

## Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009 Results (Embargoed until 9 December 2009)

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204.

### 1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of the recently issued results, arising from the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) regime.

### 2 Recommendations

Members are recommended to note the contents of this report and appended CAA report.

### 3 Background

The 2006 Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' set out proposals for a new local performance framework, including the CAA. CAA represents a fundamental change in the approach of the public service inspectorates. CAA came into force on 1 April 2009, replacing the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime, and is the new way of putting information in the hands of taxpayers, service users and citizens.

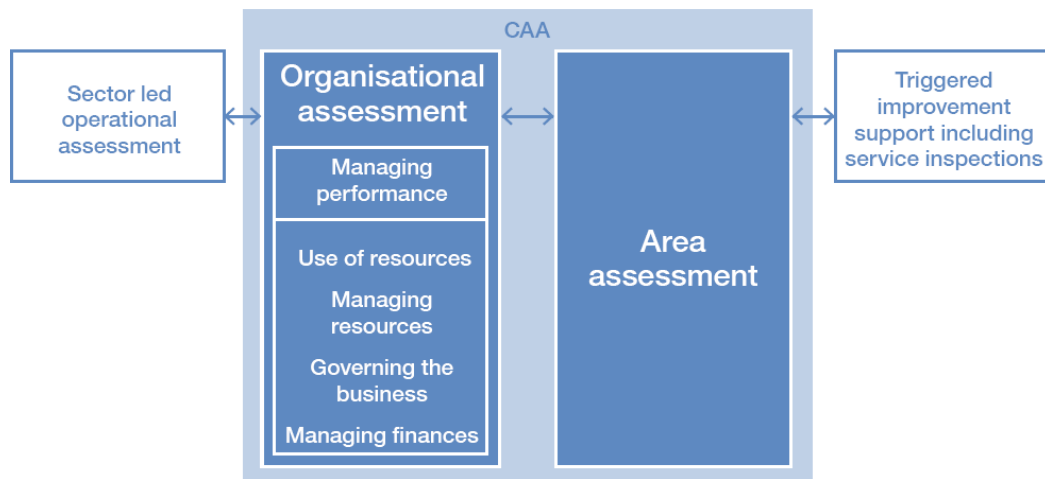
CAA has been developed to work closely with the new Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the National Indicator Set as part of a single system. It represents a significant change in the approach to assessment and inspection, reflecting the changes in local public services and the changing needs and expectations of citizens. A core principle of CAA is that it should be rooted in the needs and aspirations of local people and will focus on outcomes and quality of life in an area.

The CAA is not an 'inspection event' but an annual assessment with two components: an Area Assessment and an Organisational Assessment.

## 4 CAA - Overview

The CAA is very different from the CPA in that it has focused on outcomes for local people (particularly through the Area Assessment), rather than on processes. The CAA also considers how well local public bodies work with each other, the private and third sectors<sup>1</sup>, other organisations working locally, including town and parish councils, and their local communities.

The CAA has two elements: **Area Assessment** and **Organisational Assessment**, which inform each other. The Audit Commission represents the relationship between the two in the following way:



### Area Assessment

The area assessment is reported as a narrative accompanied by green and red flags. There is no overall score. The assessment focuses on three questions:

- How well do local priorities express community needs and aspiration?
- How well are outcomes and improvements being delivered?
- What are the prospects for improvement?

### Organisational Assessment

This is an expanded 'Use of Resources' assessment, which was part of CPA. It will be used to measure partner organisations as well as councils. It is scored, and scores will be affected, by relevant green and red flags in the area assessment.

<sup>1</sup> The 'third sector' may be defined as voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals etc.

## 5 CAA Results 2009

The Commission's CAA report (Final) for Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority is appended to this report. In summary, the Commission has stated that the Fire Authority:

**'performs well (Overall Score – 3)'**

The Organisational Assessment reviewed five areas and the following scores were awarded:

<b>Managing performance</b>	<b>3 out of 4</b>
<b>Use of resources</b>	<b>3 out of 4</b>
<b>Managing finances</b>	<b>3 out of 4</b>
<b>Governing the business</b>	<b>3 out of 4</b>
<b>Managing resources</b>	<b>3 out of 4</b>

The following CAA definition of scores is provided:

- 1** An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements  
Performs Poorly
- 2** An organisation that meets only minimum requirements  
Performs Adequately
- 3** An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements  
Performs Well
- 4** An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements  
Performs Excellently

Within England, and subject to final confirmation, it is understood that only one fire authority has achieved an overall score of **4**, 26 fire authorities achieved scores of **3**, 17 achieved scores of **2** and one fire authority scored **1**.

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's Area Assessment contains no green or red flags.

The organisational assessment will appear on the *Oneplace* website. This is a new, joint inspectorate website for independent information about the performance and prospects for improvement of local public services throughout England.

The website may be viewed at:

<http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

## 6 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## 7 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 fire and rescue authorities, are required, through the Local Government Act 1999, to participate in the assessments undertaken by the Audit Commission.

## 8 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.

## 9 Further Information

Full details regarding CAA may be obtained from the Audit Commission's website at:

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/framework.asp>

## 10 Appendix

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Organisational 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.

Balance Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	*
Comprehensive Performance Assessment	*	Operational Assurance	*
Equality and Diversity		Retained	
Efficiency Savings		Risk and Insurance	
Environmental		Staff	
Financial	*	Strategic Planning	
Fire Control/Fire Link		West Midlands Regional Management Board	

# Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

## Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



**oneplace**

for an independent overview  
of local public services

# Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

## Overall, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	3 out of 4
Managing resources	3 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

## Summary

Overall, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority performs well. The fire and rescue authority is delivering its priority services well and has the capability to continue to improve. Leadership is good, managers and members work together, and with local people to agree priorities. They make sure that there are enough resources (like people, money and equipment) to deliver what they promise. It is a learning organisation and understands the diverse needs of its communities and is targeting effort at the most vulnerable.

Shropshire is becoming safer from fire. Property fires have reduced by more than last year. Arson is greatly reducing. Fires in businesses have reduced but the number of accidental house fires increased in Telford. The number of house fires reduced in Shropshire, deaths reduced but injuries increased slightly. Overall the severity of fire has reduced. The fire and rescue authority has a good health and safety culture resulting in fewer accidents.

Good progress is being made in implementing many aspects of the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11. Response standards have been set and agreed with local people. Resilience plans are in place and tested. Retained staff are well supported to provide an effective service to the rural community. It is reducing its impact on the environment.

The authority works well with partners like the police and local councils. Community leadership is strong. This is reducing anti-social behaviour. Targeting of home fire safety work towards the more vulnerable is good.

Youth education in schools covers drugs, smoking, alcohol, bullying, hate crime and unhealthy eating.

But there are further improvements that could be made. There are not enough women fire fighters. Response standards for life risk road traffic collisions fall slightly below target.

The authority focuses on doing what local people want and provides high quality services at medium cost. The opinions of local people are used to decide on financial priorities and changes to service delivery. The authority makes realistic plans and ensures the budget and the people are focused effectively.

Managers use information about performance and services well. Arrangements are in place to ensure good data quality. There are clear structures, rules and regulations, and a strongly supportive culture, so people know what they are supposed to be doing and can get on with doing it. The authority can show how investment has led to improvements such as the improved retained service. The authority reviews what it is spending monthly so savings can be made quickly when needed. Savings are put back into priority services. Services are improving each year and resources invested in ways that will make sure improvements continue.

## About Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority serves a population of 448,900 living in 200,000 dwellings. It covers two authorities Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Borough Council, each with different population demographics. In rural Shropshire the proportion of older people is higher than average. All age groups have increased over the past twenty years, more notable the older population, which has increased by 34.3% compared to the average of around 10-15%. In the more urban area of Telford & Wrekin, there is a relatively high population of working age people and it provides 30% of the jobs in the area. Again all age groups have increased. But despite there being an overall younger population in the area, the proportion of young people has in fact declined in the last five years. The White British population dominates both areas, with the largest minority group the Asian/Asian British population.

Shropshire is England's largest inland county occupying approximately 3,490 square kilometres. Rural isolation and access to services are issues for some communities. The major route running across Shropshire is the M54/A5 and from north to south is the A49. To manage the risks in the area, the Service has 23 fire stations, with 657 staff of which 225 are wholetime fire fighters and 329 retained. It attended 6, 730 incidents in 2008/09.

The vision is 'Putting Shropshire's Safety First'. The five strategic aims reflect the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities. These are;

- Reduce the risk to life and material loss from fires, road traffic collisions and

other emergencies in the community

- Protect life, property and the environment from fire and other emergencies
- Secure the highest level of safety and welfare/wellbeing for all staff and Authority members
- Provide a sustainable service that demonstrates quality and best value in service provision
- Provide a service committed to the highest levels of Equality and Diversity

## Organisational assessment

### Reduce the risk to life and material loss from fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in the community

The fire and rescues authority is helping to make Shropshire safer. It has carried out home fire safety checks in 33 per cent of dwellings. It understands its community well. The number of property fires has fallen from 1057 to 979 in the last year. The level of improvement is better than last year. However, the number of accidental house fires has gone up with 273 in 2008/09 but 155 were out on arrival. Only 12 fires spread beyond the room of origin and in 46 per cent the smoke alarm worked. There was a reduction in deaths and a slight increase in injuries from 9 to 11. But the figure is small and the downward trend remains.

Arson is greatly reducing. Deliberate car fires reduced from 232 to 187 and house fires reduced from 202 to 155 in the last year, over 20 per cent. The fire and rescue authority is making businesses safer. It has an effective risk based inspection programme. The innovative use of short audits by operational staff has raised awareness of the importance of fire safety to local businesses. This extends to rural areas as fire fighters working on the Retained Duty System (RDS) do this work too. RDS fire fighters have other occupations and are available on call for a certain number of hours per week and live or work close to their local fire stations.

Business fires have reduced from 198 to 179 in the last year.

Strong partnership working is contributing to overall improvements in the wider safer and stronger communities agenda. For example, RDS staff are fitting door chains to those vulnerable to burglary. The fire and rescue authority is leading a 'Single Assessment Process' through which any agency in contact with vulnerable clients will be able to forward safety and welfare issues to the right source of help. Youth education programs include awareness and discouragement of; drugs, smoking, alcohol, bullying, hate crime, unhealthy eating and general anti social behaviour. Prevention teams including all operational staff are trained in Child Protection. Road casualty reduction work is good. A strong campaign to raise road awareness for motorcyclists has improved safety. However, road deaths and seriously injured have gone up in Shropshire.



The fire and rescue authority is effective in tackling false alarms. The number of attendances to automatic fire alarms in non-domestic properties has reduced by 21 per cent and the number of malicious false alarms attended by 22 per cent. This frees up firefighter time for more constructive activity and reduces the environmental impact.

## **Protect life, property and the environment from fire and other emergencies**

The fire and rescue authority responds well to emergencies. It has clearly defined and communicated risk based response standards to all life risk fires, road traffic collisions and water rescue incidents. These set challenging targets to provide a quality service to local people. The pass rate is set at 85 per cent for life risk fires. And overall this was achieved in 89 per cent of cases but the subsidiary target which requires more fire fighters at the incident was less successful. Careful monitoring of each failure resulted in improvements towards the end of the year.

Reducing the environmental impact is key to the intervention actions chosen. The fire and rescue authority measures this as part of its environmental management strategy.

Contingency and emergency plans are in place for sites identified via site risk scanning and the Local Resilience Forum. Exercises are now taking place to test procedures and competencies.

## **Secure the highest level of safety and welfare/wellbeing for all staff and authority members**

Sickness absence for wholtime fire fighters is low at 5 days. A good health and safety culture is in place. The robust training programme for staff is a positive, along with the active monitoring and investigation process, demonstrating further commitment to challenging targets. Retained staff are becoming more aware of dynamic risk assessment or the safe person concept. And staff are involved in fewer accidents at work.

RDS staff are well supported in training on core skills and competencies in many areas. Assurance has been provided that training is delivered well to all staff, competence is achieved and that a systematic assessment process exists. There is a positive culture at station level and this affects the attitude to learning through effective debrief. The acceptance of a no blame approach leads to a positive learning environment.

## **Provide a sustainable service that demonstrates quality and best value in service provision**

The fire and rescue authority has a track record of delivering continuous improvement. It scored 'improving strongly' in the previous assessment

regime. It provides good value for money and sets clear boundaries for partnership working. Both budget and changes to service delivery via the integrated risk management plan are influenced by the views of local communities. Corporate governance is effective with strong levels of member involvement in the direction of the service. The service baselined its environmental impact in December 2007. This had reduced from 925 to 849 by March 2009.

## **Provide a service committed to the highest levels of equality and diversity**

The fire and rescue authority has achieved Level 4 of the Local Government Equality standard. It sets a high priority on tackling inequalities. Equality impact assessments are routinely undertaken. It looks further than the six strands by considering the inequality of rural issues in all the work it undertakes. However, one key weakness is its lack of success in recruiting women fire fighters.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ  
Telephone: 0844 798 1212  
Fax: 0844 798 2945  
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)



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