

REPORT TO THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW & AUDIT COMMITTEE:DATE: 30TH November 2009

REFERENCE:

SUBJECT: Wales Audit Office Review of Information Security**SUMMARY**

The Service's core business processes are considerably dependent on the reliable operation of its computer and data systems. Whilst the increasing trend of interconnecting private and public networks (Internet) and the growing need to electronically share data all improve business efficiency, they also increase exposure to information security threats. There is a growing awareness in the public sector of the need to safeguard both electronic and physical data assets as is exemplified in the recently published Local Government Association advice on data handling. Furthermore, the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) that the fire service is obliged to adopt, also demands strict adherence to information security best practices.

OBJECTIVES		IMPLICATIONS	
More than an Emergency Service		Operational Risk Management	
Trusted & Respected by our customers	X	Community Risk Reduction	
Saving Lives, Protecting Communities	X	Service Control	
Managing within Budget		Civil Contingencies & Resilience	
Allocate Resources to Priorities		Finance & Procurement	X
Efficiency savings		People and Organisational Development	X
Alternative funding & resources		ICT	X
Managing People		CCMS	
Risk Reduction Planning		Transport	
Partnership Working	X	Corporate Risk	
Effective & Empowered People	X	Estates	
		Sustainability & Environment	
		Welsh Language	
		Legal	X
		Governance	X
		Equality & Diversity	
		Representative Body Consultation	

COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS ON THE ABOVE OBJECTIVES/IMPLICATIONS:**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Given that it has been sometime since an external review of its information security policies and practices was last undertaken and recognising the regulatory implications of this subject, the Service has recently commissioned the Wales Audit Office to assess current information safeguards and recommend any improvements they think necessary. Members of PRAC are asked to note this action.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT:

Local Government Data Handling Guidelines - Local Government Association (ISBN:978-1-84049-650-5)

Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information – Welsh Assembly Government

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Wales Audit Office Review of Information Security

Information is an asset and like any other asset has value. Consequently, it is important that at all levels throughout the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service recognition is given to the need to safeguard information.

Effective processes for addressing information security serve to protect the organisation from a wide range of threats and will help secure the continuity of its operational and administrative activities.

Quite recently there have been a number of high profile cases where personal and other sensitive data has been lost by public and private sector organisations. Types of data lost have included bank account details, credit card numbers, child benefit data, medical records and sensitive military information. If such data falls into the wrong hands there is huge potential for misuse including fraud, identity theft and other malicious acts.

Should the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service lose sensitive or personal data, it could result in legal action against the organisation or even individual members of staff. Notwithstanding the negative effect on the reputation of the Service, there is also the potential to impair operational activities should data be lost or the systems it resides upon be damaged.

The Local Government Association has published guidelines on the effective management of information within councils and other public bodies. (To some extent this was instigated by the high profile data losses.) Their guidance document is structured around the four recognised elements of data security namely People, Places (systems), Processes and Procedures. It also cross references related regulations such as The Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and Code of Connections for Government infrastructure. In Wales information security best practice is also being promoted by the Welsh Assembly within its preferred mechanism for sharing personal information between public bodies namely the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI). The three fire services in Wales are obliged to adopt WASPI under the guidance given in the current Wales Fire Service Framework.

The Chief Fire Officer recognises the importance of adopting information security best practice and complying with any related legislation. Consequently, he has recently sanctioned a review of prevailing information safeguards within the Service and this will be undertaken by the Wales Audit Office as one of a small number of specialist audits to be completed during this financial year.

There will be four stages to the information security audit namely:

- Gap Analysis – by the use of a questionnaire establish the general level of information security awareness throughout individual departments within the Service (to be completed in January 2010)
- Policy Review – assess existing information security and data protection policies or guidance against current recognised standards
- Report & Action List – produce an audit report and associated action list of any measures needed to improve information security practices to an appropriate level
- Follow-up – by mutual agreement review progress on action list items at a future date

During the audit particular consideration will be given to the HR, Finance and ICT functions as these are most exposed to data security threats. However, the Gap Analysis questionnaire will be circulated throughout all departments in the Service.

It is envisaged that a draft report and recommendations will be available for review at the March 2010 ICT Steering Group meeting and also made available to Members of the PRAC Committee and wider Fire Authority around that time.