	- Fire and Rescue National Framework (Wales) current and future versions http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/fire/strategy/?lang=en
PI	- Performance Indicator
Reporting year	- a period beginning on 1 April and ending on the following 31 March
The Measure	- Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009
The Programme	- Wales Programme for Improvement
WAO	- Wales Audit Office