

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

PERFORMANCE PLAN 2006-08

1 Purpose of Report

To advise Members of the 2006-08 Performance Plan requirements for single purpose fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to agree:

- The proposed content of a two-year Performance Plan 2006-08;
- The adoption of a four-stage Strategic Planning process;
- To delegate authority to approve appropriate stages to the Strategy and Resources Committee and Performance Management Committee; and
- To delegate authority to approve the final Performance Plan to the Chair and Vice-Chair in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer.

3 Background

The Local Government Act 1999 requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to prepare an annual Performance Plan. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) released Fire Service Circular (FSC) 58-2004 in December 2004, which gives guidance on Best Value and Performance Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. Section 5 and Annex C of this document focus specifically on Performance Plans (attached at Appendix A). More recently, the ODPM has issued guidance (FSC 13-2005, see Appendix B) on improvement planning to facilitate the development and implementation of plans to address the findings arising from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).



4 Requirements

The proposed Performance Plan will align in terms of duration to the recently published two-year draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2006-08 document. The Performance Plan will take into account the CPA feedback and guidance issued within Fire Service Circular 13-2005 and will also be refreshed in appearance to render it more reader friendly.

Considering the current guidance, the following information should be included (as a minimum) in the Performance Plan, which must be published by no later than 30 June 2006:

- a) A brief summary of the Fire Authority's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement. This should reflect its corporate/business planning processes.
- b) Arrangements for addressing the Fire Authority's improvement priorities, particularly the opportunities and weaknesses identified in the CPA, and the outcomes that are expected to be achieved as a result;
- c) Details of performance:
 - Outturn performance over the past year on all Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs);
 - Targets for the current year and subsequent 2 years for all BVPIs.
- d) A brief description on contracts. The Fire Authority should state and certify that all individual contracts awarded during the past year, which involve a transfer of staff, comply, where applicable, with the requirements in the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

The Performance Plan will also incorporate additional added value information that may be beneficial to the Fire Authority's future preparations for CPA reviews during 2006/07. This will include the Fire Authority's approach to:

- i. Arrangements to review and monitor operational competencies.
- ii. Direction of travel statements.
- iii. Measures to ensure the most effective use of resources.

5 Strategic Planning Process

To facilitate the effective development of the Performance Plan and to incorporate other service planning outputs a Strategic Planning Process model (SPP) has been developed and appears at Appendix C of this report. The SPP is intended to engage a wide range of views and opinions to ensure the Fire Authority's future aims, objectives and priorities are aligned as far as is reasonably practicable to the increasingly changing environment, in which the Service operates.

The SPP includes Member involvement in both planning and scrutiny activities. It is proposed that Members, through the Strategy and Resources Committee, are engaged at the strategic planning stage (Stage 2) of the SPP and that the Performance Management Committee oversees the target setting and auditing of the Performance Plan at Stage 4 and periodically thereafter.



6 Improvement Planning

The Fire Authority's Performance Plan 2006/08 acts as the overarching strategic plan to deliver the requisite CPA improvements. CPA improvement planning has been carefully integrated within existing planning activity, thus removing the necessity to produce an additional plan that distracts attention from the Performance Plan.

7 Legal Comment

The proposed outline content of the Performance Plan conforms to legislative requirements and the latest guidance issued by ODPM. The proposal to produce a two-year performance plan will not remove the statutory obligation to produce an annual plan. It is, therefore, envisaged that during 2007/08 a position statement would be published verifying the continuing validity of the proposed Performance Plan 2006-08 and noting performance for the period 2006/07.

8 Financial Implications

Provision has been made in the budget for the production of the Performance Plan.

9 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report.

10 Appendices

- Appendix A** ODPM Circular 58-2004 Section 5 and Annex C
- Appendix B** ODPM Circular 13-2005 Improvement Planning Guidance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England
- Appendix C** Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Strategic Planning Process

11 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

25 April 2005, Report 19, Performance Plan 2005/06, and Minutes
15 June 2005, Report 4, Performance Plan 2005/06, and Minutes

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Alison Pritchard, Corporate Support Officer, on 01743 260227.





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Best Value and Improvement Planning for Fire and Rescue Authorities

Issued by:

Paul Quinn
Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Team
Fire and Rescue Service Directorate

Addressed to:

**The Commissioner of the London Fire and
Emergency Planning Authority**
All Chief Fire Officers

Summary

This document includes guidance affecting Fire and Rescue Authorities in England on:

- Improvement Planning and Best Value
- Freedoms & Flexibilities
- The application of Local Government protocol on the use of Intervention Powers to the new powers available to the Secretary of State in Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Stakeholders were consulted in FSC 28/2004, from 31 August 2004 to 26 October 2004, on proposals set out in a draft Best Value Circular for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. This circular covers the final version of the Fire and Rescue Service Best Value Circular (03/04) as amended following consultation. This document incorporates measures including:

- an improvement planning process to follow the implementation of Fire Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA);
- the role of best value in supporting improvement which applies from the date of this circular;
- guidance on Best Value Performance Plans (BVPPs) following implementation of CPA and reflecting a proportional approach in response to CPA category;
- guidance on the application of Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) principles and the code of practice on workforce matters to FRA contracts which apply from the date of this circular;
- ODPM proposals for Freedoms and Flexibilities following publication of CPA outcomes; and
- the amendment of the provisions of the Local Government Intervention Protocol to apply to the powers to intervene contained in Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

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SECTION 5 – PERFORMANCE PLANS

- 40 All successful organisations need to have effective systems in place to measure and improve performance. They need to be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses, so that they can exploit opportunities for improvement, and take steps to improve any areas that are under-performing.
- 41 This is especially important for FRAs, given their vital role in delivering high quality, essential, public services. Indeed, it is fundamental to their duty of best value, which requires them to secure continuous improvement in the way that functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. For this reason, the quality of planning and performance management will be one of the key components of the CPA assessment of corporate capacity.

FOCUS OF PERFORMANCE PLANS

- 42 The Local Government Act 1999 requires FRAs to prepare an annual Performance Plan, and this is a key element of best value. But it is important that the plan does not become an end in its own right. It is a means to an end, and is less important than the planning process that underlies it.

⁷ *Delivering Better Services for Citizens*, Local Government Procurement Taskforce, June 2001

- 43 The statutory requirement to prepare a Performance Plan provides an opportunity for FRAs to articulate their proposals for improvement for the coming year, including how weaknesses will be addressed, opportunities for more efficiency exploited, and better outcomes delivered for local people. It should also set targets for future performance.
- 44 However, it is important that the plans are not prepared in isolation from authorities' business planning and Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) action plans. FRAs should ensure that the improvement planning process that underlies the Performance Plan is integrated with their corporate planning arrangements. FRAs will also be aware from the National Framework that the implementation of IPDS is central to people and organisational management and as such, it should help underpin any performance plans.
- 45 Many FRAs carry out their business/corporate planning arrangements well ahead of the new financial year, often to coincide with budget setting timescales. The preparation of Performance Plans should fit with the timescales for business planning arrangements. FRAs can prepare and publish their Performance Plans at any time up to the end of June. However, recognising that one of the requirements for all authorities is to provide outturn BVPI data, authorities must ensure that their BVPI data is incorporated within, or annexed to, their Performance Plan by the end of June.
- 46 Where relevant, best practice clearly must be for precept and IRMP consultation to be effectively linked, and for business/corporate plans to be combined with the Performance Plan and IRMP action plan into a single document published by the IRMP implementation date of 1 April. However it is recognised that internal approval processes for individual authorities may make this difficult and the primary objective must be for the Performance Plan and IRMP to be mainstreamed into business/corporate planning arrangements as far as is practical.

AUDIENCE FOR PERFORMANCE PLANS

- 47 One of the fundamental issues for the Performance Plan is its intended audience. Circular 03/03 explained that the primary audience for the Performance Plan should be the authority itself. Elected Members and officers with responsibility for delivering quality local services need to understand the authority's improvement priorities, and how they will be addressed over the coming year. Not least because they should help shape the improvement measures being introduced.
- 48 ODPM also has a significant interest in Performance Plans. The plans contain information that enables it to monitor performance towards the Fire Public Service Agreement (PSA) as well as modernisation progress by individual FRAs.
- 49 While Performance Plans should be public documents, authorities should not view the public as the primary recipients of these plans. Indeed, authorities have found other means to engage with the public – for example through IRMP consultation. Plans should be made available to the public on request.

CONTENT OF PERFORMANCE PLANS

- 50 In accordance with the approach developed for principal authorities FRAs will implement streamlined and proportionate arrangements for Performance Plans, following their CPA assessment. These are set out in annex C.
- 51 For FRAs that are categorised in CPA as Excellent and Good, where performance is strong and corporate capacity demonstrated, ODPM will accept their own corporate plan as meeting the statutory requirement to prepare a Performance Plan, **providing** that it is identified as such, and contains the following information, necessary for the monitoring of performance:
- outturn data for Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs);
 - targets for BVPIs over the current year and subsequent 2 years; and
 - confirmation, where appropriate, that they are adopting the Code of Practice in their approach to workforce matters and contracting.

This information could simply be annexed to corporate plans/ Performance Plans.

- 52 For FRAs categorised as Fair, Weak and Poor, or those that have not received the outcome of their Fire CPA, there are only four requirements summarised in section 2 of annex C. They are intended to capture the information necessary to monitor performance, and provide a structured framework around which authorities can develop and articulate their improvement planning arrangements.

AUDIT OF PERFORMANCE PLANS

- 53 The Government is discussing the statutory requirement for the audit of performance plans with the Audit Commission and other stakeholders. In the meantime, the audit provides validation of BVPIs and reassurance about the application of the Code of Practice, and the Government proposes that it should remain in its current, streamlined, form.

SUMMARY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- 54 The Government does not intend to amend the current arrangements for producing and publishing summary performance information, as set out in paragraphs 80–83 of ODPM Circular 03/03. Accordingly, all FRAs should continue to prepare summary performance information by March each year.

SUMMARY – PERFORMANCE PLAN REQUIREMENTS

(1) Excellent and Good Fire and Rescue Authorities

- (a) The following requirements are issued under Section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999.
- (b) All Fire and Rescue Authorities categorised in CPA as Excellent and Good must include the following items in their Performance Plan:–
 - details of performance:
 - outturn performance over the past year on all Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs);
 - targets for the current year and subsequent 2 years for all BVPIs.
 - a brief statement on contracts if applicable. The authority should state and certify that all individual contracts awarded during the past year which involve a transfer of staff comply, where applicable, with the requirements in the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

(2) Fair, Weak and Poor Fire and Rescue Authorities, and any Fire and Rescue Authority where a CPA outcome has not been reported

- (a) The following requirements are issued under Section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999.
- (b) All Fire and Rescue Authorities categorised in CPA as Fair, Weak or Poor, and any Fire and Rescue Authority where a CPA has not been reported, must include the following items in their Performance Plan:
 - a brief summary of the authority's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement. This should reflect its corporate/ business planning processes.
 - arrangements for addressing the authority's improvement priorities, particularly the opportunities and weaknesses identified in CPA (or self-assessment where a CPA has not reported), and the outcomes that are expected to be achieved as a result.
 - details of performance:

- outturn performance over the past year on all Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs);
 - targets for the current year and subsequent 2 years for all BVPIs.
- a brief statement on contracts if applicable. The authority should state and certify that all individual contracts awarded during the past year which involve a transfer of staff comply, where applicable, with the requirements in the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.



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Improvement Planning Guidance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England

Issued by:

Paul Quinn
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Addressed to:

**The Commissioner of the London Fire and
Emergency Planning Authority**
All Chief Fire Officers

Summary

**This document provides further guidance affecting Fire and Rescue
Authorities in England on Improvement Planning following CPA.**

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1.0 The function of improvement planning

1.1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is a means to an end, with the primary objective of providing a baseline for improvement. As the Audit Commission completes the assessment process, ODPM and the Commission want to support each fire and rescue authority in improvement planning. Improvement Planning is a means to bring about modernisation and service improvement for local people, strengthen local delivery and performance management and improve value for money. It comprises:

- **Performance improvement activity by fire and rescue authorities:** a fire and rescue authority's strategy for building on its strengths and tackling its weaknesses, taking account of the emerging findings of the CPA. It is not about the production of a new plan but rather a recognition of what needs to be prioritised or enhanced, and built into existing strategies to bring about change and improvement. Best Value reviews, with the greater flexibility that is now available, also have an important role to play in delivering change and improvement outcomes for local people. It is also about recognising where management capacity needs to be further developed and determining how best this can be achieved – whether through improved management and control systems or through staff skill development.
- **Action led by the Audit Commission and auditors:** planning and agreeing co-ordinated and appropriate assessment and audit activities to support and recognise improvement from the CPA baseline. Working with others to identify, analyse and promote effective innovation and good practice.
- **Support from Government in response to the CPA outcomes:** the allocation of 'packages' of measures, including freedoms and flexibilities (see annex A ODPM Circular 09/04), as appropriate reflecting the performance and needs of authorities. This will include identification and provision of targeted support and capacity building measures. Working with the Audit Commission and others to identify, analyse and promote effective innovation and good practice.

1.2 The principles and processes outlined in this guidance were developed on the basis of learning from the process of improvement planning used following local government CPA. They are also the product of extensive discussion between Central Government, the Audit Commission, the Local Government Association (LGA), CFOA and other stakeholders.

2.0 The improvement plan and 'round-table'

2.1 The purpose of this part of the guidance is to provide more detail of how ODPM intends to facilitate dialogue between authorities and relevant external review and support bodies for the purposes of improvement planning. This guidance expands on the principles for improvement planning on which we consulted in the Autumn of last year and which were published in final version in December (ODPM Circular 9-2004). These processes were tested with the help of the second round CPA pilot authorities and this guidance reflects the outcomes of that work.

- 2.2** The dialogue is intended to enable the delivery of an appropriate programme of support, assessment and research activities, which reflects authorities' improvement priorities.
- 2.3** The Government announced the freedoms and flexibilities that will be available to authorities in 05/06 in Circular 9-2004, together with the way in which poor performance will be tackled. The Circular also confirmed that ODPM and LGA, as joint sponsors of the local government capacity building programme, have agreed that Fire and Rescue Authorities will have access to the programme on the same basis as local authorities. The programme consists of central funding of a range of measures at regional and national level intended to support authorities in improving and building corporate capacity. Further details of the capacity building programme are on the ODPM website (www.odpm.gov.uk/capacitybuilding) and the other sites referred to in the National Framework, or are available from your Business Change Manager (BCM).
- 2.4** Discussions are continuing with the LGA, CFOA and others concerning further support which may be available to authorities following the announcement of the CPA outcomes in August.
- 3.0 The timing of the Improvement Planning process**
- 3.1** A clear message from authorities during consultation about improvement planning is the desire to move quickly. Authorities have said that we do not need to wait until the full results of CPA are known, but should begin as soon as draft assessment reports are available and the Fire and Rescue Authority has had sufficient opportunity to consider its improvement and capacity building priorities. We have also been urged to begin early to enable integration with Fire and Rescue Authority planning processes, for example IRMP and financial planning. A seamless fit with all authorities' planning cycles may not be possible for 05/06, but authorities have confirmed that an early start on this work is the best approach. We therefore propose to begin rolling out improvement planning as soon as the first tranches of draft CPA reports are available in 2005. Where possible round-table discussions will be prioritised on the basis of CPA categories.
- 3.2** The proposed approach to improvement planning seeks to ensure authorities' ownership of their improvement agendas and to facilitate the capture of new good practice and innovation for the wider benefit of the Service. We are therefore proposing a round-table discussion with every authority, and asking authorities to share with us their draft CPA outcomes and provide us with information about their improvement proposals and capacity building plans to start this process. The proposals also seek to enable inspectors, auditors and support and research teams to develop their work programmes in an appropriate and co-ordinated way. However this must recognise that the need for performance assessment will continue to arise from, or relate to, the needs of public assurance and ministerial discretion; and that audit work will continue to be subject to auditors' professional discretion.

4.0 Facilitating dialogue between authorities and external review and support bodies

4.1 We are proposing a three-step process:

- **Step 1:** we are suggesting that authorities, after considering the results emerging from the CPA, reflect on their improvement priorities by reviewing their self-assessment and set out:
 - Their priorities for improvement
 - Their capacity building needs and intentions
 - What they think would be appropriate to support and assess improvement in these areas.

Once the authority has produced a summary of its measures and intentions for discussion, a date for the round-table can be agreed in discussion with the relevant BCM.

- **Step 2:** review and support bodies, participating in the round-table, (i.e. the Audit Commission, auditors, HMFSI, BCM) will consider the authority's improvement priorities, capacity building needs and proposals regarding support and assessment activity set out in its summary document. They will also consider other drivers for assessment, audit and support, including the needs of other authorities, statutory responsibilities and decision-making arrangements. Participating bodies will then agree, if necessary through a pre-meeting, proposals and options for support, assessment and possible study or research for discussion with the authority.
- **Step 3:** representatives from the authority and representatives from relevant external bodies will meet for a round-table discussion to:
 - Discuss the authority's priorities for improvement and capacity support
 - Seek to identify, in outline, a co-ordinated programme of assessment and support activity
 - Identify areas of strong performance for further analysis in support of capturing new good practice
 - For any CPA 'Excellent' authorities, to begin discussion of any measures authorities may wish to incorporate in their 'bespoke' agreement with ODPM.

4.2 Further engagement will be arranged as required, in order to complete and agree the programme and ongoing liaison arrangements. BCMs will produce a summary of the meeting and action points for participants. Future changes to the programme will be agreed, as appropriate.

4.3 Annex A to this guidance is a document which expands on some of the principles of effective action planning which authorities may wish to adopt in reviewing their improvement priorities in the light of their CPA outcomes and preparing a summary document.

- 4.4 Annex B expands on the process described above in a form which can also be circulated by the Fire and Rescue Authority to elected members and staff to further explain the improvement planning process and what it involves.

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Annex A

5.0 The characteristics of a good action plan

- 5.1 In considering their improvement proposals and summary documentation for discussion at the round-table, authorities will wish to have regard to the following principles in their approach to planning for improvement.
- 5.2 The best starting-point is likely to be consideration of existing, pre-CPA improvement priorities in the light of CPA outcomes and how these should be refined and developed.
- 5.3 The round-table discussion should focus on outcome-based priorities for improvement in the delivery of activities and services.
- 5.4 A good plan has an effective structure – a ‘top-down’ approach is often a good way to begin to map this out.
- 5.5 A good action plan should be ‘SMART’, with defined criteria for achievement, milestones, required resources, timetable and responsibility for delivery clearly identified.
- 5.6 The plan should address underlying performance issues, including management capacity, and link individual action areas sensibly and coherently.
- 5.7 The plan should be realistic as regards timing – prioritisation must focus on considering (a) what is important, (b) what is urgent, (c) what is achievable.
- 5.8 A good action plan must reflect long-term vision about service priorities, rather than short-term fixes.
- 5.9 It may be equally important to identify what is not a priority.
- 5.10 In considering options for building capacity in a service or activity area, the possibilities of joint or co-operative working with other authorities or through the RMB, must not be overlooked.
- 5.11 A Best Value Review may be the most effective starting-point in planning significant change in service or activity areas (further guidance on this is contained in ODPM Circular 09-2004).

5.12 However, improvement planning should not become a long-term activity in its own right, it should be, or quickly become, mainstreamed into routine business planning, IRMP and BV processes. If the authority begins this work with a separate planning process, this should indicate how activities will become mainstreamed.

6.0 CPA and Improvement Planning

6.1 What is improvement planning?

The Government intends the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for the Fire and Rescue Service to provide a basis for improvement planning. Improvement planning is a means to bring about modernisation and service improvement for local people, strengthen local delivery and performance management and improve value for money. It encompasses:

- **Performance improvement activity by Fire and Rescue Authorities:** A Fire and Rescue Authority's strategies for building on its strengths and tackling its weaknesses, taking account of the findings of the CPA. It is not about the production of a new plan but more a recognition about what needs to be prioritised or enhanced from existing strategies to bring about change and improvement. Best Value reviews, with the greater flexibility now available, also have an important role to play in delivering improvement outcomes for local people. It is also about recognising where management capacity needs to be further developed and determining how best this can be achieved – whether through improved management and control systems or through staff skill development.
- **Action led by the Audit Commission and auditors:** planning and agreeing co-ordinated and appropriate assessment and audit activities, and identification of good practice.
- **Support from Government in response to the CPA outcomes:** the allocation of 'packages' of measures, including freedoms and flexibilities, as appropriate reflecting the performance and needs of authorities. This will include identification and provision of targeted support and capacity building co-ordinated with assessment and audit activities, and if needed, intervention measures. Working with the Audit Commission and others to identify, analyse and promote effective innovation and good practice.

6.2 What do authorities need to do?

If we are to ensure that support, research, assessment and audit programmes reflect the improvement needs of the Fire and Rescue Service, we clearly need to understand the improvement agenda of each authority.

Authorities are therefore asked to provide information about their top priorities for improvement, informed by the CPA outcomes. We would also like authorities to outline how they will deliver on those agendas, and by when, in developing proposals for action.

We suggest that authorities provide us with a focused list of their priorities for improvement to separately cover:

- Outcome-based priorities for improvement in the delivery of activities and services

- Corporate improvements required in the light of their assessment. These priorities may relate to improving capacity and processes to manage and deliver improvement.

We are not asking authorities to produce an additional plan, unless they wish to do so. We are expecting authorities to implement improvement planning as part of their normal planning processes.

To minimise additional work, we suggest that authorities advise about their priorities for improvement by updating their CPA self-assessment prepared prior to arrival of the CPA team.

We also want to encourage authorities to tell us their views about the types of assessment, audit and capacity support activity that would help delivery of their priorities for improvement. We are therefore asking authorities to tell us what activities, in their view, should be undertaken and when. We aim to enable these activities to dovetail with authorities' own improvement work, wherever this can be facilitated, particularly if authorities are planning to work jointly on improvement. Thus while programming will reflect the respective statutory responsibilities and resources of the various external review and support bodies and the needs of other authorities, the authority's views will inform activity and programming, wherever flexibility exists.

Discussions about assessment and support will relate also to authorities' proposals for their best value review programme. Authorities should therefore be ready to talk about their review programme at the round table meeting.

Authorities should identify someone to liaise with the BCM firstly on the progress of their improvement planning proposals once their draft CPA report is available as the basis for planning and discussion and secondly, once this work is sufficiently advanced, to agree a date for the round table meeting with external representatives.

6.3 Does improvement planning require authorities to produce a new plan?

Authorities have generally indicated to us that they believe it is appropriate for them to integrate CPA improvement planning with existing planning activity. For example, in preparing financial information for budget cycles; in reviewing corporate and business plans and IRMPs; in reviewing Best Value review programmes; in developing more focused improvement priorities; and preparing their BVPP an/or annual plan. Most authorities have told us that they would naturally review the findings from the CPA anyway, and integrate this with ongoing improvement work.

Thus, although it is essential for authorities to provide a clear summary of their intentions and proposals for discussion at the round-table, improvement planning is not about the production of an additional plan. It is about pulling together an authority's existing priorities for improvement, taking account of the findings from CPA and consolidating and modifying the authority's priorities for improvement to reflect any new findings.

The outcomes of improvement planning should be integrated with existing plans, some elements may be reported as part of Best Value performance plans by 30 June 2005.

6.4 What should be discussed at the round-table and what happens afterwards?

The meeting will discuss the authority's improvement planning and capacity building needs and proposals and seek to identify sources of support, including:

- Fire and Rescue Service and external good practice
- Guidance and ODPM support team input
- Current or future components of the ODPM/ LGA capacity building programme available via the Regional Director of Practice
- Training and development
- Mentoring, peer or joint working support opportunities.

The meeting will also, if applicable:

- Identify any areas of strong performance and potential good practice for further study with the FRA
- Discuss operational assurance measures
- For any 'Excellent' FRA the round-table could provide an opportunity for initial discussion of any projects the FRA wishes to pursue as part of the 'bespoke' component of its freedoms and flexibilities
- Any other issues the FRA wishes to raise.

The meeting will agree ongoing liaison arrangements on the basis of the round-table discussions and action points, and having regard to the annual audit programme and any other external reviews that are planned reflecting the Audit Commission's ongoing responsibility for performance assessment of Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The BCM will produce a summary of agreed action points from the meeting and next steps.

6.5 Who will be involved in agreeing a co-ordinated assessment, audit and support programme?

The Fire and Rescue Service White Paper made clear the government's intention to introduce a performance management framework for the Service which would support modernisation and improvement. An effective process to co-ordinate the activities of the various bodies intended to assess and support the Service, reflecting each Fire and Rescue Authority's improvement priorities and activities, will be central to achieving this.

The Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Team, working through its BCMS in each Government Office, will lead the work to agree an appropriate programme of support, assessment and research activity. We will work with the following review and support bodies to co-ordinate and agree the programme:

- The Audit Commission and the appointed auditor or relationship manager
- HM Fire Service Inspectorate
- ODPM support teams for IRMP and IPDS
- ODPM's Fire and Rescue Service Research Division and the Fire Service College
- ODPM's Regional Directors of Practice and the ODPM/ LGA Local Government Capacity Building Programme

Further information on the roles of these bodies in the improvement process is contained in paragraphs 22-24 of ODPM circular 9-2004 'Guidance on Best Value and Performance Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England'.

We would normally expect attendance at round-tables for authorities categorised as 'Fair', 'Good' or 'Excellent' in their CPA to consist of the relevant BCM, HMFSI lead and CPA Team rep/ auditor. However, discussions around issues such as analysis of potential new good practice may involve the participation of some of the other bodies indicated above either at the round-table or in subsequent discussions.

6.6 Who leads the process of improvement planning?

Authorities must own the process of improvement planning if this is to have a real impact on local services. ODPM would expect each authority to nominate the Chair for the round-table discussion, regardless of its CPA outcome. Where significant corporate weaknesses are indicated by a CPA 'Poor' or 'Weak' outcome however, ODPM will work closely with the authority from the outset to support the development and implementation of its improvement plan.

The arrangement and co-ordination of round-table meetings will be managed locally by your BCM who will liaise with other attendees and contact you to confirm dates for exchanging information and arranging meetings.

6.7 When will improvement planning begin?

ODPM and other external bodies will work with authorities on improvement planning from when the first tranche of draft CPA reports become available in early 2005 onwards. We propose to phase this work. ODPM engagement with improvement planning will be based on the principles outlined in the guidance on Best Value and Improvement planning set out in ODPM circular 9-2004. They are designed to enable a proportionate approach, allowing more direct engagement with the improvement planning of authorities with lower scorings in the CPA.

We propose to begin the roll-out with authorities in the lower indicated CPA category as far as possible. This will allow a longer lead-in time, prior to CPA publication, for authorities who are likely to have lower scores to:

- Enable discussions with support and assessment bodies to feed into authority decisions about improvement priorities, financial planning and best value review programmes

- Agree programmes of support, assessment and audit.

Authorities are urging us to start this process as soon as possible. We are therefore suggesting authorities review their top priorities for improvements and plans for delivery immediately upon receipt of their final draft CPA report.

6.8 Who from authorities should be involved?

Each authority will need to decide who should be engaged in developing its improvement priorities and views on assessment and support activities. Each authority will need to determine who should attend the round-table meeting to represent the authority and who it wishes to nominate as Chair. However, trials of the round-table process with the pilot authorities indicated that the active participation of the Authority Chair/ lead elected member and the Chief Fire Officer can add considerable value to the process.

6.9 How does improvement planning link with best value review programmes?

Authorities are still required to review all services using best value reviews, but there is now much greater flexibility for the timing and nature of reviews.

Review monitoring should be drawn up alongside improvement plans and the round-table meeting will allow proposed review programmes to be discussed with the auditor and with support bodies.

Best Value reviews provide an invaluable tool to address the weaknesses and opportunities for improvement identified through improvement planning. In particular, reviews can help where:

- There is a need to improve performance on a shared or local priority
- Authorities are unclear about the objectives of an activity or service
- There is a need or opportunity for step change in performance.

In devising their review programmes authorities should focus on areas that present the most serious challenges and opportunities.

6.10 Operational performance is not directly assessed in CPA – how will the public be assured that a weak or poor CPA result is not reflected in emergency response?

Following CPA, HMFSI will, where necessary, work with Fire and Rescue Authorities to support effective operational performance as part of the improvement planning process. Other than in exceptional circumstances, these activities will not constitute any form of additional inspection activity. Should any authorities be identified as 'weak' or 'poor' by CPA, with significant performance management issues, HMFSI will work appropriately with the authority, from draft report stage, to enable it to provide public assurance that operational performance is fully effective.

6.11 What is the role of Regional Management Boards?

Following publication of all CPA reports by the Commission, we propose to hold a round-table meeting with each Regional Management Board (RMB). These will discuss progress towards delivering the major objectives through the RMB, on the basis of the additional information CPA will provide. It is not proposed that the individual improvement plans of authorities, or other issues, are discussed at this round-table unless authorities themselves wish to raise them.

Further advice on this process will appear in due course.

