

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT NATIONAL REPORT JANUARY 2006

1 Purpose of Report

The Audit Commission published its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), Fire and Rescue National Report in January 2006. The report considers the findings of the CPA assessments carried out in 2005. This report summarises that document.

2 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Approve the attendance of the Chair of the Fire Authority at the Audit Commission Reference Group meetings.

3 Background

The 2001 Local Government White paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* introduced the concept of CPA for local authorities. CPA assessments for Fire and Rescue Services were carried out between January and April 2005 and the reports were published on the Audit Commission website in July and August 2005.

The national report considers the findings of the assessments and:

- Outlines the overall performance of fire and rescue authorities and the influence of local factors on performance;
- Identifies what fire and rescue authorities do well and areas for improvement;
- Identifies the actions required to secure future improvement; and
- Considers what impact CPA has had in driving improvement in fire and rescue authorities.

The report has been informed by the findings of a survey of Chief Fire Officers and fire and rescue authority chairs commissioned by the Audit Commission and undertaken by MORI.



4 Summary Findings

This section is a précis of the summary contained within the National Document.

- While there is a clear appetite for change in fire and rescue authorities, the pace varies substantially and improvement has not been achieved to the extent that might be expected.
- Forty-seven per cent of fire and rescue authorities have been categorised as good or excellent.
- Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities and authorities serving larger populations, with larger budgets, tend to perform better. Capacity and the ability to achieve economies of scale are an issue for many fire and rescue authorities, but some smaller fire and rescue authorities have achieved good performance, despite capacity constraints.
- Leadership within senior management is often strong but the best performing authorities combine this with a well-developed and active role for elected members to good effect. Elected members must play a greater role in providing leadership, scrutiny and political accountability in fire and rescue authorities. Good political and managerial leadership drives modernisation and improvement in fire and rescue authorities.
- The fire and rescue service employs over 50,000 people. Managing the skills and capacity of staff is, however, a significant weakness for many fire and rescue authorities and none achieves top levels of performance.
- Managing and developing the skills of staff must also be supported by changes to working practices, such as making changes to shift systems or other working arrangements, to increase effectiveness and efficiency. Limited progress on this issue has meant that fire and rescue authorities are not fully realising their potential or their capacity to deliver on priorities, such as community fire safety.
- Diversity and equality are longstanding issues for the fire and rescue service, particularly in rural areas. There is still much progress that can be made to improve diversity in the fire and rescue service, both in relation to the composition of the workforce and the way in which the service engages with diverse communities.
- Performance management is the area where fire and rescue authorities most consistently under-perform. Almost two-thirds of authorities are only at or below minimum standards.
- Fire and rescue authorities spent £1.7 billion of public money in 2003/04. While value for money is often considered, it is less often delivered. This is restricting the ability to reallocate resources to where they are most needed, which is hampering improvement. Linking performance to spending is essential to running an effective fire and rescue authority. The links are not in place, however, in many fire and rescue authorities.



5 Recommendations to Bring about Further Improvement

The summary outlines what needs to be done to bring about further improvements in the service delivered by fire and rescue authorities. In short these are:

- **Fire and rescue authorities** should accelerate the pace of change by addressing working conditions and practices, seeking to fill skills gaps in key areas with those best placed to deliver them. They should improve performance management, support to, and development of, elected members and prioritise the achievement of equality and diversity in the Service.
- **Local government** should carefully consider the appointment of representatives to fire and rescue authorities to ensure that they are suitable and well equipped to provide strategic leadership.
- **The Government** should note that Fire and Rescue CPA appears to demonstrate a pattern of performance by different types of fire and rescue authority, which merits further investigation.
- **The Audit Commission** should continue to support improvement through development of a new assessment framework for fire and rescue authorities.

6 Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

Although Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority does not appear as a case study, it does feature on several occasions within the report:

- Population size is one factor that does show a small, but significant, relationship to overall performance. Fire and rescue authorities serving a larger population base have a tendency to perform better. However, serving a larger population is no guarantee of better performance and there are examples of strong overall performance across all sizes of fire and rescue authorities. Shropshire and Wrekin, a good fire and rescue authority, serves the second smallest mainland population (Page No 11, Paragraph 30).
- The report highlights examples of effective community engagement. It states that most fire and rescue authorities are developing their approaches, with Shropshire and Wrekin cited as an example of good practice regarding the use of Scrutiny Panels, focus groups, public meetings and internet communication being used to inform improvement priorities (Page 24, Table 1).
- There are examples of strong overall performance in fire and rescue authorities with both small and large budgets. Dorset, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Shropshire and Wrekin fire and rescue authorities all have comparatively low budgets and cost per head of population yet achieve good overall performance (Page 28, Paragraph 67).
- Good authorities, including Shropshire and Wrekin, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire employ some of the smallest workforces nationally but make the most of their enthusiastic and motivated staff. Furthermore, they are able to recognise their capacity weaknesses and build on their strengths. An example being their ability to prioritise and bring extra capacity through partnership (Page 35, Paragraph 80).



7 What Happens Next?

The Audit Commission will enter a period of consultation with fire and rescue authorities and stakeholders from March 2006 on an appropriate framework for future assessments. It is envisaged that the work will be based on the following:

- An annual service assessment. The methodology used will be directly applicable to all types of fire and rescue authority and will have greater emphasis on service delivery, including operational performance;
- An annual assessment of improvement (or deterioration) through a scored direction of travel assessment; and
- An annual use of resources judgement. This will assess the authority across a broad range of financial issues, and provide a scored judgement on whether the fire and rescue authority is providing value for money.

The Audit Commission wishes to establish a reference group and has invited a number of Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority Chairs to attend meetings to observe and test out proposals ahead of the consultation period. Cllr. Morgan is amongst the invitees.

Work on the above areas has commenced and will be reported to the Combined Fire Authority via its strategic planning process.

8 Further Details

The Audit Commission has published a summary of the report, which is attached as an Appendix.

To view the full version of the report, please follow the link below to the Audit Commission website:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/fire/firelearning.asp?page=index.asp&area=hped>

9 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising directly out of this report.

10 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no equality or diversity implications associated with this report.

12 Appendix

Fire and Rescue Summary January 2006, Comprehensive Performance Assessment



13 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

6 February 2003, Report 14 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment
28 May 2003, Report 14 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment
17 December 2003, Report 14 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment
6 May 2004, Report 14 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment
15 December 2004, Report 17 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Finance and Performance Management Committee

25 September 2003, Report 14 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Interim Report
20 January 2005, Report 5 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the Fire and Rescue Service.
10 March 2005, Report 9 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment

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.



Fire and rescue

Summary

January 2006



Appendix to report on
Comprehensive Performance Assessment
National Report January 2006
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
8 February 2006

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Learning from CPA for the
Fire and Rescue Service in England 2005

- 1 The 2003 Fire and Rescue White Paper¹ set out the improvement agenda for fire and rescue authorities, including the development of a performance assessment framework. Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) examines how well fire and rescue authorities are being run to meet the needs of local people and sets a baseline for measuring improvement. It does not give an opinion on how well fire and rescue authorities respond to emergency incidents.
- 2 Fire and rescue authorities are changing. The programme of modernisation aims to implement a more targeted and risk-based approach to prevention, protection and emergency response. While there is a clear appetite for change in fire and rescue authorities the pace varies substantially and improvement has not been achieved to the extent that might be expected.
- 3 Forty-seven per cent of fire and rescue authorities have been categorised as good or excellent. However, only a small proportion of fire and rescue authorities are performing across the board at above minimum requirements. Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities and authorities serving larger populations, with larger budgets, tend to perform better. Capacity and the ability to achieve economies of scale are an issue for many fire and rescue authorities, but some smaller fire and rescue authorities have achieved good performance despite capacity constraints. Partnership activity is starting to address these but authorities and government should seek to identify new ways of creating capacity and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.
- 4 Leadership within senior management is often strong but the best performing authorities combine this with a well-developed and active role for elected members to good effect. Elected members must play a greater role in providing leadership, scrutiny and political accountability in fire and rescue authorities. Good political and managerial leadership drives modernisation and improvement in fire and rescue authorities.
- 5 The fire and rescue service employs over 50,000 people. However, managing the skills and capacity of staff is a significant weakness for many fire and rescue authorities and none achieves top levels of performance. Firefighters and support staff are the backbone of fire and rescue authorities but further improvement is needed to ensure that they have the skills and support they need to deliver the modernisation agenda. There is also a reluctance to recruit to skilled posts, such as human resources and communications,

¹ The Fire and Rescue White Paper 2003, available at www.odpm.gov.uk/fire.

from outside the service. Greater progress to implement fully the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) is essential to making the most of staff.

- 6 Managing and developing the skills of staff must also be supported by changes to working practices, such as making changes to shift systems or other working arrangements, to increase effectiveness and efficiency. Limited progress on this issue has meant that fire and rescue authorities are not fully realising their potential or their capacity to deliver on priorities such as community fire safety.
- 7 Diversity and equality are longstanding issues for the fire and rescue service, particularly in rural areas. Only 2.1 per cent of fire and rescue authority staff are from black and minority ethnic communities (BME) and only 2.4 per cent of the operational workforce are women. There is still much progress that can be made to improve diversity in the fire and rescue service both in relation to the composition of the workforce and the way in which the service engages with diverse communities.
- 8 Performance management underpins improvement across the fire and rescue service. It enables fire and rescue authorities to understand if they are making the most of their resources and maximising their impact to deliver on priorities. Performance management is the area where fire and rescue authorities most consistently under-perform. Almost two-thirds of authorities are only at or below minimum standards.
- 9 Fire and rescue authorities spent £1.7 billion of public money in 2003/04. While value for money is often considered it is less often delivered. This is restricting the ability to reallocate resources to where they are most needed, which is hampering improvement. Linking performance to spending is essential to running an effective fire and rescue authority. However, the links are not in place in many fire and rescue authorities. Metropolitan and larger authorities tend to perform better in their approach to use of resources and value for money.
- 10 The CPA process has already had an impact on strategic planning processes in almost all fire and rescue authorities. Furthermore, almost nine out of ten chief fire officers (CFOs) feel that CPA is a driver for change and a majority of chairs and CFOs would choose to go through the process again, even if it was not compulsory.

- 11 To bring about further improvement in the service delivered by fire and rescue authorities we have made a number of recommendations:
- **Fire and rescue authorities** should accelerate the pace of change by addressing working conditions and practices, seeking to fill skills gaps in key areas with those best placed to deliver them. They should improve performance management, support to and development of elected members and prioritise the achievement of equality and diversity in the service.
 - **Local government** should carefully consider the appointment of representatives to fire and rescue authorities to ensure that they are suitable and well equipped to provide strategic leadership.
 - **The government** should note that Fire and Rescue CPA appears to demonstrate a pattern of performance by different types of fire and rescue authority which merits further investigation.
 - **The Audit Commission** should continue to support improvement through development of a new assessment framework for fire and rescue authorities.

❗ Copies of the full report are available at: www.audit-commission.gov.uk
or to order a printed copy telephone: **0800 502030** quoting stock code: **LNR3304**

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