

## Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007/08 – Overview and Outcomes

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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#### 1 Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with a summary overview of the Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007/08 (introduced by the Audit Commission in 2006), together with the recently published performance results in respect of this and other English Fire and Rescue Authorities.

#### 2 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of this report.

#### 3 Background

To assess performance of fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) the Audit Commission introduced in 2006 the Fire and Rescue Performance Framework.

The Commission states that the Framework used has been proportionate and focused on improvements made against the fire and rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) and measured the Service as experienced by the community.

The approach to measuring improvement and performance in FRAs has been through a performance framework with three elements:

- A **use of resources assessment**. This has assessed the FRA across a broad range of financial issues and provides a scored assessment, including whether the FRA is providing value for money.
- An assessment of improvement, or deterioration, in performance measured through a **scored direction of travel assessment**. The assessment has been outcome focused and draws together all assessments on the FRA.
- A **scored service assessment**, which has had an emphasis on service delivery and includes an operational assessment of the quality of service delivery.

The performance framework is a complex process, comprising of several objective and subjective elements. Full details can be accessed via the Audit Commission's website:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/fire/fireperformance.asp>

#### 4 Performance Assessment Framework - Outcomes

The results of the Commission's Performance Assessment Framework for all 46 FRAs were formally published on 12 February 2009. A full copy of the results, including scores and analysis is appended. The results may also be accessed via the Audit Commission's website:

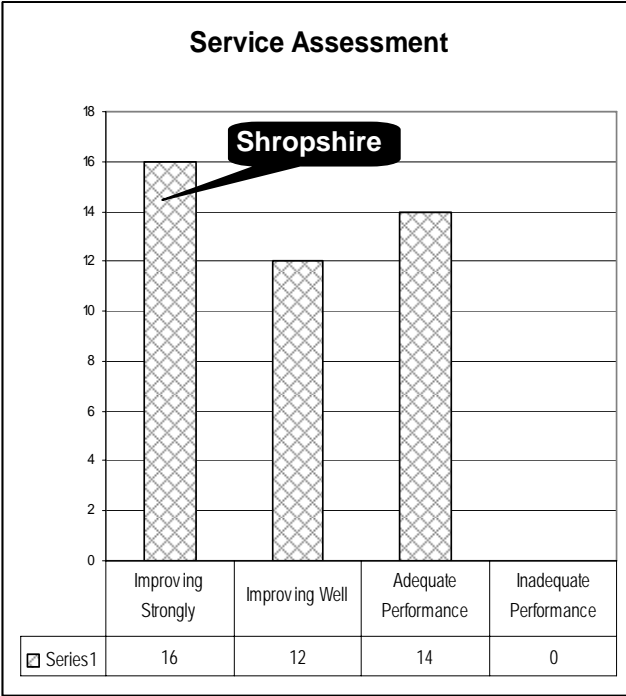
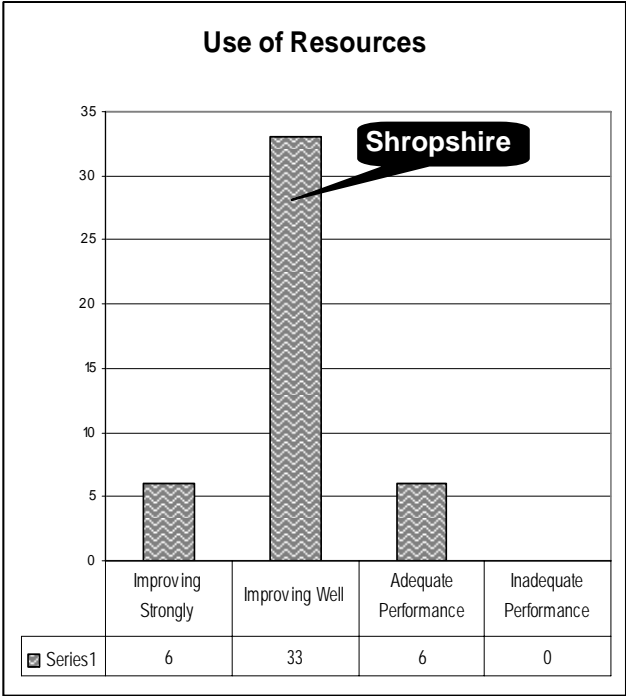
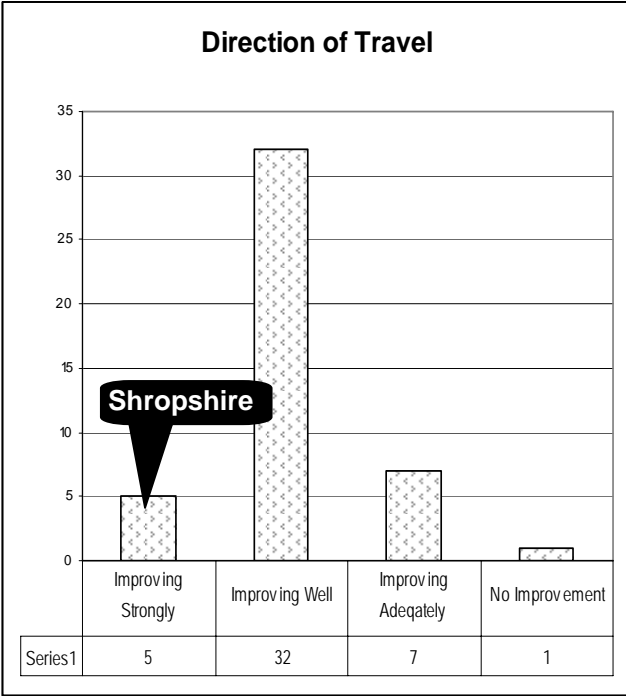
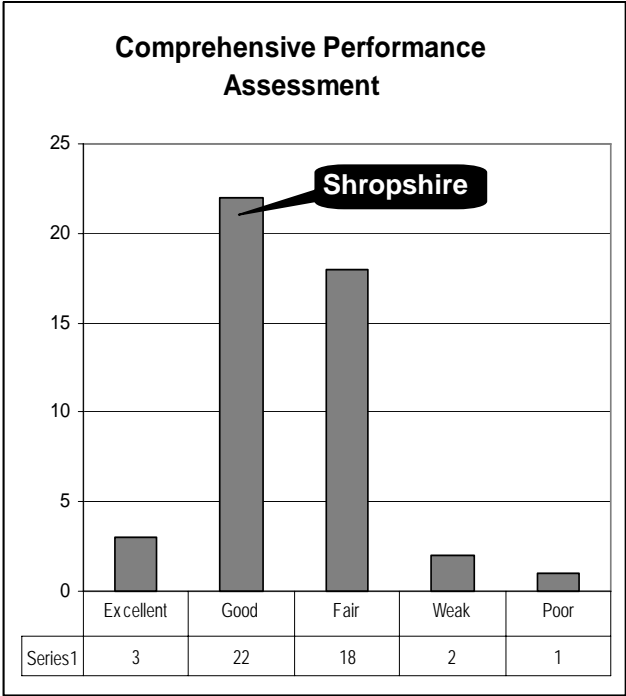
<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=&ProdID=7639EA8B-CFC9-4B71-9077-8CE8E189BBF9&fromREPORTSANDDATA=NATIONAL-REPORT>

#### 5 Scored Judgements

The judgements contained within the national report (as appended) provide a statement of performance in four areas (see Figure 1 below).

It has not been possible to determine an accurate overall league position, as the performance assessment framework comprises of four independent areas of audit (each with its own separate scoring metrics) that cannot be combined to present an overall score.

The relative scored position of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority across the four performance areas is illustrated within the four graphs shown in Figure 1. Each graph depicts (in the tables below the bar charts) the number of FRAs achieving the shown scored judgement for each area.



**Figure 1 Summary of FRS Performance Framework Assessment Scores 2007/08**

The following noteworthy summary comments of the Commission's judgements are provided:

- a. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was undertaken by the Commission in 2005. During 2008, the Commission gave fire and rescue services the opportunity to apply for a revision of their 2005 CPA category through a new corporate assessment. Eight services undertook a re-assessment and, as a result, seven have been upgraded and one downgraded.

This Fire Authority considered the merits of a re-assessment but concluded that, as CPA will be replaced during 2009 with Comprehensive Area Assessments, the benefits to be attained from an upgraded score ('good' to 'excellent') did not justify the resource commitment necessary to prepare for the re-assessment.

- b. The direction of travel assessment measures improvement or deterioration in service delivery. Five fire and rescue services (11 per cent) were found by the Commission to be – improving strongly (two of these - Kent and Shropshire – achieved this rating for the second year running).
- c. The use of resources assessment considers how well the fire service manages its resources. Six fire and rescue services (13 per cent) achieved the highest rating (performing strongly). Shropshire, for the third consecutive year scored – performing well.
- d. The fire service assessment comprises two elements: the operational assessment of service delivery, carried out in 2006, and an analysis of performance information for 2007/08. The service assessments in 2007/08 show sixteen (38 per cent) fire and rescue services achieving the top score – performing strongly (which includes Shropshire for the third consecutive year).
- e. When analysed in a regional context, Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester FRAs achieved equal best scores in the West Midlands region.

These results present a very positive picture of this Fire Authority's performance. The Commission makes reference to the Service's achievements on several occasions within the report and, in particular, praises the community leadership role, undertaken by this Fire Authority's Members:

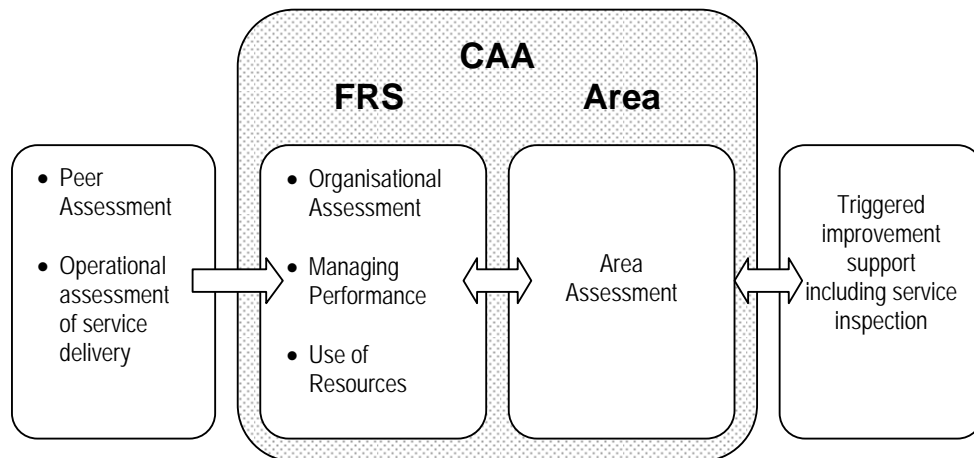
“...Some fire authority members have also developed stronger community leadership roles. Members of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Authority are key contacts in the community and strong ambassadors for the fire service.”

(Paragraph 68, page 24)

## 6 Further Assessments - 2009 and Beyond

From April 2009, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will replace the current Performance Assessment Framework (as discussed above) and will act as the independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services.

All audit and inspection activity for fire and rescue services will be undertaken within the CAA framework. Figure 2 below sets out the proposed framework for the assessment of fire and rescue services.



**Figure 2 CAA Framework**

Further details regarding CAA and its implications for the Fire Authority will be reported to Members at the April 2009 meeting of the Authority.

## 7 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## 8 Legal Comment

The Audit Commission Act 1998 places statutory responsibilities upon the Audit Commission to undertake assessments of local government bodies.

Local government bodies, including FRAs, are required through the Local Government Act 1999 to participate in the assessments undertaken by the Audit Commission.

## 9 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

## 10 Appendix

Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment: Scores and analysis of fire and rescue authorities' performance 2008

## 11 Background Papers

### Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

25 April 2007, Report 14 - Fire and Rescue Service Performance Framework 2006/07 – Overview

18 October 2006, Report 18 – Fire and Rescue Service Performance Framework 2006/06 – Overview

### Audit and Performance Management Committee

29 March 2007, Report 7 - Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 – Overview and Outcomes

7 September 2009, Report 7 - Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 - Service Assessment

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk); the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card	*	Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment	*	Operational Assurance	*
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

# Fire and performance assessment

Scores and analysis of fire and rescue authorities' performance 2008

Appendix to report on  
Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007/08 -  
Overview and Outcomes  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority  
Strategy and Resources Committee  
5 March 2009



Community safety

National report

February 2009

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**We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to follow up any of the case studies, please do get in touch: please email [nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk)**



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# Summary

- 1** Fire services are improving the safety of local communities.<sup>1</sup> Since our last assessment, most have delivered better outcomes in preventing fires and protecting the most vulnerable people in their areas.
- 2** National research (Ref. 1) shows that people on low incomes and living alone are more likely to experience a fire in their home and to suffer death or injuries as a result. Our assessments in 2008 showed that all fire services routinely analyse the make up of their communities and identify those at highest risk of fires and other emergencies. The top performers exchange information with partners to form a shared picture of local need and risks and work with others to better meet the needs and reduce the risks.
- 3** In 2008, 13 services (29 per cent) improved their direction of travel category with the result that 32 (71 per cent) were assessed as improving well. However, the number of services assessed as improving strongly stayed the same at five (11 per cent). The rate of improvement has slowed in six services (13 per cent) and for the first time one service, Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, was assessed as not improving adequately.
- 4** All fire services have the potential to improve further. The rate of improvement in county council fire services is slower than that of others. In 2008 no county council fire service was assessed as improving strongly. Of the 14 county council fire services receiving an assessment in 2008, two were assessed as improving adequately and one not improving adequately.
- 5** In 2008 fire service use of resources assessments showed little change with 40 services (89 per cent) achieving the same score as in 2007. Thirty-three services (73 per cent) were performing well in their use of resources. In 2008 six services (13 per cent) were performing strongly. Greater Manchester, Kent and Merseyside fire services have now achieved this level for three years. Financial management is sound in all services. Spending is within available resources and services generally manage financial risks well. Financial

<sup>1</sup> References in this report to 'fire services' mean fire and rescue services in England and their responsible fire and rescue authority or the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

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reporting gives managers and authority members a clear picture of costs and performance helping them to make sound investment decisions. Most services need to do more to report costs and spending to the public in easy to understand and accessible ways.

- 6** An important feature of the use of resources assessment is the value for money judgement. In 2008 for the first time, two fire services achieved the top score for value for money. They demonstrate high levels of performance, together with the delivery of sustainable efficiency savings. However, releasing capacity through changes in traditional working practices is still an issue in most services. The Audit Commission study *Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency* (Ref. 2) found there is significant scope to improve economy and efficiency in the fire service without increasing risk to public or firefighter safety. The study identified potential for savings of up to £200 million. Although national efficiency savings targets have been exceeded, just four fire services (9 per cent) have contributed nearly half of all the savings achieved to date. Until fire services analyse all of their business for potential savings and fully consider new approaches, they are unlikely to deliver significant and sustained improvements in value for money.
- 7** Fire services have improved their engagement with people most at risk from fire to help prevent fires happening in the first place, and to better protect people from the impact of fires when they do occur. During 2008, most fire services substantially increased the numbers of home fire safety checks (HFSCs), which include the installation of smoke alarms in high-risk communities. In Hampshire, 90 per cent of residents have a smoke alarm. Targeting prevention in this way is resulting in fewer fires in the home, with fewer injuries and less damage when they do occur.

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# Summary

- 8** Fire services are becoming more effective at working with local businesses to give fire safety advice and to reduce false alarms from automatic fire detection equipment. They are also working with young people to reduce hoax calls. Nationally, attendance at hoax calls fell by 12 per cent in 2007 (Ref. 3). Our assessments in 2008 recognised good practice in reducing unnecessary attendance at hoax calls. This has been achieved by improving the quality of information from callers through effective call handling practices. Reducing unnecessary attendances saves money and increases the availability of fire crews to attend real emergencies.
- 9** Two-thirds of all fire stations are staffed by firefighters working the retained duty system (RDS). They carry a pager and respond to calls from work or home, day and night. Maintaining capacity and the competence of staff working the RDS is an increasing challenge for fire services especially those working in rural areas that rely heavily on this duty system. Recruitment of RDS staff is becoming more difficult and more left the service in 2008.
- 10** Fire services have extended their role and influence in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and have been actively involved in the development of local area agreements (LAAs). As a result, fire services are attracting support from partners for the delivery of fire service priorities. Fire services are also contributing to the delivery of shared priorities in community safety and improving local neighbourhoods. Fire services are getting better at managing their involvement in partnership working including assessing the costs and benefits.
- 11** The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework sets out the government's priorities and objectives for the fire service. During 2008, the 2006-08 National Framework (Ref. 4) came to an end and a new one, covering 2008-11 (Ref. 5) was introduced. This report examines performance against the 2006-8 framework (Ref. 4). Most fire services are planning well for the delivery of the new framework.
- 12** All fire services are performing well against the national public service agreement (PSA) target for arson. This requires fire services to reduce the number of deliberate fires by 10 per cent by 2010, against the baseline set in

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2005. The fire service is also on course to meet the PSA target for reducing deaths from accidental fires in the home by 20 per cent by 2010.

- 13** Fire services need to be representative of the diverse communities that they serve. Only then can they fully understand and identify local needs and risks in neighbourhoods. All fire services express a strong commitment to improving the diversity of their workforce. Efforts are beginning to pay off in a few services, but most still have a long way to go. Better approaches to recruitment are increasing the number of applications from women and ethnic minority groups in some areas, but these new applicants are often not successful, so the services are seeing little impact on overall diversity in their workforce.
- 14** Retention levels for women and minority ethnic staff are still low in many fire services and these staff are less likely to be promoted than their white, male colleagues. Although fire services are providing better training in equalities and diversity for staff, anti-bullying and harassment policies need to be enforced. In better performing services managers and fire authority members set good examples through their own behaviour, giving clear messages on unacceptable behaviour.
- 15** Only a few fire services have a good picture of the impact that their work has on the environment and have set challenging targets to save energy, increase recycling and use sustainable procurement. However, most services are starting to consider environmental impact in their integrated risk management plans.
- 16** Business processes, including strategic planning and performance management, continue to improve. Performance monitoring is in place in all fire services. Around three-quarters of fire services have good systems for using performance information to drive improvements. Evaluation of community safety work is improving, with some good examples in 2008, especially in work with young people. However, all services can do more to make sure that they are targeting the right people and achieving the maximum impact from their investment.

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# Summary

- 17** Good absence management is reducing sickness levels in most fire services, although around a third found it difficult to sustain their previous good performance. The numbers of ill health retirements are falling in all services.
- 18** From April 2009, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will be the independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services. All assessment and inspection activity for fire services will be undertaken within the CAA framework. We will assess the effectiveness of each fire service through an organisational assessment, which will reflect how well they are delivering against the priorities and objectives in the *National Framework* (Ref. 5). Through a joint area assessment, we will also assess the impact and effectiveness of the services' contribution to broader partnership outcomes in the LAAs.
- 19** The fire service needs to develop more efficient working practices, focusing its work on those who need it most and in a way that represents value for money for the public.

# 1 | Background

## The fire service

- 20** There are 46 fire services in England. County councils provide 15 fire services and the rest are separate statutory bodies known as combined or metropolitan fire services. London is the only regional fire service. Each service is accountable to a fire authority of locally elected councillors. The government's priorities for the service are set out in the *Fire and Rescue National Frameworks* (Ref. 4) (Ref. 5). Collectively, fire services spent around £2.1 billion of public money in 2007/08. Their income comes from a mix of council tax and grants from government.
- 21** In 2007/08, the fire service in England employed 42,324 firefighters, 1,522 fire control staff and 7,800 non-uniformed support staff (Ref. 6). In 2008, sickness absence levels reduced by 8 per cent for control staff and 7 per cent for whole-time firefighters. The numbers of ill health retirements continue to fall. Firefighters suffered fewer injuries in 2008, a fall of six per cent on 2007. However, tragically, five firefighters died attending fires during 2007/08: four at an incident in Warwickshire and one at an incident in Hertfordshire.
- 22** Fire services attended a total of 296,000 fires in England in 2007, which is 13 per cent fewer than in 2006. This includes 118,000 primary fires;<sup>i</sup> a fall of 10 per cent on 2006, and 172,000 secondary fires;<sup>ii</sup> a fall of 15 per cent on 2006. Deliberate fires also fell by 14 per cent in 2007 compared to the previous year
- 23** Of the 296,000 fires the service attended in 2007, 35,000 were accidental fires in the home. This is 6 per cent fewer than in 2006, continuing the year-on-year decline since 2000. Provisional figures for 2007 show a reduction of 11 per cent in all deaths from fire.<sup>iii</sup> This is the lowest figure since 1958, with a 16 per cent reduction in deaths from fires in the home (Ref. 3). A reduction of 5 per cent in injuries from fires continues the long-term downward trend and, at 10,400, is the lowest figure recorded since 1994.
- 24** Attendance at false alarms is falling. Hoax calls are down by 12 per cent and false alarms activated automatically are down by 5 per cent. However, automatic false alarms still account for over two-thirds of all false alarms and two-fifths of call-outs.

**i** Primary fires include all fires in buildings, vehicles, outdoor structures and any fire involving a casualty.

**ii** Secondary fires are outdoor fires, including grassland, refuse fires and fires in derelict buildings.

**iii** A person whose death is attributed to a fire is counted as a fatality even if the death occurred weeks or months later. It sometimes later transpires that fire was not the cause of death. The figures for fatalities are therefore subject to revision, when information supplied by the fire and rescue service is later cross-checked against the cause of death that appears on the death certificate. The main area of uncertainty is whether fire was the cause of death in road accident fatalities.

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# Background

**25** The fire service responds to a wide range of other incidents. These include road traffic incidents; chemical, biological and radioactive exposures and spills; severe weather conditions, such as flooding and high winds; and collapsed buildings. In 2007, the service attended 164,000 such incidents. Of these 38,867 were road traffic incidents, down slightly from 40,707 in 2006. The rest included 9,188 leaks and spills; 24,473 incidents of releasing people from lifts and a variety of incidents such as animal rescue and helping people who had locked themselves out of their homes. The fire service attended 10,193 flooding incidents in 2007, which included some major incidents that required fire service attendance over a sustained period of time such as in Gloucestershire and Humberside.

## Community

**26** Fires can result in significant business losses. Even a relatively minor fire at crucial stages of production can mean large losses for individual firms. Business interruption or even closure can have a significant effect on local communities through loss of jobs and amenities. There has been a significant increase in the insured commercial loss from fire from £521 million in 2000 to £753 million in 2007 (Ref. 7). Fire services play a key role in limiting the impact of fire on the economy by providing fire safety advice to the business community and enforcing fire safety legislation.

**27** Fire services work with partners to reduce the risk of fire and improve community safety. They are partner authorities in LAAs and crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs).

**28** People on the lowest incomes and living alone are more likely to experience a fire and to die or suffer injuries as a result. Factors such as smoking, poor health, disability and poor housing raise the risk. The government estimates that 30 per cent of those that die in fires are people with limited mobility (Ref. 1).

**29** The fire service has increased its focus on prevention, identifying those people and communities at highest risk from fire. This is contributing to reductions in fires.

**30** Fire prevention work also contributes to reduced carbon emissions. The total carbon footprint of a fire includes the carbon released during the fire and the carbon dioxide released in reconstruction of the building and recycling of materials damaged in the fire. *The National Framework* (Ref. 4) requires fire services to safeguard the environment in delivering their services. This includes preventing pollution at emergency incidents, protecting drinking water supplies and minimising clean-up costs. In 2008 we increased the emphasis on sustainability in our direction of travel assessments.



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**31** Fire services need to be representative of the diverse communities they serve. Only then can they fully understand and identify local needs and risks in neighbourhoods. In 2008 the government launched the national Equality and Diversity Strategy for fire services (Ref. 8). This requires services to build a closer and more effective relationship with the public and create a more diverse workforce which reflects the diversity of the local working population.

**32** Recruitment and retention of RDS staff is an increasing challenge especially for rural services. Traditional recruitment of people who live and work in local villages and towns has become more difficult. More people commute greater distances to work and so cannot respond quickly enough to local emergencies. In 2008, 116 (11 per cent) more RDS fire fighters left the service than in 2006/07.

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### **Comprehensive Performance Assessment of fire and rescue authorities**

**33** Fire Comprehensive Performance Assessment (fire CPA), undertaken by the Commission in 2005, assessed how well fire services were delivering services to local people and communities. During 2008/09, the Commission gave fire services the opportunity to apply for a revision of their 2005 CPA category through a new corporate assessment. This depended on fire services showing significant and sustained improvement in outcomes for local people and

good progress against the *National Framework* (Ref. 4). The Commission also carried out a new corporate assessment of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service because of a significant decline in performance.

**34** The Commission has published the following corporate assessment reports:

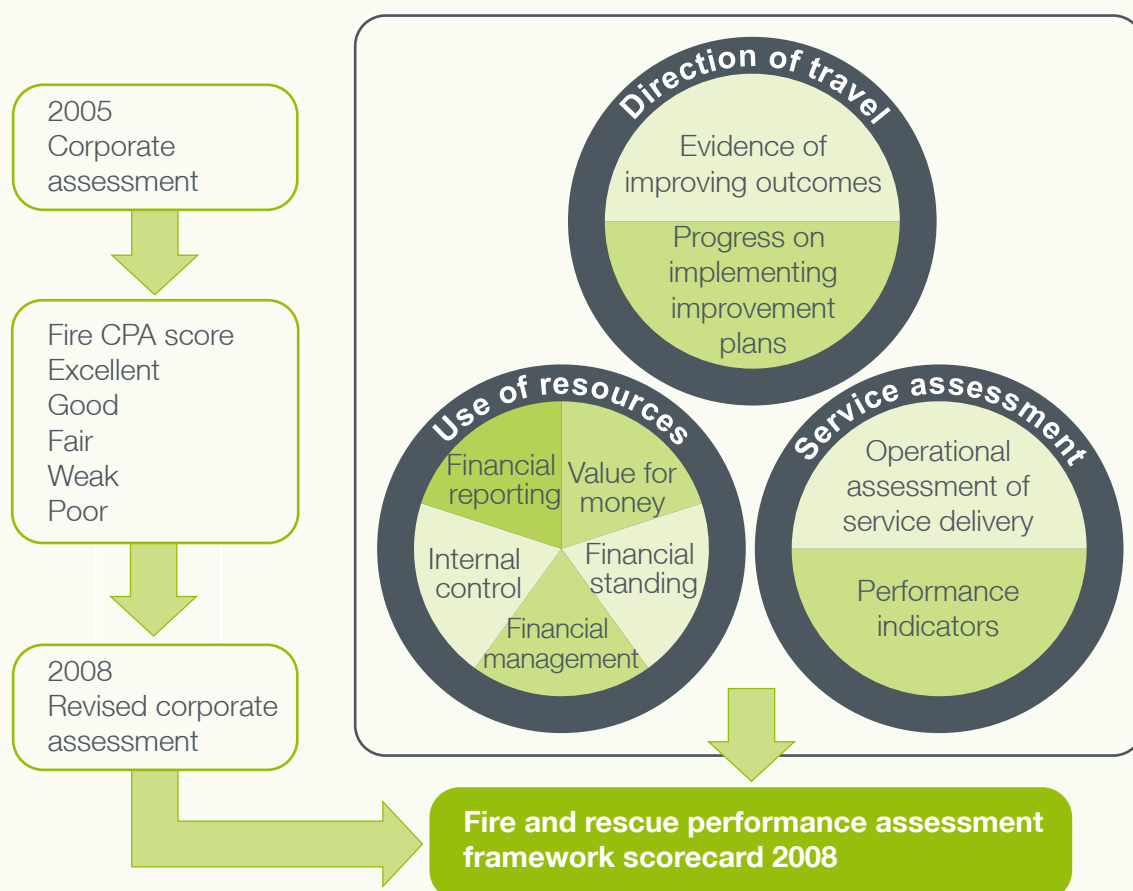
- Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service has improved from fair to good.
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service has improved from fair to good.
- Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service has improved from weak to fair.
- Wiltshire and Swindon Fire and Rescue Service has improved from weak to fair.
- London Fire Brigade has improved from good to excellent.
- Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service has improved from weak to good.
- Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service has deteriorated from fair to poor.
- Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service has improved from weak to fair.

# 2 | Assessing progress

**35** The Audit Commission is responsible for assessing and reporting on the performance of England's fire services. This report sets out the scores and findings of the 2008 performance assessment of fire services (Ref. 9). The assessment has three scored elements that assess progress against the *National Framework* and local priorities:

- a direction of travel assessment of the extent of improvement or deterioration in service delivery in the last year;
- a use of resources assessment of how the service manages its finances, including a clear judgement on the extent to which the service provides value for money; and

**Figure 1**  
Fire and rescue performance assessment 2008



Source: Audit Commission

- 
- a service assessment, which looks at how effectively the fire service plans and responds to emergencies and incidents.
- 36** This is the third and final year that the Audit Commission has assessed the performance of fire services using this framework. Over the past three years the pace of improvement has varied across individual services and the gap between the best and the worst has widened. However, overall there has been a clear upward trend in performance with better outcomes delivered in most communities. Fire services have improved business systems and, in particular, risk assessment, strategic planning and performance management have been significantly strengthened. Community safety work is better managed and is having real impact in preventing fires and protecting the public. Services are building productive relationships within local communities and this is helping community safety officers to deliver fire safety messages to people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and most at risk from fire.
- 37** Over the past three years, fire services have significantly developed their approach to partnerships. Many services now have a strong and influential role in LSPs and CDRPs and are making good contributions to delivering the priorities of their LAA. There is still a need to develop the community leadership roles of fire authority members. Our assessments show that fire services are working well with their partners to improve the quality of life for local people.
- 38** Despite these successes there is room for much more improvement especially in relation to improving efficiency and achieving value for money. The Audit Commission study (Ref. 2) found that better strategy and evaluation are required to ensure that fire services are getting value for money. The study found the fire service could be more efficient and effective if it improved regional and local collaboration. A small number of fire services have led the way in modernising and improving efficiency. Strong leadership from fire authority members and chief fire officers is needed to overcome resistance to change.

# 3 | Direction of travel

**39** The direction of travel assessment measures improvement or deterioration in service delivery including the delivery of the *National Framework* priorities (Ref. 4) (Ref. 5). It shows the rate of progress made in the last year and assesses the ability to improve further. There is an overall direction of travel judgement expressed as one of four categories: improving strongly; improving well; improving adequately; and not improving adequately (or no improvement).

**40** The direction of travel assessments for 2008 show:<sup>1</sup>

- the rate of improvement slowed in six fire services (13 per cent) which have moved down a category. This compares with 14 services (30 per cent) in 2007;

- five services (11 per cent) are improving strongly. This is the same number as in 2007;
- two of these, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service achieved this rating for the second year running;
- thirteen services (29 per cent) raised their performance sufficiently to move up a category;
- twenty-six services (58 per cent) maintained the same rate of improvement in 2008 compared with 18 services (39 per cent) in 2007; and
- thirty-nine services (87 per cent) are improving well or improving adequately.

**Figure 2**  
Direction of travel

Direction of travel category	2007	Change	2008
Improving strongly	5	3 down, 2 left, 2 up	5
Improving well	23	2 down, 19 left, 2 up	32
Improving adequately	18	1 down, 5 left, 10 up, 1 up	7
No improvement	0		1
Total fire services	46		45

Source: Audit Commission

<sup>1</sup> Warwickshire FRA did not have a direction of travel or a full use of resources assessment in 2008 because of the ongoing investigation into the Atherstone-on-Stour fire of November 2007.

**Figure 3**  
**Direction of travel scores by fire service 2008**



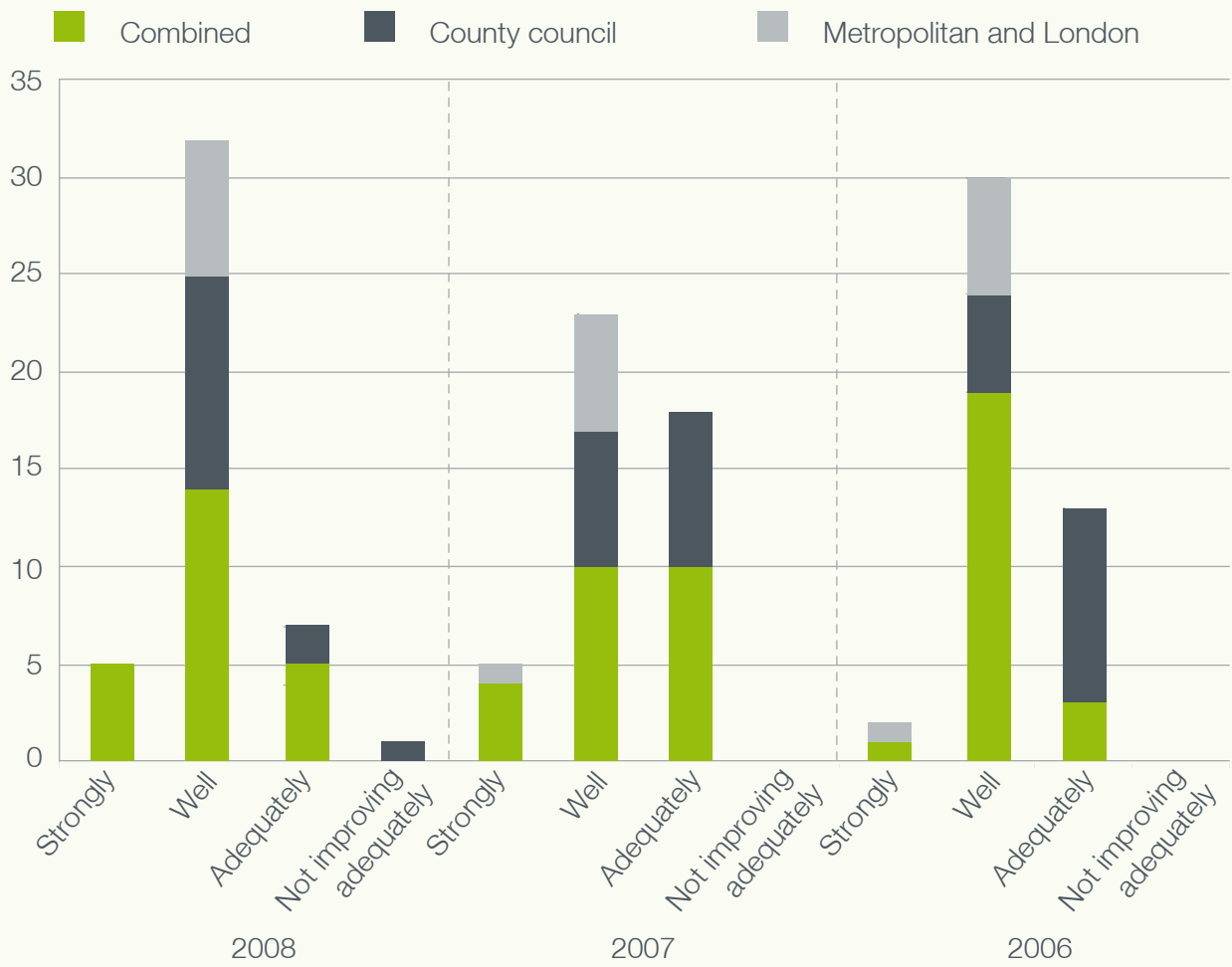
Source: Audit Commission

**41** Services dropped down a category where their performance has become below average in important aspects, such as the number of primary fires and where their prevention work is not having enough impact in reducing fires in the home. County fire services are still not keeping pace with the rest and no county service is improving strongly. In 2008 there was a slight improvement

in the number improving well. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service is the first service to be assessed as not improving adequately.

# Direction of travel

**Figure 4**  
**Direction of travel scores 2006 - 2008**



Source: Audit Commission

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**42** Services with a CPA score of good or excellent have shown more consistent and stronger performance in their direction of travel assessments over the past three years. There were 21 services (47 per cent) that were judged to be good or excellent in the 2005 CPA. The proportion of improving well or improving strongly judgements achieved by good and excellent services over the past three years was 79 per cent. This contrasts with a proportion of 65 per cent of improving well and improving strongly judgements achieved by the remaining 24 services (53 per cent in the same period).

# 4 | Key findings from direction of travel assessments

## Fire services continue to improve performance

**43** Although most fire services are improving, the extent of improvement in national performance indicators continues to vary considerably. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service had the highest percentage of national indicators improved in 2008 (90 per cent) and Surrey Fire and Rescue Service the lowest (45 per cent). The national average is 69 per cent of indicators improved. Dorset Fire and Rescue Service had 80 per cent of national indicators in the top quartile in 2008 compared with a national average of 34 per cent. Humberside Fire and Rescue Service had only 10 per cent in the top quartile.

**44** Some fire services are improving at a faster rate than others. In 2007 Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service had the lowest percentage of national indicators improved (34 per cent) and in 2008 it had one of the highest (80 per cent). This includes achieving significant

reductions in fire deaths and injuries, primary and non-domestic fires and all categories of arson.

**45** Services that have moved up a category in 2008 did so by demonstrating consistently better outcomes in preventing fires and protecting those most at risk of fire. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service achieved challenging response targets through sharing best practice and comparing performance across stations to achieve higher and more consistent outcomes. Nottinghamshire and West Sussex fire services also raised their performance significantly in 2008.

**46** Kent and Shropshire fire services have maintained the strong pace of improvement in 2007. In 2008 Kent Fire and Rescue Service attended the lowest number of fires in ten years. It achieved this by rigorously analysing risks at neighbourhood level and targeting prevention work where it can have the most impact.

### Case study 1

#### Kent Fire and Rescue Service

##### Protecting those most at risk

Kent Fire and Rescue Service ranks all its 5,241 output areas according to risk using incident data, demographics, lifestyle data and information from partners. Output areas are defined by the Office of National Statistics. They have a population of about 250 people and their boundaries are fixed to allow comparisons through time. Sixty per cent of all accidental fires in the home occurred in the top 40 per cent of ranked output areas. As a result the fire service has been able to target its prevention work where it can have greatest impact. In 2007/08 the service had the third lowest level of deaths from fire in the home nationally.



- 47** Working with local businesses is also helping to reduce false alarms from automatic fire detection equipment and the effective challenge of hoax calls is resulting in fewer unnecessary call-outs. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is reducing fire risk for businesses and residents. In 2008 fires in non-domestic properties reduced at a faster rate than in other areas. Most services attended fewer false alarms from automatic fire detection equipment in 2008. For example, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service reduced such attendances by 12 per cent by working with business owners to make sure that equipment operates correctly. Hoax calls are reducing in most areas, with good results by South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Hampshire fire services.
- 48** All fire services carry out HFSCs (sometimes called home fire safety visits (HFSVs)). HFSCs include alerting people to the particular risks from fire in their home, helping them to form an escape plan and fitting smoke alarms. Most services increased numbers of HFSC in 2008. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service completed over 100,000 by focusing the work of volunteers, community safety staff and partners in the most vulnerable communities and through a range of media campaigns. As a result more people escape unharmed from accidental fires in the home. Injuries in accidental fires overall fell by 45 per cent.
- 49** West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service almost doubled HFSCs in 2007/08, exceeding its target. Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service completed 41 per cent more in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07. As the case study in Hampshire shows, some services are achieving a high proportion of smoke alarms in homes. In London it is 70 per cent. Many fire services use partners to help deliver HFSC in homes at highest risk. Examples are third sector organisations that support vulnerable older people or

## Case study 2

### Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

#### Fire safety messages reaching the most vulnerable

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service undertook 20,000 HFSVs over the year and over 90 per cent of Hampshire residents now have smoke detectors in their homes. Referrals by partners such as the police, health bodies, voluntary organisations and community wardens are helping the fire service to gain better access to people at most risk of fire. It has established community outreach teams and local advocates to ensure effective communication with all parts of the community, especially hard to reach groups. The service works with the Ghurka Association to produce a HFSV booklet specifically to target the local Nepalese community. It works with Sensory Advisory Awareness teams to ensure that individuals with sensory impairment receive the most suitable services to meet their needs.

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# Key findings from direction of travel assessments

potentially excluded people from minority ethnic groups. This helps fire services to reach more vulnerable people with fire safety messages.

- 50** In May 2008, the Department for Communities and Local Government launched a new three-year *National Framework* (Ref. 5). Most fire services are planning well for delivery of the 2008/11 framework.

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## Reliable risk assessment helps fire services to identify vulnerable people and communities at highest risk

- 51** The 2008 assessments show most fire services analyse the make up of their communities and identify people and places at most risk of fire. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has effective data sharing arrangements with partners, which help it to predict risk. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service uses neighbourhood-level risk assessments, exchanges information with partners and uses a problem solving toolkit to identify groups and households at risk of fire and other emergencies such as flooding. London Fire Brigade's Incident Risk Analysis Tool brings together data from around 50 sources, including incident data and information from partners, to identify current and emerging risks. This enables the service to identify where fires are most likely to occur in each London borough and therefore target local prevention and protection work effectively.

- 52** Fire services are improving their engagement with people and communities at most risk of fire. There are good examples of connecting with previously excluded groups such as migrant workers and travellers. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service uses local advocates to communicate with minority groups about fire safety in ways that are relevant to their needs. Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service uses community advocates, who are members of minority groups, to promote fire safety messages within their communities. Eight advocates work with older people, young people, people with hearing impairment, minority ethnic communities and those at risk from drug and alcohol misuse. In Derbyshire, the Phoenix Project combines the promotion of home fire safety messages with other safety measures to help people be less afraid of becoming victims of crime. This project targets an area with a high minority ethnic population. It received a national award for the outcomes achieved including exceeding its fire reduction targets.

- 53** As part of this work, fire services are opening fire stations for use by local community groups. In North Yorkshire, community groups have used the Harrogate fire station on over 150 occasions in 2008. In Hertfordshire, the Migrant Workers Forum is based at Hatfield fire station and aims to improve the health and well-being of migrant workers by improving access to support services. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is committed to playing a wider

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role in improving public health, a key local priority. The All Fired Up courses run at fire stations give 11-16 year olds information, advice and inspiration to improve their lifestyle with access to gym facilities and healthy cooking classes. In Gloucestershire, fire stations act as recycling centres, libraries and blood donor centres. In Essex, the RDS fire stations are used by mobile libraries and health services as a base for providing services to rural communities. Using fire stations as a community resource helps fire services to meet local people, understand local problems and deliver fire safety messages.

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### **Partnership working is helping fire services to achieve their priorities and to contribute to wider outcomes**

- 54** In 2008, fire services significantly improved approaches to partnership working, largely driven by their involvement in LAAs. High performing services have aligned borough commands with LAA areas and built strong and influential roles and relationships in LSPs and CDRPs.
- 55** Partners are improving their understanding of the contribution of the fire service to all LAA priorities and not just to fire and rescue priorities such as arson reduction. Partnership working is also helping fire services to achieve their goals for completing HFSCs and installing smoke detectors in prioritised homes. Essex Fire and

Rescue Service has an agreement with a local gas maintenance firm to fit smoke alarms during annual servicing visits to housing association properties. This resulted in around 1,000 installations in 2008. Some fire services have also expanded their approach to HFSCs to support partners' aims to improve overall safety in the home and meet wider needs. Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service works with the trading standards department of the Council and voluntary groups to deliver HFSCs alongside advice to protect older people from rogue traders. Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service include assessment of potential risks to older people from trips and falls in the home. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service working with health and social care partners uses HFSC to trigger a full assessment of needs and as a result increased the take up of benefits by older people by £2 million in 2008.

- 56** Many fire services contribute to improving the wider quality of life for residents. They help clean up neighbourhoods and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour through environmental action days. These multi-agency events carried out with police, councils and the DVLA, target vulnerable neighbourhoods and have had good impact in areas such as Greater Manchester, Leicester and in London boroughs. The fire services involved have analysed the perceptions of residents and evaluated how long the targeted areas remain cleaner and more attractive. This analysis shows

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# Key findings from direction of travel assessments

that improvements are sustained; local people feel more pride in their area and have more confidence in local services.

- 57 Fire services are key partners in CDRPs. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service coordinates multi-agency work to reduce crime. Community outreach firefighters target resources based on risk assessments. In 2007/08, eight districts that were high crime neighbourhoods were targeted. In the eight districts crime reduced by between 15 and 27 per cent and the number of young people entering the Youth Justice System for the first time reduced by 6 per cent.
- 58 There are good examples of partnership working with health services. Some fire services are partners in co-responder schemes. These schemes deliver a fast response to medical emergencies such as cardiac arrest. The schemes

are particularly important in rural areas where, in many cases, the fire service can reach emergency incidents and administer life saving treatment before paramedics arrive. Health service statistics show that such schemes in rural Lincolnshire increased cardiac arrest survival rates by 35 per cent.

- 59 Fire services are helping to reduce road traffic collisions and improving road safety where this is a local priority. In Cheshire, the fire service contributes to road safety initiatives in the Ellesmere Port area, which have contributed to a 25 per cent reduction in road traffic collisions. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has contributed to a 15 per cent reduction in casualties over the last three years through interventions such as Crash Zone, Bikers Skills and Dying to Drive. These interventions

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## Case study 3

### Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

#### Working with others to help people who have experienced a fire or other emergency

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service works with the Red Cross to help people who have suffered damage to their homes following a fire, flood or similar emergency. Two units are based at the Plymouth Red Cross Centre and Bridgwater Fire Station, where volunteers provide out of hours cover on weekday evenings from 6pm to 7am and 24 hour cover at weekends and on Bank Holidays. This service is available 365 days a year. A typical call may occur in the early hours of the morning when normal sources of help are not so readily available. Using a specially adapted and fully equipped motor home, volunteers assist individuals and families affected by providing and arranging for practical help and support. This includes immediate temporary accommodation and a calm listening ear amid the noise and clamour of the incident ground. Other forms of help include sign posting to other useful organisations, support with the care of children and pets and transport to friends or family.

Feedback has confirmed that people have been reassured at a time of immense stress.

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target specific groups, such as bikers or children and young adults with tailored messages often delivered in partnership. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service has made a significant contribution to a CDRP safer motorcycling campaign which reduced collisions and brought motorbike related road deaths down from ten in 2006/07 to zero in 2007/08.

- 60** All fire services work with young people, aiming to improve their personal safety and deter them from anti-social behaviour such as starting fires and attacking firefighters. Firefighters are often able to engage positively with young people who are mistrustful of authority figures. They can draw young people into productive local activities that improve their behaviour and their life chances. Evaluation of such projects is improving. Good examples are the LIFE projects in London and the YES! scheme in Derbyshire. Evaluation shows that by taking part in such schemes, young people have returned to education, employment or training and there has been a fall in anti-social behaviour and hoax calls. Attacks on firefighters are also reducing. However not enough fire services evaluate projects in this way and so cannot be confident they are targeting the right groups or achieving impact.
- 61** Overall, partnership working is better managed, with stronger analysis of costs but less robust analysis of benefits. In 2007/08 some fire services introduced more rigour in their analysis of the benefits of joint work. More services need to apply this approach. High

performing services such as Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Greater Manchester and Derbyshire routinely evaluate the outcomes of all partnership work. This has informed decisions about whether to continue or cease their involvement in specific partnerships.

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### **Most fire services show commitment to improving the diversity of the workforce but few are achieving real progress**

- 62** A workforce that reflects the diversity of its local communities inspires confidence in fire services. It makes it easier to access those at most risk of fire and to deliver fire safety messages in a way that is easily understood.
- 63** Women and minority ethnic staff are more likely to leave the fire service and less likely to be promoted than their white, male colleagues. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has the lowest number of women firefighters nationally at 1.4 per cent and only 1.8 per cent of uniformed staff are from minority ethnic communities compared to 9.2 per cent in the working population.
- 64** Some fire services have increased applications from women and minority ethnic people but this has not increased the numbers actually being recruited. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service used targeted campaigns and significantly increased applications from women and minority ethnic residents, but these applicants were largely unsuccessful, so there

# Key findings from direction of travel assessments

was little impact on the overall make up of the workforce. There were similar experiences for women applicants in Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service. Services have yet to fully analyse the reasons for these applicants not succeeding.

- 65** Services that are starting to recruit a more diverse workforce show strong leadership from senior managers and fire authority members around issues of equal opportunity and fairness. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service used effective local campaigns to

increase the recruitment of female firefighters in 2008. The result was 7 per cent of RDS firefighter recruits and 25 per cent of whole-time recruits were women. Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service have used similar positive action to increase the number of minority ethnic recruits to levels that reflect the local working population.<sup>1</sup>

- 66** The extent of the challenge was reported in *Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency* in Figure 5.

## Case study 4

### London Fire Brigade

The diversity of the workforce is improving year on year.

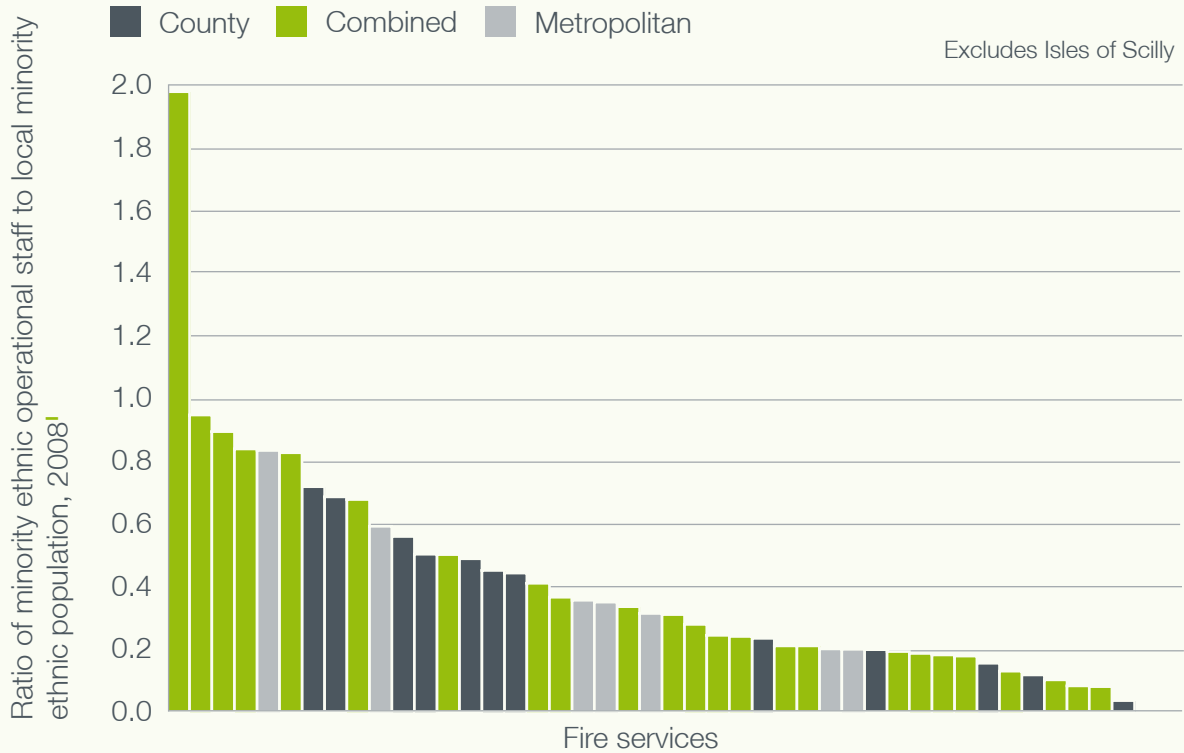
In 2007/08, the number of women firefighters in the London Fire Brigade exceeded the national average for the first time. The number of minority ethnic fire-fighters increased from 9.9 per cent to 10.6 per cent compared to the national average of around 3.2 per cent. The percentage of top earners who are women (11.1 per cent) or from minority groups (7.3 per cent) is significantly above national averages which are 8.8 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively. The number of top earners with a disability is 4.3 per cent compared to the national average of 2.1 per cent. The percentage of non-operational staff from minority ethnic communities at 27 per cent is close to the average in London's population of 29 per cent. Some of the factors that have enabled London Fire Brigade to achieve these important outcomes are strong leadership, including from authority members, good training for all staff and a clear corporate message about unacceptable behaviour. Internal support groups enable minority staff to network and to provide good challenge to policies and service delivery. London Fire Brigade's robust approach to equality and diversity issues led to it achieving level five of the Equality Standard for Local Government in 2008.<sup>11</sup>

- I** Positive action is a range of lawful actions that seek to address imbalance in employment opportunities among groups that have previously experienced disadvantage, been subject to discriminatory policies and procedures or are under represented in the workforce.
- II** The Equality Standard for Local Government was developed to enable local authorities to mainstream age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation into local authority policy and practice at all levels. Authorities report what level of the standard they have reached from five levels. Level 5 is the highest.

**Figure 5**

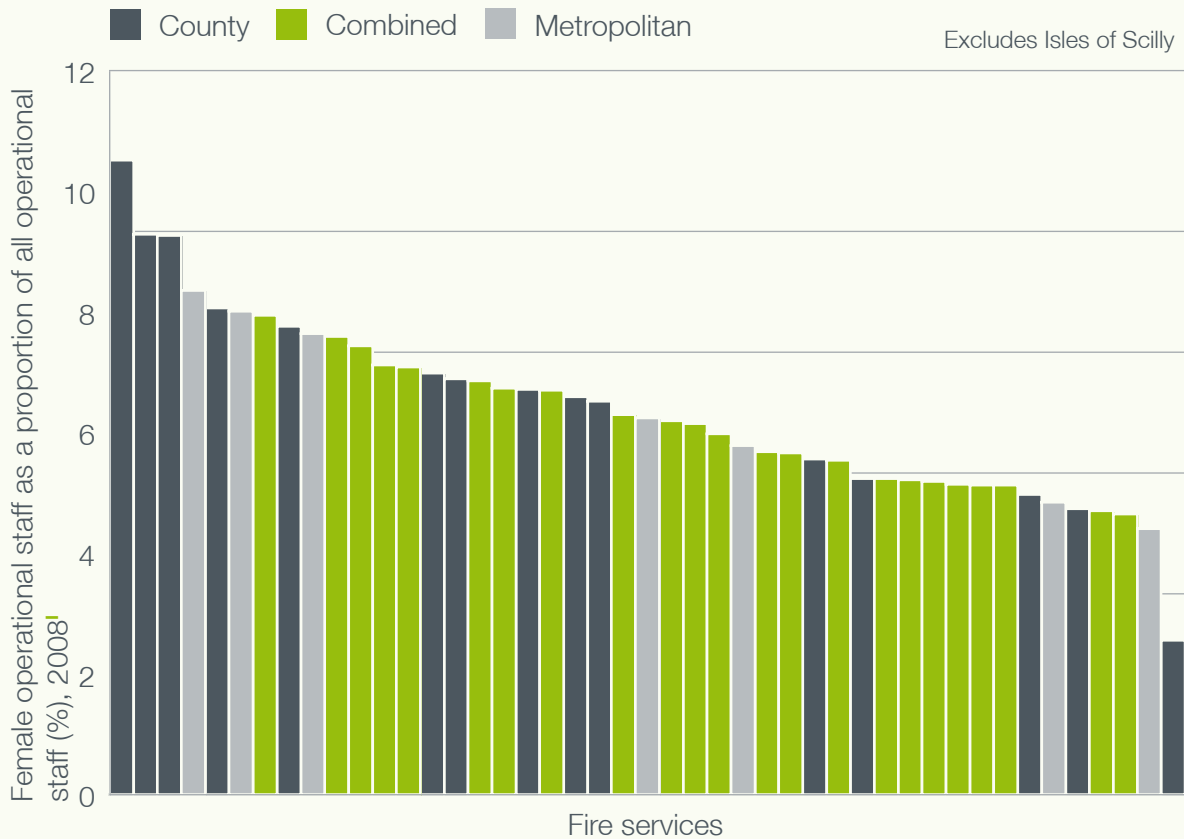
**Fire service performance with respect to minority ethnic and female staff**

In all but one fire service, minority ethnic groups are under-represented among operational staff compared to the local minority ethnic population



Figures taken at March; operational staff measured as headcount.  
Source: CLG

In all but one fire service, less than 10 per cent of operational staff are female



Figures taken at March; operational staff measured as headcount.  
Source: CLG

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# Key findings from direction of travel assessments

**67** Progress towards delivering against the equality and diversity targets (Ref. 8) remains poor. Managers and members need to set high standards and challenge unacceptable behaviour. Delivering improvement will require fire services to provide good quality training on equality and diversity issues, and to support networks and development opportunities for women and ethnic minority staff. The Commission will assess and report achievement in equalities and diversity through organisational assessment of fire services in 2009.

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## Community leadership is improving but fire authority members need to strengthen their role in local communities

**68** Community leadership is improving, but fire authority members need to strengthen their role in local communities. The improvements in outcomes achieved in partnership in 2008 are a reflection of the stronger leadership and influence that senior managers have in LSPs and CDRPs. Some fire authority members have also developed stronger community leadership roles. Members of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Authority are key contacts in the community and strong ambassadors for the fire service.

**69** Some authority members have a strong influence in setting and leading the strategic direction of their fire services by acting as champions for specific aspects of service delivery. Our assessments show that when members take on such

roles it increases the effectiveness of community work. Essex Fire and Rescue Service has a member champion for environmental protection. Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's older people's champion played a lead role in organising a multi-agency conference, which led to new approaches to reducing fire risk among older people.

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## Fire services are starting to address sustainability and the impact of their activities on the environment

**70** Fire services are starting to reduce environmental impact and promote sustainable solutions. Some are reducing their use of natural resources and considering sustainability when making procurement decisions about new buildings and vehicles. The Rayleigh Weir fire station in Essex has solar panels, a ground source heat pump and a wind turbine which are reducing energy costs. The Ashton fire station in Manchester includes good sustainability measures such as rainwater harvesting and solar panels to create heat for showers.

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## Business processes continue to improve

**71** The quality of business planning continues to improve in most fire services. This is leading to better setting of priorities and more effective targeting of activity and resources to reduce risks. Fire services are beginning to



## Case study 5

### London Fire Brigade

#### **An ambitious, holistic and enthusiastic approach to sustainability is bringing results.**

London Fire Brigade's vehicles meet the Low Emission Zone requirements and are on track to meet future requirements. It is reducing its overall energy use through a programme of energy efficiency and renewable energy with photovoltaic cells, solar heating panels and wind turbines fitted at some fire stations. In 2007/08 it reduced overall water usage in buildings by 1.73 per cent. It has exceeded the London Mayor's CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction target of 15 per cent by 2010 (from 1990 levels) having reduced levels by 17.4 per cent so far. It achieved this through initiatives such as combined heat and power schemes to produce renewable and low carbon energy and high efficiency lighting installations at fire stations. A staff motivation scheme which includes 'green champions' at most sites is raising awareness and reducing energy usage. This is also helping to achieve an average recycling rate of 44 per cent a month. In taking forward its Responsible Procurement Policy it has delivered improvements on supplier diversity, is paying the London Living wage to 180 Londoners through its contracts and achieved 83 per cent reuse on over 300 tonnes of furniture from the move of its HQ. These efforts were recognised in winning the City of London's Sustainable City Award and Sustainable Procurement award.

make longer-term plans in areas such as sustainability and being prepared to respond to major incidents and catastrophic events such as acts of terrorism or natural disasters.

- 72** Performance management was a weakness nationally in the 2005 fire CPA and the 2006 performance assessment. The assessments in 2008 show that all fire services collect and report performance information in relation to their local priorities and national indicators. The majority (around 75 per cent) use this information effectively to identify areas for improvement and keep performance on track. Greater internal challenge and formal scrutiny by authority members is also helping to drive improvement in the top

performing services.

- 73** Maintaining the capacity and competence of the RDS workforce is a key challenge for fire services working in rural areas. It presents a real risk to the sustainability of a competent RDS service in some areas. Traditional recruitment from local villages and small towns has become difficult as more people commute greater distances to work. This is a particular issue in Cornwall, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Northamptonshire and Royal Berkshire fire services.
- 74** Sickness absence rates have improved steadily overall although some services such as Dorset and Cheshire slipped

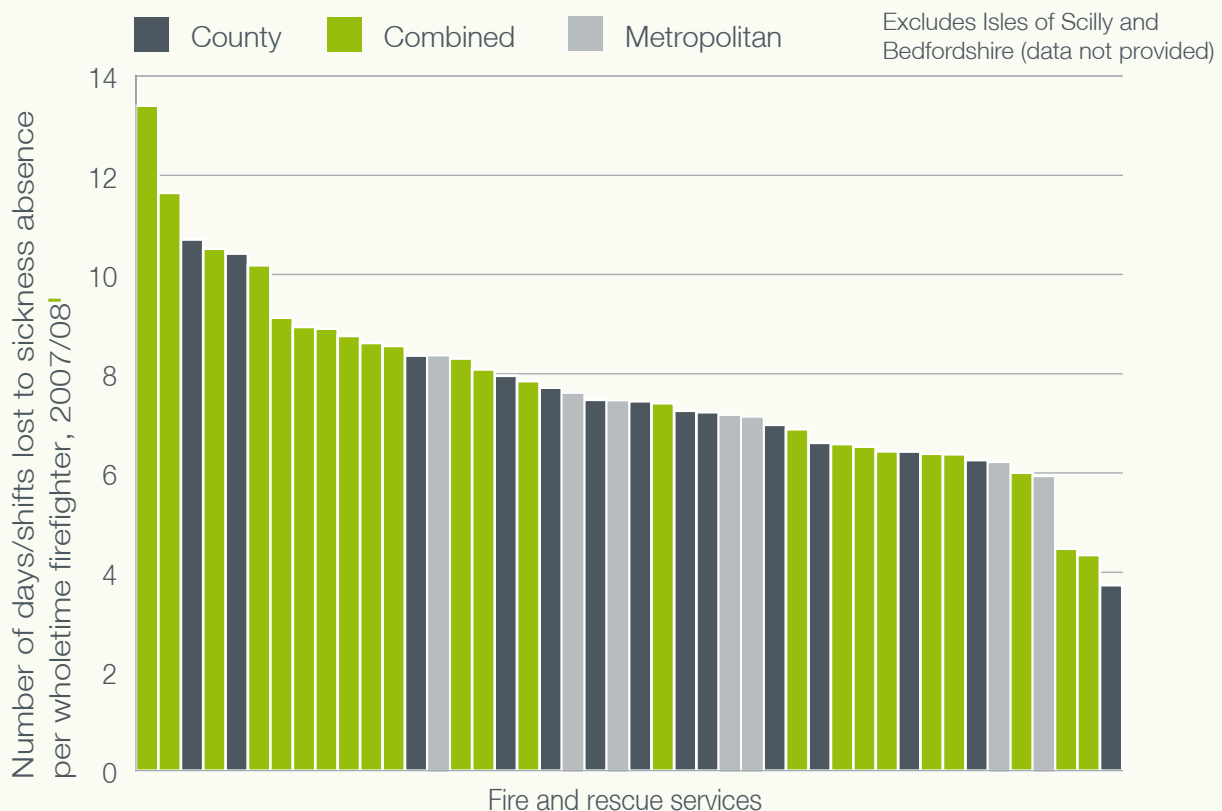
# Key findings from direction of travel assessments

back in 2008. Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service is a top performer. The average number of working days lost due to sickness by whole-time uniformed staff at 4.9 days is significantly less than the national average of 7.9 days for 2007/08. West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service has also significantly improved its performance achieving a reduction in days lost by whole-time uniform staff from 9.5 days lost in 2006/07 to 6.7 days lost in 2007/08. Both these services have achieved success through improved policies,

better training and support for managers and good occupational health facilities

- 75** The Audit Commission study *Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency* (Ref. 2) found there is scope to reduce sickness absence and achieve significant savings.
- 76** The study identified potential savings of over £10 million in respect of firefighter sickness absence and almost £1.5 million in relation to support staff absences.

**Figure 6**  
**Sickness absence**



Figures taken at March; whole-time firefighters measured as FTE  
Source: Audit Commission

# 5 | Use of resources

**77** The use of resources assessment considers how well the fire service manages its resources. This includes having effective internal controls, sound planning arrangements and effective deployment of people and assets. It focuses on sound and strategic financial management to ensure that resources are available to support the service's priorities, improve service delivery and provide value for money. Services are scored on a four-point scale: 1 – inadequate performance; 2 – adequate performance; 3 – performing well; and 4 – performing strongly. The overall score comprises scored assessments of five themes: financial management; financial reporting; internal control; financial standing; and value for money.

**78** Use of resources assessments in 2008 show that:<sup>1</sup>

- overall there has been little change with 40 fire services (89 per cent) achieving the same score as 2007;
- six services (13 per cent) achieved the highest rating (performing strongly) compared to four services (9 per cent) in 2007 and three services (6 per cent) have now achieved this for third year running;
- thirty-three services (73 per cent) were performing well compared to 37 in 2007;
- performance fell in only one service (from performing well to performing adequately); and
- for the first time two services (4 per cent) achieved the top score in value for money.

**Figure 7**  
Use of resources scores

Use of resources category	2007	Change	2008
Performing strongly	4	↔ 4	6
Performing well	37	↓ 1 ↔ 31 ↑ 2	33
Adequate performance	6	↔ 5 ↑ 1	6
Inadequate performance	0		0
Total fire services	47		45

Source: Audit Commission

**1** Devon and Somerset became a Combined Fire Authority in April 2007, reducing the total number of services in England from 47 to 46. Warwickshire FRA did not have a direction of travel or a full use of resources assessment in 2008 because of the ongoing investigation into the Atherstone-on-Stour fire of November 2007.

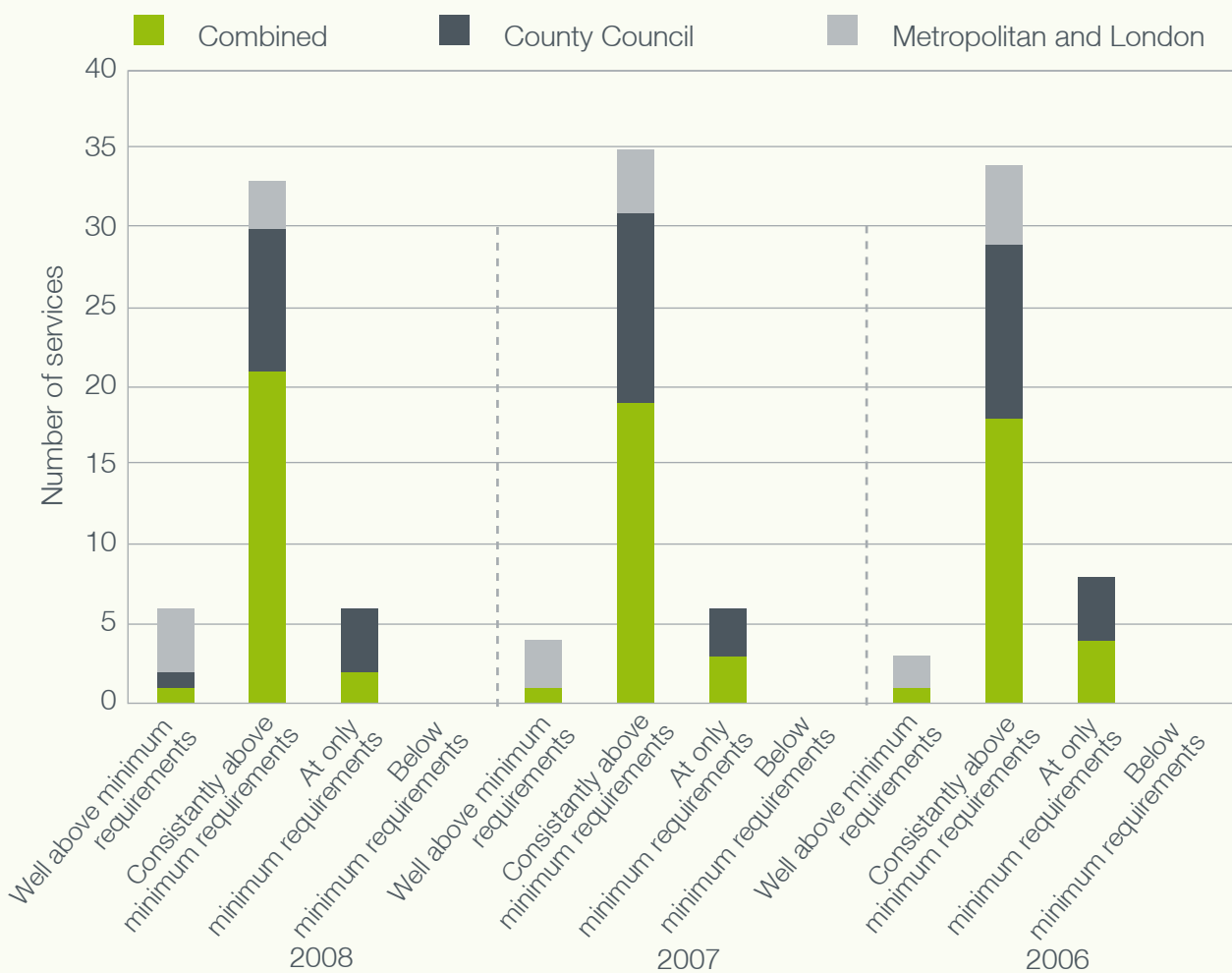
# Use of resources

**79** Services that performed well in the 2005 fire CPA have consistently performed well in the use of resources assessment. In the three-year period between 2006 and 2008 there has only been a single instance where a service that was judged to be good or excellent in the 2005 CPA received a use of resources score of less

than 3. In comparison, the 24 services (51 per cent)<sup>1</sup> that received a CPA score of fair, poor or weak in 2005, have had use of resources scores of 2 (25 per cent of the possible scores).

**80** There has been little change in the use or resources scores over the period between 2006 and 2008.

**Figure 8**  
**Use of resources<sup>11</sup>**



<sup>11</sup> Showing services that had scores for 2006 - 2008  
Source: Audit Commission

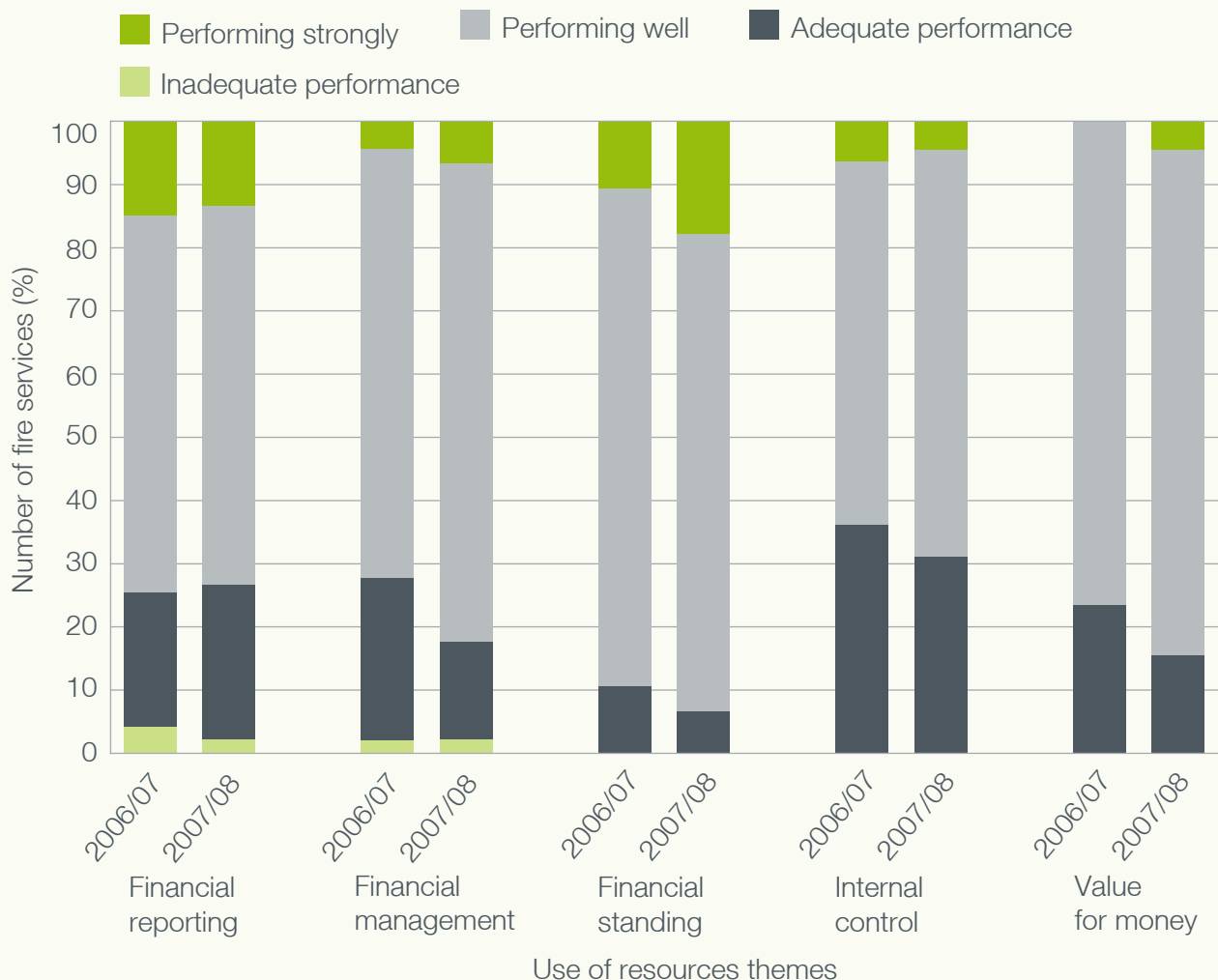
<sup>1</sup> In 2005 there were 47 fire and rescue services.

# 6 | Key findings from use of resources assessments

**81** Six fire services (13 per cent) are performing strongly. Three of these, Greater Manchester, Kent and Merseyside fire services have now achieved this for three years. Thirty-three services (73 per cent) are performing well and six (13 per cent) performing adequately. No service is performing inadequately.

**82** In the use of resources assessments for 2006 and 2007, no fire service achieved the top score for the value for money theme. In 2008 two fire services achieved the top score and all services delivered efficiency savings.

**Figure 9**  
Use of resources theme scores



Source: Audit Commission

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# Key findings from use of resources assessments

- 83** Financial management continues to be sound. Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Oxfordshire fire services were top performers in 2008. Only the Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service scored below adequate performance. Services performing strongly have effective business planning, which is fully integrated with financial planning and risk management. Robust medium-term financial projections and reliable risk assessments underpin budgets and capital programmes.
- 84** Financial reporting is reliable and effective in most services. Kent, Lancashire and Merseyside fire services are strong performers. Good financial information gives managers and authority members a clear picture of costs and performance throughout the year. This information has helped managers and members to make sound investment decisions. High performing services also make real efforts to report costs and spending to the public in easy to understand and accessible ways.
- 85** Financial standing assesses how well a fire service manages its spending within available resources. Forty-two fire services (94 per cent) were performing well or performing strongly in 2008. Tyne and Wear, Oxfordshire, and Cleveland fire services were top performers. Features of good performance include a strong scrutiny role by authority members, close monitoring of funding streams and detailed reports for managers and members to identify efficiencies. Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service map efficiency saving measures to strategic objectives and ensure that there is no negative impact on performance.
- 86** Internal control assesses whether a service has sound checks to manage its financial risks and ensure proper use of public money. Only two services (4 per cent), West Yorkshire and Manchester fire services are performing strongly in this area. The remaining 43 fire services (96 per cent) are performing well or adequately. It is the strength of business risk management that singles out the high performers. Risk management is clear in financial and business planning with risks fully assessed and rigorously reviewed. It is also important for fire services to have a comprehensive business continuity plan which is reviewed regularly. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has a good approach to keeping business continuity plans complete and up to date.

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### Case study 6

#### West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

##### Good management of significant business risks

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has a good approach to managing business risks and keeping business continuity plans up to date. The service has risk champions who keep the profile of risk management high. Business risks are regularly monitored and updated through the Risk Management Strategy Group and robust measures and controls are in place. Thorough testing means that the service's business continuity plans are up to date and effective. For example in 2008 the service ran a simulation exercise that involved the full management team and fire authority members. This confirmed the service's plans were capable of being implemented, and being successful, in the event of a major disaster. It provided good hands-on experience for those who would be involved in an actual event. The learning from the event was used to refine existing plans. A direct benefit from this commitment to risk management has been the reduction in insurance premiums. Copies of the risk matrix and business continuity plan are used by the brokers as part of the tendering exercise for insurance renewals.

- 87** In 2008 for the first time, two fire services, Kent and Wiltshire, scored performing strongly for value for money. Of the rest, 34 (76 per cent) were performing well and 9 (20 per cent) performing adequately. The strongly performing services deliver high quality performance in key areas such as numbers of fires and deaths and injuries from fire alongside low costs and high efficiency savings.

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### Case study 7

#### Kent Fire and Rescue Service

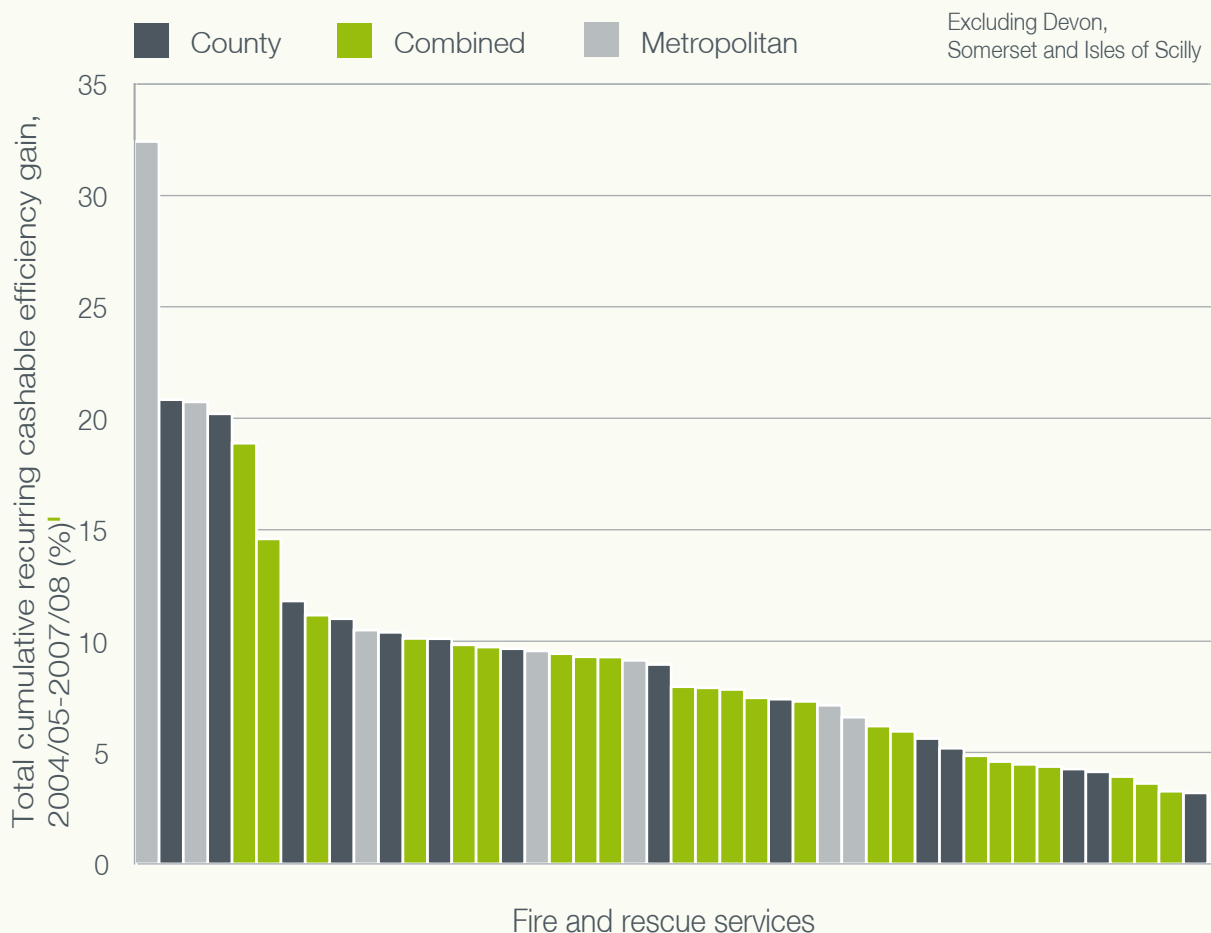
##### Low cost and high performance

Corporate risk data is provided to local station managers. It is finely tuned to street level so that local managers can target the highest risk properties. This has helped to achieve high levels of performance at a comparatively low cost. Kent Fire and Rescue Service achieved challenging efficiency targets in 2008. The service avoids unnecessary spending. Robust monitoring procedures ensure that achievement of efficiency targets has become integrated with routine service planning and delivery.

# Key findings from use of resources assessments

**88** The Audit Commission national study *Rising to the Challenge: Improving Fire Service Efficiency* (Ref. 2) identifies the potential for savings of up to £200 million without increasing risk to the public or firefighters. It found most of the gains in efficiency nationally have been made by a few services.

**Figure 10**  
**Levels of savings**



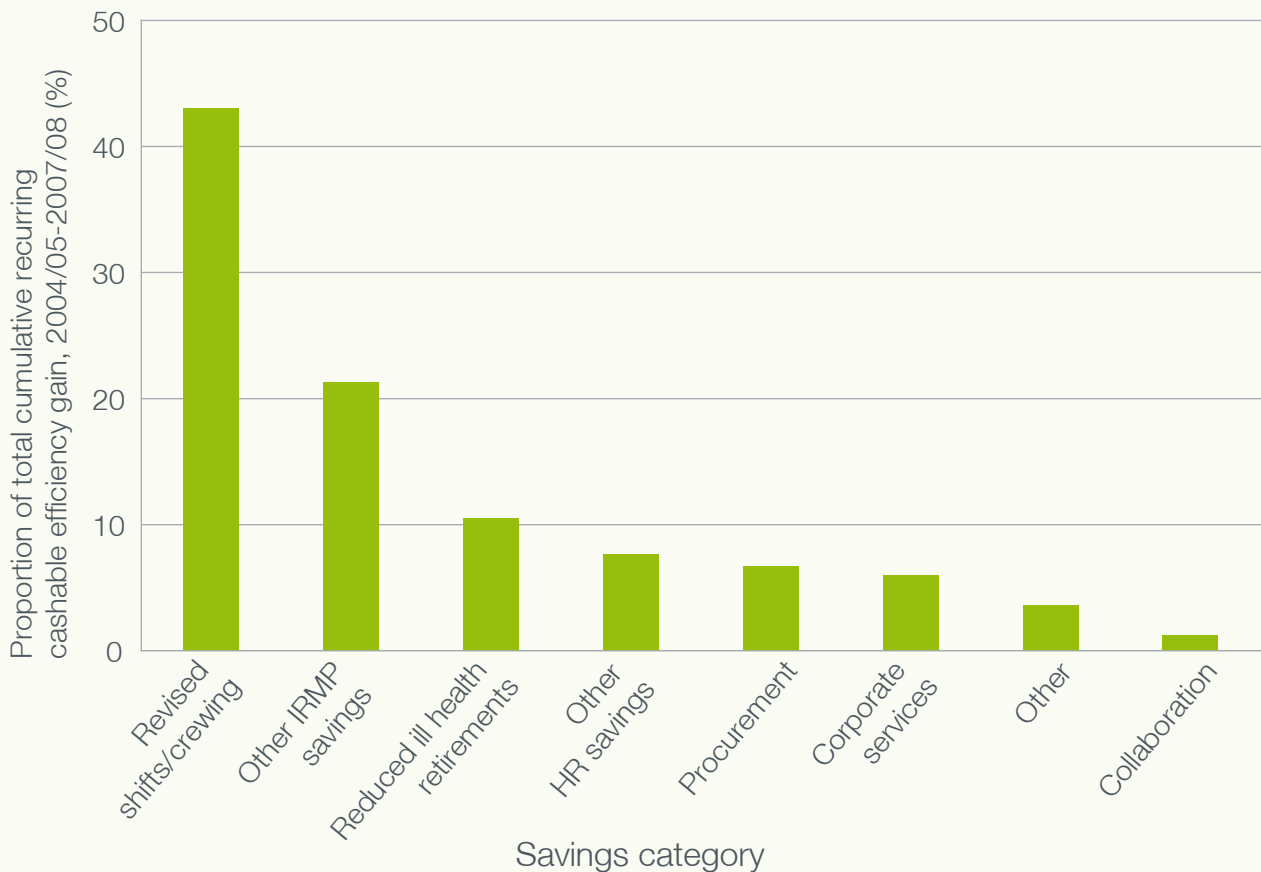
As percentage of net expenditure in 2003/04 (excluding capital charges).  
Source: Audit Commission



**89** The study found that, while overall efficiency savings targets have been exceeded, just four fire services, accounting for around a third of expenditure, have contributed nearly half of all the savings achieved to date. Four fire services (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Northumberland and Cleveland) have reported efficiency savings equivalent to more than 15

per cent of their total expenditure in 2003/04. Four fire services (Warwickshire, Berkshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire) have found savings equivalent to less than 4 per cent.

**Figure 11**  
**Savings made**



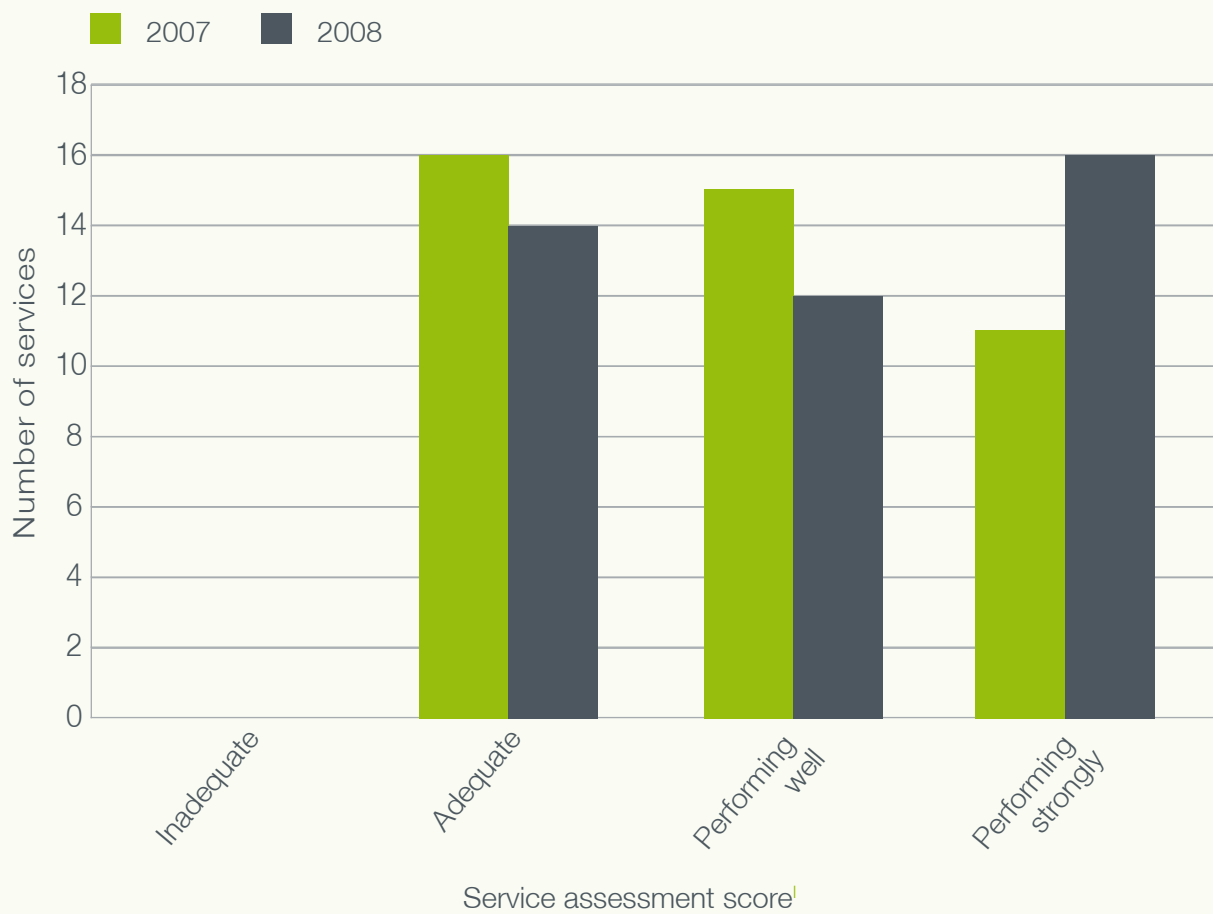
Source: Audit Commission

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# 7 | Service assessment

- 90** The fire service assessment comprises two elements: the operational assessment of service delivery (OASD) carried out in 2006, and an analysis of performance information for 2007/08.
- 91** The operational assessment element focuses on how well a fire service plans to respond to emergencies and prevent incidents. The performance information element of the service assessment score brings together a suite of performance indicators. These focus on measures of outcomes, rather than inputs or processes, including:
- the number of primary fires;
  - deaths and injuries resulting from fires; and
  - the number of deliberate fires.
- 92** Adjustments for deprivation are made where there is a clear link between local deprivation and performance, for example, fires occurring in high occupancy and deprived neighbourhoods.
- 93** Kent and Merseyside fire services do not have a 2008 service assessment because they achieved a score of excellent in the 2005 CPA and the Commission can rely on their strong service performance. The Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service does not have a service assessment score as it is not required to publish all national performance indicators. There is no service assessment score for Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service which came into being as a service in April 2007 when the separate services of Devon Fire and Rescue Service and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service combined.
- 94** The service assessment is scored on a four-point scale: 1 – inadequate, 2 – adequate, 3 – performing well, 4 – performing strongly.
- 95** The service assessments in 2008 show:
- more services in the top category. Sixteen services (38 per cent) were performing strongly in 2008 compared with 11 (26 per cent) in 2007;
  - twelve fire services (29 per cent) were performing well in 2008 compared with 15 (36 per cent) in 2007;
  - fourteen fire services (33 per cent) were performing adequately compared with 16 (38 per cent) in 2007; and
  - no service was performing inadequately.

**Figure 12**  
**Service assessment scores 2007 and 2008<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Services that had assessments in both years  
Source: Audit Commission

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# 8 | Key findings from service assessments

- 96** The 2006 OASD provided a judgement on how well fire services are preparing for and responding to emergency incidents. The judgement is valid for three years and was based on assessments undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government for the Audit Commission.
- 97** The 2006 OASD found that six services (13 per cent) were providing an adequate service overall; 28 (62 per cent) were performing well and 11 (25 per cent) performing strongly. The Isle of Wight was the only service to score as inadequate in preparation and response to emergencies. Overall the assessment found fire services perform less well in emergency response than protection and prevention.
- 98** The operational assessment found that:
- the health and safety of firefighters is a clear priority for services;
  - firefighter training is becoming more risk based, but training for RDS staff and staff above watch manager grade is not consistent;
  - effective debriefing following calls to emergencies takes place in all services, but some do not act on the lessons they learn;
  - handling emergency calls is consistently effective across all the services; and
  - risk analysis and prevention and protection from fires are managed well in all services.
- 99** In 2008, the Audit Commission assessed how fire services had addressed the issues identified in their operational assessment. Most services have completed their OASD improvement plan and put in place better arrangements to ensure operational preparedness for the future.
- 100** The government PSA targets for fire services in England came into effect on 1 April 2005. The targets are to:
- reduce the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home by 20 per cent, averaged over the 11 year period to 31 March 2010, equivalent to 280 fire-related deaths per year, compared with the average recorded in the five-year period to 31 March 1999 of 350 fire-related deaths; and,
  - achieve a 10 per cent reduction in deliberate fires by 31 March 2010 to 94,000 from the 2001/02 baseline of 104,500.
- 101** All services are performing well against the PSA target for arson. Performance in reducing deliberate fires appeared to be levelling off but this trend did not continue in 2007/08. The fire service is also on course to meet or exceed the PSA target for reducing deaths from accidental fires in the home.

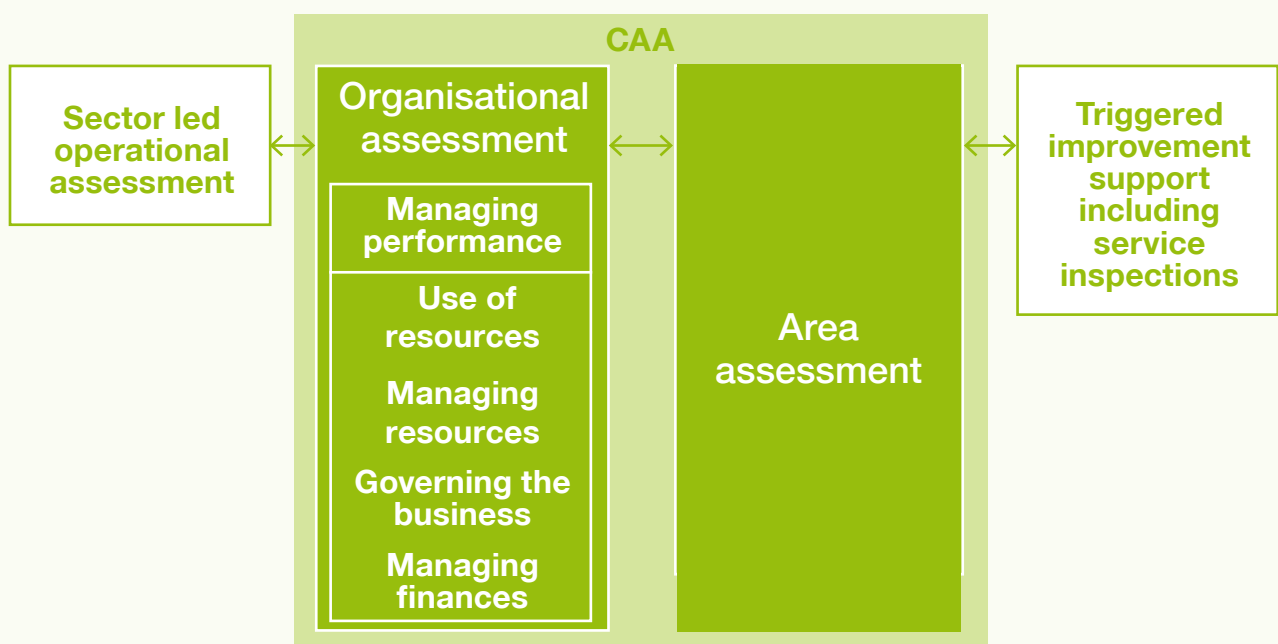
# 9 | Future assessment of fire services

## Overview

**102** From April 2009, CAA will be the independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services. The CAA framework was published in February 2009 (Ref. 10), together with a linked document *Comprehensive Area Assessment, Fire and Rescue Service Framework Document* (Ref. 11). All audit and inspection activity for fire services will be undertaken within the CAA framework. Figure 13 sets out the framework for the assessment of fire services within CAA.

**Figure 13**

**The framework for the assessment of fire services within CAA**



Source: Audit Commission

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# Future assessment of fire services

- 103** CAA will have two main elements, which will inform each other:
- an area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people in agreed priorities, such as health, economic prospects and community safety, and how likely they are to improve in the future; and
  - an organisational assessment of individual fire and rescue services, combining the appointed auditor's assessment of value for money (through the use of resources theme) with an assessment of the fire and rescue service's performance (through the managing performance theme) into a single judgement.

**104** The managing performance assessment theme reflects the specific performance and service delivery priorities within the fire sector. We will draw on the sector led operational assessment where this has been undertaken.<sup>1</sup>

## Area Assessment

**105** For the area assessment we will take the locally agreed priorities in the LAAs and the sustainable community strategies as our starting point. We will look at the prospects for future improvement in those outcomes that are most important to the local community and to people in the most vulnerable circumstances. We will take into account how well the local partners understand their local communities and reflect this in their

priorities, as well as how well served local people are currently.

- 106** In the area assessment we will be interested in the contribution that the fire and rescue service is making to improved local service outcomes. We will consider the specific challenges and opportunities for the fire and rescue service to contribute to the outcomes delivered by the local partnerships.
- 107** The three key overarching questions of the area assessment that will be applied collectively to local partners are:
- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
  - How well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
  - What are the prospects for future improvement?
- 108** There are specific areas where the fire and rescue service has an important contributory role. These include:
- engaging more effectively with local communities to build up a comprehensive risk profile for the area;
  - involving local communities in developing fire prevention, fire protection and community safety priorities;
  - ensuring that partners are engaged in larger scale emergencies, civil contingency and local resilience;
  - delivering any fire-specific priorities within the LAA; and

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<sup>1</sup> A sector-led self assessment/peer review toolkit for the operational assessment of front line fire and rescue services.

- contributing to broader local priorities, like tackling anti-social behaviour, in an effective, well coordinated and prioritised way.

**109** We will draw on a broad range of evidence to reach our area assessment conclusions. In relation to the fire and rescue service we will draw on the evidence from the organisational assessment; performance data in the National Indicator Set; the conclusions from the operational assessment and nationally available fire data.

### **Organisational assessment**

**110** We will assess the effectiveness of each fire and rescue service through an organisational assessment which combines the appointed auditor's assessment of value for money (through the use of resources theme) with an assessment of the fire and rescue service's performance (through the managing performance theme) into a single judgement. We will publish a short report on each fire and rescue service that includes the overall organisational assessment score alongside the area assessment.

**111** The organisational assessment will reflect how well individual fire and rescue services are delivering against the priorities and objectives contained in the National Framework. We will assess how each fire and rescue service is balancing effectively its prevention, protection and response functions. In doing so, we will consider how well equality and

diversity are integrated into all aspects of the service. We will also assess the impact and effectiveness of the service's contribution to broader partnership outcomes in the LAA. We will draw on a range of evidence including evidence from the operational assessment where this is available. We will involve peers from the fire sector in the managing performance theme of the organisational assessment. Assessment of progress against the requirements of the National Framework will be carried out on a three year cyclical basis which will be detailed in guidance.

**112** The fire service has been a constructive and influential stakeholder during the development of CAA. Fire services have been engaged in trialling our methodology and approach for organisational assessment. The Commission will continue to work closely with the fire service and other fire service stakeholders as we implement CAA.

**113** The first CAA reports will be published in November 2009.

# Appendix 1

## Summary of assessment scores

**114** This table displays the current fire CPA score followed by the 2008 direction of travel, use of resources and service assessment overall scores. Services are listed in alphabetical order. The change from the 2007 score is also shown where applicable.

**115** Direction of travel assessments are scored on a four-point scale from improving strongly (the highest score),

improving well, improving adequately to no improvement (the lowest score). Use of resources and service assessments are scored on a four-point scale from 1 to 4 where 4 is the highest possible score and 1 the lowest. A score of 2 represents adequate performance. The information is a summary of that provided on each fire authority scorecard on the Audit Commission website: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

### Key for CPA score table

▲ Upwards movement

▼ Downwards movement

◀▶ No change in category

No score Indicates the authority does not have a current CPA score

N/A This assessment is not applicable for the authority

Fire service	CPA score <sup>1</sup>	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment	
		2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007
Avon Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	◀▶	3	▲
Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	▼	3	◀▶	3	◀▶
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Weak	Well	◀▶	2	◀▶	2	◀▶
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority	Good	Adequately	◀▶	3	◀▶	2	◀▶
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▼	3	◀▶	4	◀▶

<sup>1</sup> This is the latest CPA score including changes from new corporate assessments carried out in 2008.



Fire service	CPA score	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment	
		2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007
Cleveland Fire Authority	Good	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	4	▶▶
Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority	Poor	Not improving adequately	▼	2	▶▶	2	▶▶
County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	▶▶	3	▲
Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	2	▼
Derbyshire Fire Authority	Fair	Strongly	▲	3	▶▶	3	▶▶
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority prior to 1 April 2007 this fire and rescue authority was: <sup>1</sup>	No Score	Well	▲	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
– Devon Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
– Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dorset Fire Authority	Good	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	4	▶▶
East Sussex Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	3	▶▶
Essex Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▶▶	2	▶▶	4	▶▶
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	4	▲
Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶▶	4	▶▶	2	▶▶
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Strongly	▲	3	▶▶	4	▶▶

<sup>1</sup> Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority did not have a service assessment in 2008 as this assessment relies upon data for the previous two years which are prior to 1 April 2007 when the combined authority was created.

# Appendix 1

## Summary of assessment scores

Fire service	CPA score	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment	
		2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Strongly	▲	3	▶▶	4	▶▶
Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	▶▶	3	▶▶
Humberside Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	▶▶	3	▲	4	▲
Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority	Poor	Well	▲	2	▶▶	3	▶▶
Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▶▶	2	▶▶	N/A	N/A
Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority	Excellent	Strongly	▶▶	4	▶▶	N/A	N/A
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	Good	Well	▼	3	▶▶	3	▲
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority	Good	Well	▲	3	▶▶	2	▶▶
Lincolnshire Fire Authority	Good	Well	▶▶	3	▶▶	4	▲
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	Excellent	Well	▼	3	▶▶	3	▶▶
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority	Excellent	Well	▶▶	4	▶▶	N/A	N/A
Norfolk Fire Authority	Good	Adequately	▶▶	3	▶▶	3	▶▶
North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▲	3	▶▶	4	▶▶
Northamptonshire Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	▶▶	2	▼	2	▶▶
Northumberland Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	▶▶	4	▲

Fire service	CPA score <sup>1</sup>	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment	
		2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007	2008	Change from 2007
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	▶◀	3	▶◀	2	▶◀
Oxfordshire Fire Authority	Good	Well	▶◀	4	▲	4	▶◀
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	Good	Adequately	▼	3	▶◀	2	▼
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority	Good	Strongly	▶◀	3	▶◀	4	▶◀
South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Weak	Well	▶◀	3	▶◀	2	▶◀
Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶◀	3	▶◀	3	▶◀
Suffolk Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▶◀	3	▶◀	3	▶◀
Surrey Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶◀	3	▶◀	2	▶◀
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▶◀	4	▲	2	▶◀
Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority <sup>1</sup>	Good	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	▶◀
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶◀	3	▶◀	2	▶◀
West Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	▶◀	4	▲
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	▶◀	4	▶◀	4	▲
Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority	Fair	Well	▲	3	▶◀	4	▶◀

<sup>1</sup> Warwickshire FRA did not have a Direction of travel or a full Use of resources assessment in 2008 because of the ongoing investigation into the Atherstone-on-Stour fire of November 2007.

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## Abbreviations

CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CDRP	Crime and disorder reduction partnership
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
HFSC	Home fire safety check
HFSV	Home fire safety visit
LAA	Local area agreement
LSP	Local strategic partnership
OASD	Operational assessment of service delivery
PSA	Public service agreement
RDS	Retained duty system

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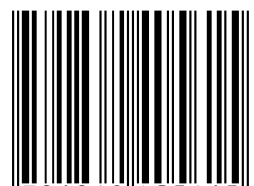
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