

Fire and rescue

National report

January 2008

 **audit**  
commission



# Fire and rescue performance assessment

Scores and analysis of performance in fire and rescue  
authorities 2007

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# Summary

- 1** All fire services<sup>1</sup> in England have improved the safety of their local communities since our last assessment but there is scope for further improvement. Fire services have become better at preventing fires and reducing the impact on life and property when they do occur. This has been achieved through a better understanding of who is at greatest risk from fire and targeting efforts towards protecting people in the most vulnerable circumstances.
- 2** The number of fires in England continues to fall and fire deaths are at their lowest levels since the 1950s. All but four (10 per cent) fire services are on track to achieve the national target for a 20 per cent reduction in fire deaths by 2010. These fire services have not been on target for two years or more and serve large populations.
- 3** All fire services are on track to meet the government's target for reducing total numbers of fires and they are performing well against national targets to reduce arson. However, although targets are being met, there are concerns that performance is starting to level off. This may have implications for performance in future years.
- 4** Direction of travel assessments for 2007 show that all fire services are improving. Over half are improving well and five fire services (10 per cent) are improving strongly. However the rate of improvement in almost a third (30 per cent) of fire services has slowed. This is often due to weak performance management systems and insufficient capacity to deliver priorities.
- 5** All fire services show great commitment to delivering imaginative campaigns to improve community safety, such as projects to deter young people from starting fires or targeting home fire risk assessments to have maximum impact in reducing deaths and injuries from fire. But this is not always matched by rigorous evaluation of their impact. Almost half (45 per cent) of fire services cannot demonstrate the costs and benefits of their community safety work. Only the better performing services can demonstrate real impact.

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**1** 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.

- 6 Partnership working is now a key feature in all fire services. Working with others such as councils, police and health services helps fire services to deliver their targets. Working with councils to reduce anti-social behaviour helps to reduce arson. Working with police helps to improve road safety. Partnership working enables fire services to contribute to wider outcomes such as improving local environments and providing support for vulnerable older people. In high-performing areas, partnership working has evolved to the extent that the fire service not only participates in local partnerships, but leads and influences joint work to drive better outcomes.
- 7 In this year's use of resources assessments 37 fire services (80 per cent) are performing well, with 38 (83 per cent) retaining last year's score. Fire services continue to have good financial arrangements and most have reliable systems for financial reporting and manage financial risks well. No fire service is performing inadequately, but equally only four fire services (8 per cent) are performing strongly.
- 8 An important component of the overall use of resources assessment is the value for money judgement. No fire service is performing strongly on this component. However, all services are achieving some efficiency savings, and 31 fire services (67 per cent) are meeting their efficiency targets. Some services are now improving value for money by addressing more challenging issues such as levels of fire cover and staff numbers, matching resources to risk and demand. Most are changing traditional shift systems and working practices to free up resources for fire prevention work. Improvements in handling 999 emergency calls are reducing hoax calls and false alarms. This reduces unnecessary call-outs, saving time and resources. All are working in partnership to build capacity for community safety projects.
- 9 Business processes are improving. Better business planning is supporting the delivery of local and national priorities. Integrated Risk Management Plans are of generally good quality, with clearly defined local priorities based on a sound understanding of the most vulnerable people and places. This has been achieved through better arrangements for consulting local people and more effective work at the neighbourhood level. Performance management has shown a marked improvement. Thirty-one (67 per cent) services have significantly improved their approach this year. But there is still room for improvement in all fire services, particularly in data quality and evaluation of outcomes.

- 10 No fire service demonstrates good practice in its approach to equalities and diversity, so senior managers and fire authority members need to improve their leadership in this area. London Fire Brigade is one of the few services that is making a noticeable difference. All can learn more from their public sector partners.
- 11 While awareness of equality and diversity is improving in all fire services, the lack of a diverse workforce remains a major issue, because it significantly reduces the service's ability to reach and educate different communities about the risks from fire. It also reduces the accessibility of the service to minority communities.
- 12 Even where the proportion of female firefighters and staff from minority ethnic communities is increasing, numbers remain very low and are not representative of the communities they serve. There are a few examples of services using partnership working to increase the diversity of the public face of the service, for example using female community safety staff and volunteers to support home fire risk assessments and bilingual advocates to deliver fire safety messages. However, all fire services still have a long way to go.

# 1

## Background

- 13** There are 46 fire and rescue 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 who are members of the authority. Collectively, fire services spent over £2.1 billion of public money in 2006/07. This is funded through a mix of council tax and grants from government. The government's comprehensive spending review settlement will result in limited growth budgets over the next three years as well as a target for at least 1.6 per cent annual efficiency savings.
- 14** The service employs around 50,300 people nationally, including 42,700 firefighters, 6,200 support staff and 1,400 control staff. Two-thirds of all fire stations are staffed by retained (volunteer) firefighters. Retained firefighters respond to calls from work or home both day and night. They attend the same type of calls as full-time staff and provide added cover for many whole-time stations.
- 15** The role of the fire service in responding to emergencies is well understood and held in high regard by the public. The service responds to individual emergencies as well as large-scale fires and major incidents, such as the 2007 floods. In the last year there has been a six per cent increase in major fires in business premises. The number of firefighter deaths is the highest since 1957 following the tragic death of four firefighters at a single factory fire last year.
- 16** As well as responding to emergencies, including fires, flooding and road traffic accidents, the service works in communities to reduce risk and prevent fires. The total number of fires recorded in England has fallen by over 20 per cent in the past five years. Deaths and injuries from fire are at their lowest levels since the 1950s. The latest figures (**Ref. 1**) show that the fire service attended 159,300 primary<sup>I</sup> fires, a 6 per cent decrease on the previous year. The number of accidental house fires decreased, continuing a steady decline since 1985. Secondary fires<sup>II</sup> rose by 6 per cent, mainly because of an increase in grass fires during the hot summer of 2006.

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**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.

- 17 Fire services work in a wide range of social and geographical environments. Services working in mainly rural areas face the challenge of small populations and long distances to travel to emergencies. Those in urban areas deal with large populations in compact localities. This leads to different fire risks and variations in the size and make-up of local fire services. Rural services tend to be small and reliant on retained firefighters. Urban services tend to be large and rely mainly on full-time firefighters.

## Fire service modernisation

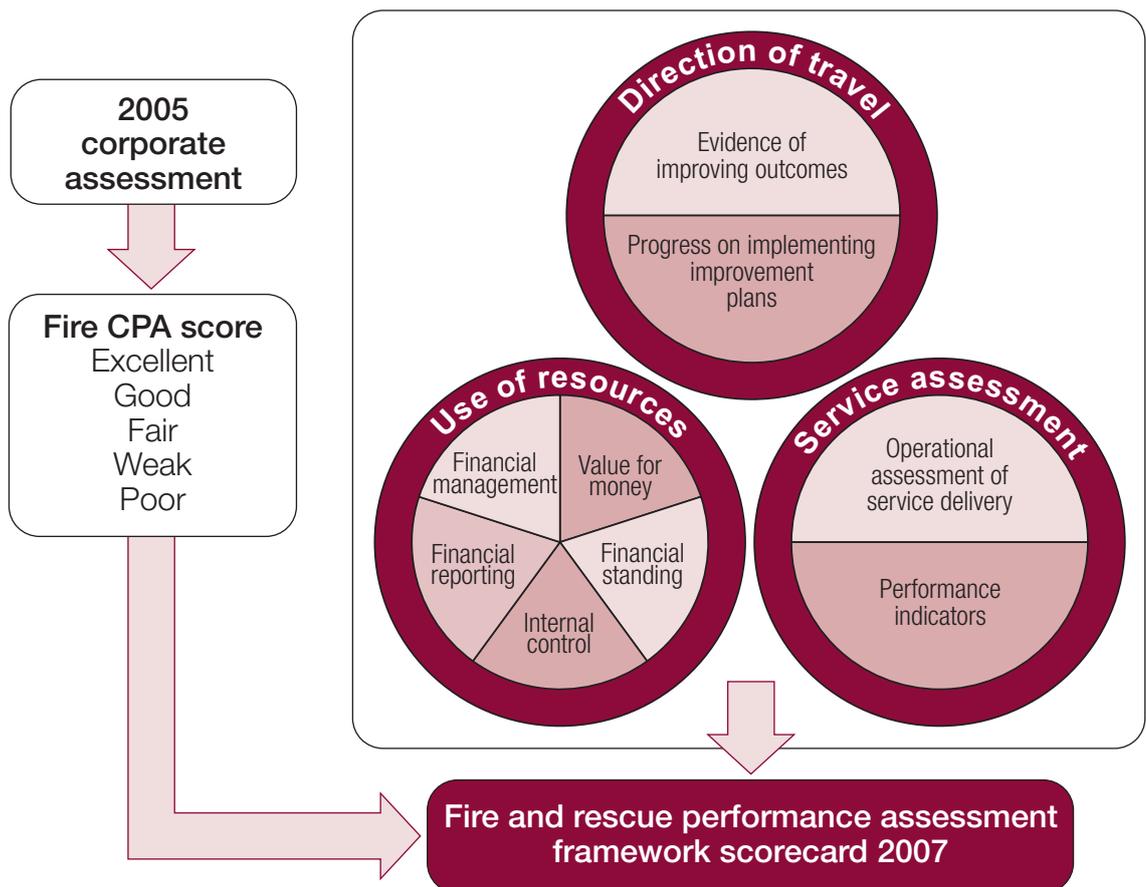
- 18 Fire services have been modernising over the last five years. At the heart of modernisation is the emphasis on identifying risk and fire prevention. As a result the firefighter role has changed to focus more on prevention and protection work in local communities. Fire services now increasingly work with public and voluntary partners to improve fire safety and to contribute to quality of life in local areas.
- 19 Fires affect the poorest people disproportionately. Those on the lowest incomes are 16 times more likely to die in a fire and 5 times more likely to be injured. The most isolated are often the most vulnerable. The most at risk are often the hardest to reach. It is important that fire services know their communities well and target preventative work towards those at greatest risk.
- 20 Fire services need to be representative of the diverse communities they serve. Only then can they understand and identify local needs and risks in neighbourhoods. Preventative work requires a good understanding of very specific risks. Nationally, as of 31 March 2006 (the latest published statistics), figures show that across all services only 3 per cent of staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 2.8 per cent of firefighters are women.

## Assessing progress

- 21 Fire Comprehensive Performance Assessment (fire CPA), undertaken by the Commission in 2005, assessed how well fire services were delivering fire and rescue services for local people and communities.
- 22 This report sets out the scores and findings of the Audit Commission's 2007 performance assessment of fire and rescue services (**Ref. 2**). It comprises three scored elements that assess the progress of fire modernisation:

- a direction of travel assessment on the extent of improvement or deterioration in service delivery in the last year;
- a use of resources assessment on how the service manages its finances, including an explicit judgement on the extent to which the service provides value for money; and
- a service assessment, which looks at how effectively the fire service plans and responds to emergencies and incidents for local residents and businesses.

**Figure 1**  
**Fire and rescue performance assessment 2007**



Source: Audit Commission

# 2

## Direction of travel

- 23 The direction of travel assessment measures improvement or deterioration in service delivery including the delivery of the national framework priorities (Ref. 3). It indicates the rate of progress made over 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).
- 24 This year's direction of travel assessments show that:
- all fire services are continuing to improve. However, the rate of improvement has slowed in almost a third (14) of fire services, which have moved down a category;
  - 5 fire services (10 per cent) are now improving strongly compared with only 2 fire services (4 per cent) last year; and
  - 18 fire services (39 per cent) have maintained the same rate of improvement (improving adequately or improving well) as last year.

**Figure 2**  
**Direction of travel**

All fire services have continued to improve in the last year.

Direction of travel category	2006	Change		2007
Improving strongly	2	↓ 2	↑ 5	5
Improving well	30	↔ 13	↑ 5	23
Improving adequately	15	↓ 12	↔ 5	18
No improvement	0			0
<b>Total fire services</b>	<b>47</b>			<b>46</b>

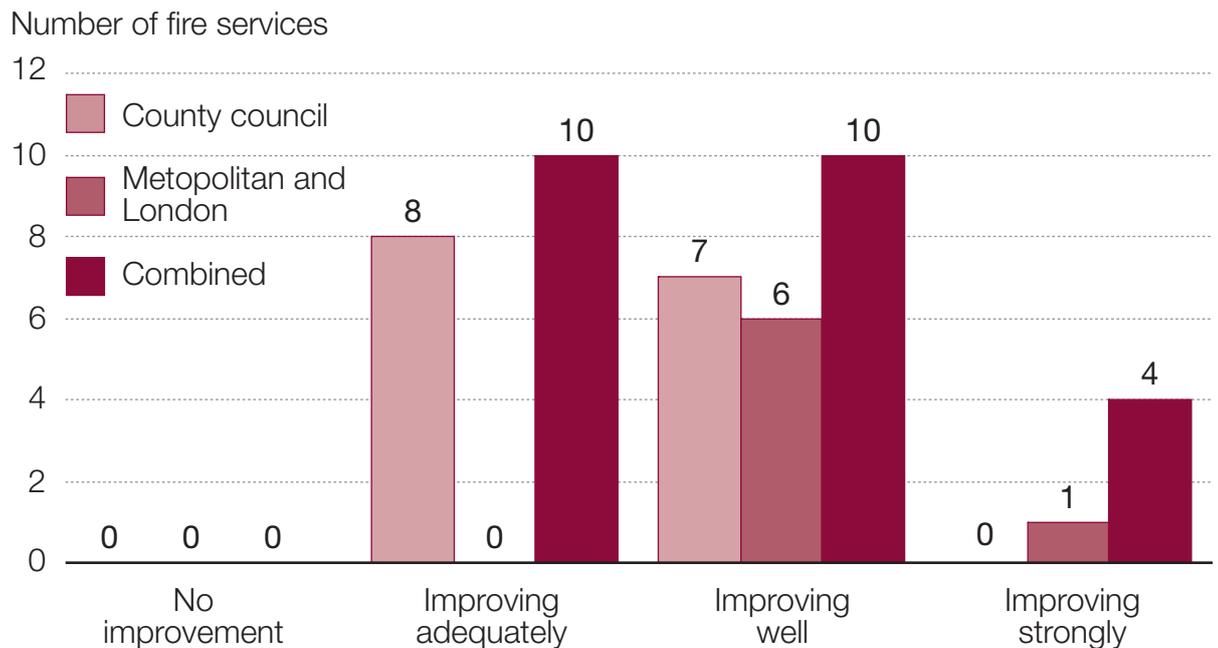
Key  
 ↓ Down 1 category   ↔ No change   ↑ Up 1 category

Source: Audit Commission

25 Services that have moved down a direction of travel category this year, such as Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service, have done so because they have not sustained their earlier rates of improvement in outcomes such as reducing injuries from fires. The main reasons for the slow down are insufficient capacity to deliver priorities in a sustained way and weak performance management systems.

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

Combined and metropolitan fire services improving more strongly.

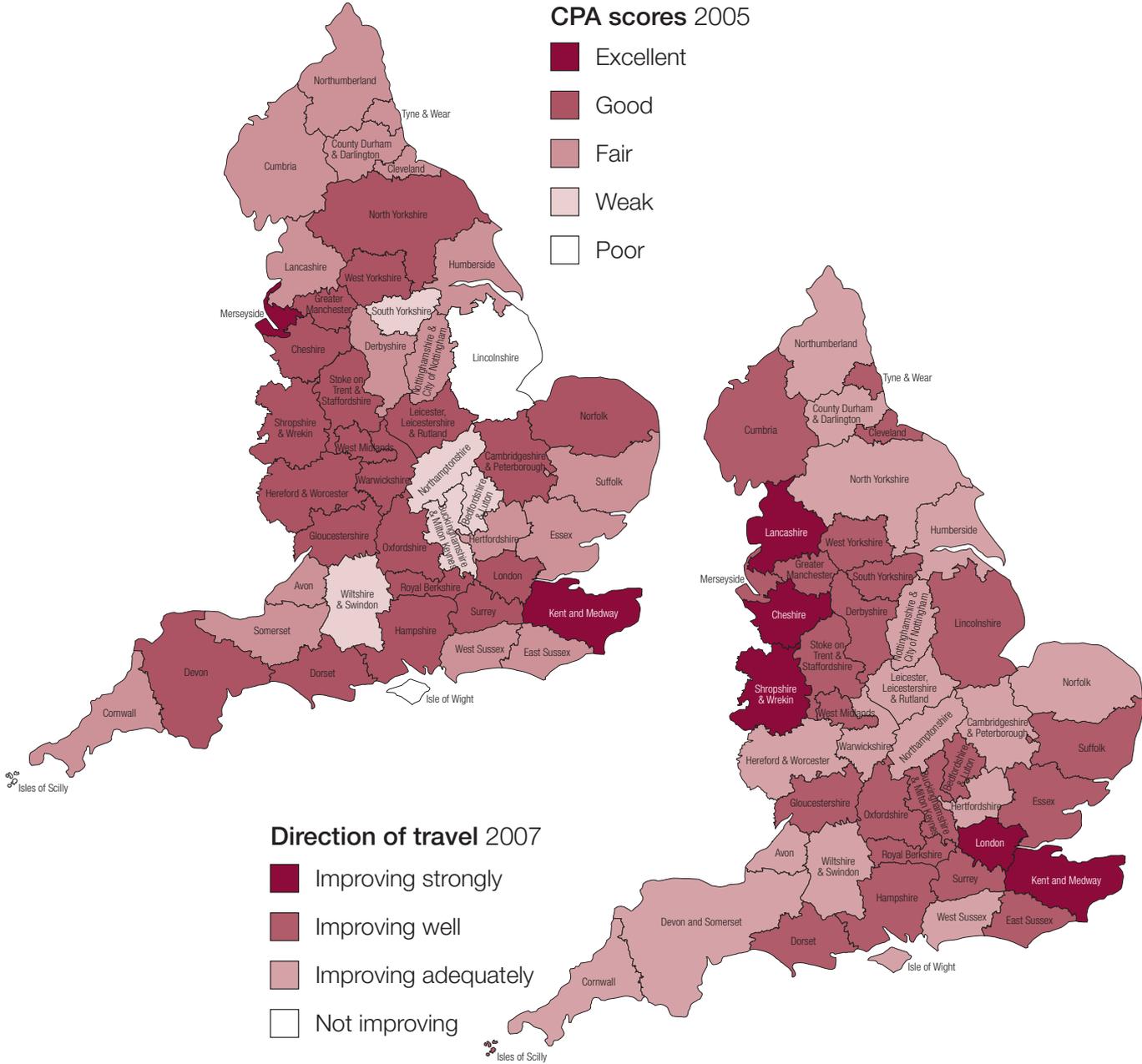


Source: Audit Commission

26 There remains a correlation between the direction of travel results and fire CPA scores determined in 2005. Services with a fire CPA score of good or excellent have tended to improve their direction of travel categories. Seven of the 18 fire services scoring fair in CPA have remained in the same direction of travel category as last year, although 4 moved into a higher category and 6 fell to a lower category. Services categorised as poor or weak in 2005 are not improving as quickly as those that achieved higher fire CPA scores in 2005. The performance of county council fire services is closely linked to that of their county council. No county fire authorities are in the top direction of travel category of improving strongly.

**Figure 4**  
**Map of direction of travel scores**

Fire services with higher fire CPA scores continue to improve at a faster rate.



Source: Audit Commission

## Key findings from the 2007 direction of travel assessment

### All fire services continue to improve

- 27 This year all services were in the improving adequately category or above. But the extent of improvement in national performance indicators varies considerably. To illustrate this, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has the highest percentage of national indicators improved this year (82 per cent) and Hereford and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service the lowest (34 per cent). Dorset Fire and Rescue Service has the highest percentage of indicators in the top quartile nationally (56 per cent) and Avon Fire and Rescue Service has the lowest (9 per cent).

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### Case study 1

#### Dorset Fire and Rescue Service

##### High performance and good customer satisfaction

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service is achieving high levels of service performance and increasing its rate of improvement. In 2006/07 the Service improved against 79 per cent of national performance indicators and 56 per cent were among the best, making the Service the highest performer nationally. It achieved this through good performance management and scrutiny. The Service met 87 per cent of its targets, improving performance in all areas apart from the number of deliberate fires, which increased slightly. At the same time the Service reduced expenditure from £32.40 per head of population to £30.50 (5.9 per cent). An independent survey shows that 64 per cent of residents are satisfied with Dorset's fire service.

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### Knowing local communities is helping fire services protect the people most at risk

- 28 All fire services are now more outward looking. Knowing their local communities helps higher performing services to target efforts and deploy resources to achieve maximum impact. For example, Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service has improved its engagement with vulnerable people living in isolated rural areas. Outreach services in South Lakeland include using the rural library van to target high-risk households for home fire risk

assessments. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service works with the county travellers' liaison service to deliver a programme of smoke alarm installation on traveller sites.

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## Case study 2

### Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service

#### Understanding the community helps improve fire safety

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service uses its knowledge of local communities to target those at highest risk and connect with new communities. It is a partner in Migrant Workers North West, an organisation providing advice and support. A Polish speaking community safety worker provides community fire safety messages for inclusion in welcome packs for new residents. Fire stations are used to run English as a second language courses. Using female volunteers, the Service is increasing home fire risk assessments in homes in the Asian community. These approaches are helping to break down barriers and increase the take-up of fire safety messages. Lancashire's work means people are less vulnerable and better able to protect themselves from fire.

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### Working with others is improving quality of life

- 29 Fire services are working more effectively with partners to improve both fire safety and overall quality of life for local people. Thirty-four fire services (74 per cent) improved partnership working by being clearer about their own priorities and how others can help deliver them. In Essex, hoax calls have reduced by 24 per cent following targeted campaigns involving two theatre group initiatives which reached over 10,000 young people in 2006/07. Partnership working is enabling services to carry out better targeted home fire risk assessments. For example, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service works with Age Concern to increase home fire safety visits for vulnerable older people.

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### Case study 3

#### Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

##### Working with partners makes Cheshire safer

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has improved the safety of local people. The Service has a good knowledge of its communities. Its targeted programme of home fire risk assessments means people in Cheshire are now less likely to suffer death, injury or property damage from fire. The Service works in partnership in Ellesmere Port to install smoke alarms, and on road safety initiatives and youth engagement work. This partnership working has reduced house fires, road casualties and arson, with below average costs and continued high levels of efficiency savings.

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- 30 All services are complying with their statutory responsibility in respect of local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs). Fire services contribute to the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour in local communities, and in doing so are better able to achieve their targets for reducing arson. For example, working with the police, the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service achieved a 50 per cent reduction in deliberate secondary fires in a five-month period. In Lancashire, work with CDRPs to speed up identification and removal of abandoned vehicles has reduced deliberate vehicle fires by 30 per cent.
- 31 There are limited examples of fire services not just contributing to partnerships but leading joint work and collaboration in their local area. An increasing number of local area agreements (LAA) include targets for fire reduction, fire safety, home fire risk assessments or improvements in road safety. This provides opportunities to access additional funding. For example, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, working in partnership with Sheffield City Council, gained £1.2 million in performance reward grant for arson reduction in 2006/07.
- 32 The work of firefighters is highly valued by the public, but attacks on them are becoming more frequent, particularly in urban areas. Services are addressing this by supporting their staff in dealing with incidents and through more effective partnership working. For example, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service secured support from local councils to fund CCTV cameras on all first response fire engines. Attacks in Greater Manchester have reduced by nearly two-thirds, from 280 to 100, in a year.

## Lack of evaluation of community safety work makes it difficult to demonstrate success

- 33** Prevention work in vulnerable communities is reducing the incidence of fire. The number of house fires reduced by 6 per cent between 2005 and 2006 (**Ref. 1**). Home fire risk assessments, which include escape plans and fitting smoke alarms, is reducing the impact of fires on life and property. For example, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service doubled the number of home fire risk assessments carried out by retained firefighters last year. As a result, risks have been lowered significantly for residents in rural areas. The West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service can demonstrate the link between decreases in deaths and injuries from fire and the increase in home fire risk assessments.
- 34** All fire services have designed imaginative community safety projects which are often delivered in partnership. However, many do not evaluate the effectiveness of these projects, relying instead on anecdotal evidence or descriptions of activity rather than outcomes. Evaluation of initiatives improved in 26 services (57 per cent) last year. But there is still room for improvement across all fire services. Sound evaluation enables services to be confident that their projects are the most effective and represent good value for money.
- 35** Better performing fire services set clear and measurable goals. They are clear about the outcomes they seek to achieve through their community safety work. For example, Essex Fire and Rescue Service runs a life skills course for 13-17 year olds who are assessed as potentially at risk of offending. It is independently evaluated. Of the 568 participants, 38 per cent went on to secure a college place and 36 per cent found full-time employment. The Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service's evaluation of a project for young pre-drivers shows participants are 50 per cent less likely to have an accident in the first three years of driving. Rigorous approaches to evaluation mean services can be clear about the benefits of their work.

## Slow progress on equalities and diversity

- 36** A representative workforce makes the fire service more accessible to minority communities and inspires confidence. Fire safety messages are likely to be more effective if they take more account of differing needs, circumstances and risks.

- 37** No fire service is an exemplar of best practice in its approach to equality and diversity. Just over half of fire services have improved their approach this year but this is from a low base. Three per cent of firefighters come from black and minority ethnic communities and fewer still are women. This is against government targets of 7 per cent ethnic minority staff and 15 per cent women firefighters by 2009.
- 38** All fire services express a commitment to improving workforce diversity in their plans and strategies. Some services are beginning to turn this commitment into a reality. For example, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service has the highest percentage of female firefighters, double the national average. It has increased the number of women in senior positions and is the best performing service nationally for the number of staff with a disability. This results from effective recruitment policies. The London Fire Brigade continues to make good progress particularly in improving diversity at senior levels. It has also increased the number of women firefighters to 3.4 per cent and minority ethnic firefighters to 10 per cent.
- 39** Despite expressing commitment to equality and diversity, fire services are failing to make a noticeable difference with their efforts. All are struggling to put good intentions into practice with a small number making no progress at all.
- 40** Senior managers and fire authority members need to improve their leadership of equality and diversity. For example, authority members acting as champions for equality and diversity make a difference, but this only happens in a small minority of services.

### Community leadership is developing

- 41** Fire authority members are beginning to develop their community leadership roles. In a few services they are driving the modernisation agenda, but this is not typical. The lack of engagement by members is a factor in the quality of fire services. Higher performing services provide good training and development opportunities and members take a lead role in partnerships. Improvement in community outcomes is best where members demonstrate strong leadership, championing local service improvements.

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## Case study 4

### Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

#### Effective community leadership

Staffordshire Fire Authority members are closely involved in local community safety work. Each area-based community safety team includes an Authority member who works with local people and community safety staff to identify and tackle local problems. Members monitor service performance in their local area. They meet regularly to discuss community safety and share experiences. As a result, local people are more engaged with safety projects and learning about what works best is shared across areas.

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#### Business processes are improving

- 42 Business processes are improving in all fire services. Strategic and service planning is good, but the effectiveness is limited by a lack of evaluation and, in some services, weak performance management.
- 43 Integrated Risk Management Plans are generally of good quality with clearly defined local priorities based on a good understanding of the most vulnerable people and places. Services consult well with partners to make sure that plans are aligned and they share information and intelligence about local communities well.
- 44 Services are now better at planning activities to achieve targets. Expenditure is more firmly linked to priority areas. Staff, authority members and the public are aware of what services are trying to achieve.
- 45 The 2005 CPA identified performance management as a weakness in all services. Thirty-one services (67 per cent) have now improved in this area. Better systems for collecting data and monitoring progress are providing services with a clearer picture of how well they are doing against their own priorities and the priorities in the national framework. Services are better able to target efforts and resources to priority areas. This leaves 16 services (35 per cent) that are not improving their performance management arrangements, and all services have further room for improvement.

- 46 The more successful services, such as Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, have built a performance culture throughout their organisations.

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## Case study 5

### Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

#### **A strong performance management culture drives results**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has built a culture of managing performance to drive improvement. Performance management is integrated in day-to-day activity at all levels of the Service. There is a rigorous approach to collecting and analysing data, not only within the Service itself, but also in work with partners. Performance management agreements with strategic partners, including five local councils, keep joint work on track. Information on performance is easily accessed through the Service's website and set out clearly in public documents. Local people can see what the Service is trying to achieve and how well it is doing.

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- 47 Working with smaller budgets and fewer staff is a challenge for the smaller services. However, there are some good examples of building capacity without increasing spending. For example, Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service is increasing capacity in key operational and support areas. It created 66 new posts this year, funded largely by efficiency savings. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has developed a Personnel Reserve System. This system identifies excess capacity in night-shifts and releases it to deliver community safety work. In this way services increase capacity to deliver priorities without over-stretching their budgets.
- 48 In April 2007 Devon and Somerset fire services combined into a single new fire service. Early signs are that the new service is delivering better outcomes, is improving value for money and is in a stronger position to drive further improvement and sustain this in the longer term.
- 49 Different standards of training and expectations of competence between whole-time and retained firefighters remain. As a result, the public does not always receive a consistent standard of service and firefighters face differing degrees of risk when tackling fires. However, some services are narrowing the gap by making sure that whole-time and retained firefighters are recruited and trained to the same standards.

## Engagement with regional management boards is not consistent

- 50 Regional management boards (RMB) were created to bring a regional dimension to fire services. They aim to improve collaboration, particularly around six priorities: fire investigation; resilience plans for large scale emergencies; personnel and human resource functions; training; regional control centres; and regional procurement. RMBs that function well help fire services deliver improvements by increasing capacity through collaboration.
- 51 The extent to which fire services are engaged in the RMB varies. In some regions, such as the North West and West Midlands, engagement is good and working together is bringing real benefits. In others areas, such as the South West, the fire services support their RMB but have been slow to exploit the opportunities of working together and are making less progress.
- 52 Last year's major floods tested fire services' resilience plans. Effective responses required good collaboration. This included sharing high volume pumping equipment, boats and boat crew. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service provided the national control centre. It is important that all services and RMBs review and learn lessons from these experiences.

# 3

## Use of resources

**53** The use of resources assessment considers how well the fire service manages and uses its financial resources. It focuses on the importance of 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.

**Figure 5**

### Use of resources scores

Most services (80 per cent) are performing well.

Use of resources category	2006	Change	2007
Performing strongly	3	↔ 3 ↑ 1	4
Performing well	37	↓ 3 ↔ 33 ↑ 1	37
Adequate performance	7	↓ 3 ↔ 3 ↑ 4	6
Inadequate performance	0		0
<b>Total fire services</b>	<b>47</b>		<b>47</b>

Key

↓ Down 1 category   ↔ No change   ↑ Up 1 category

**Source:** Audit Commission

**54** The use of resources assessments show that:

- overall there has been little change;
- 37 fire services (80 per cent) are performing well;
- 4 fire services (8 per cent) achieved the highest score of performing strongly, 3 services have now achieved this for a second year; and
- the performance in 3 services (6 per cent), Cornwall, Essex and Humberside, declined to improving adequately.

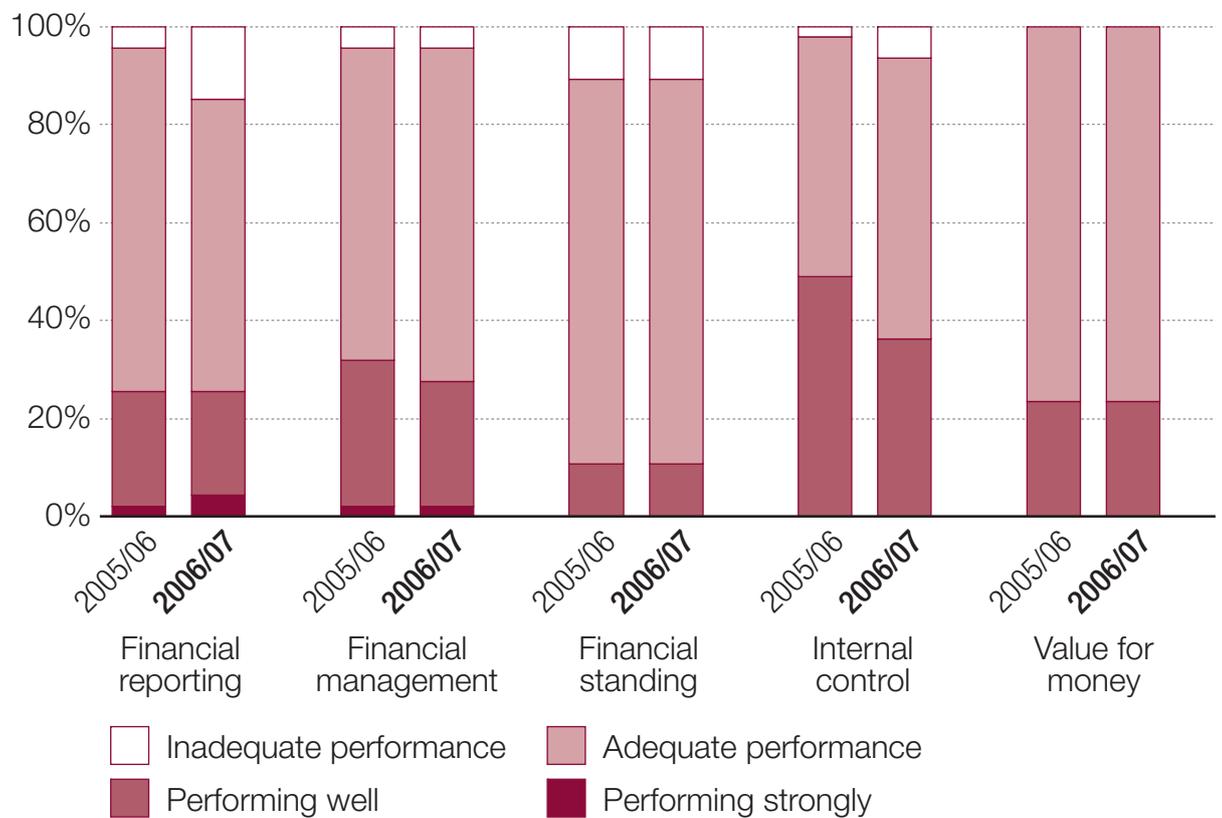
## Key findings from the 2007 use of resources assessment

- 55** Forty-one (89 per cent) fire services are performing well or performing strongly with 38 fire services (83 per cent) retaining their score of performing well from last year. Fire services continue to have good financial arrangements.
- 56** Financial management is generally sound. For example, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has a high-quality medium-term financial strategy ensuring that service priorities receive satisfactory funding and priorities are shared with partners through the LAA.
- 57** Most fire services have reliable systems for financial reporting with only two services, Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service and the Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service, scoring below adequate performance. North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service is one of seven services (15 per cent) performing strongly in this theme. It has consistently improved the quality of accounts and working papers. The Authority has good quality information to support its decisions about the use of resources.
- 58** Financial standing assesses how well a fire service manages its spending within available resources. Forty-two (91 per cent) services are performing well or performing strongly in this area. Kent Fire and Rescue Service is a top performer. Its approach means it has kept within budget for the last three years and has built an appropriate level of reserves. As a result there are no existing financial pressures threatening the Service's ability to achieve its ambitions and priorities.

**Figure 6**  
**Use of resources theme scores**

Overall there has been little improvement.

Percentage of fire services



**Source:** Audit Commission

**59** Internal control assesses whether a service maintains a sound system of checks to manage its financial risks and ensures proper use of public money. Only three services are performing strongly with the rest performing adequately or well in this area. The top performers set a good example for others. Risk management arrangements in Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service are fully integrated into performance management and strategic planning frameworks down to station level. Other fire services have successfully adopted Cleveland’s approach.

- 60 No service was assessed as performing strongly in respect of value for money. There were few changes, with most services achieving the same score as last year. All services are performing either adequately or well.
- 61 Services are increasingly realising efficiency savings from risk-based deployment and modernising working practices. Higher performers are tackling challenging issues such as changing shift patterns, structures and levels of fire cover.

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## Case study 6

### Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service

#### Delivering efficiencies alongside improving service

By the end of 2006/07, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service achieved £12 million in efficiency savings. The Rostering for Duty project, a flexible approach to deploying operational resources, is delivering over £3 million annual efficiency savings and enabling more family friendly working practices. The project won a European public sector innovation award for optimising resources. Local emergency response standards and targets for crewing levels are being exceeded. The Service is therefore providing value for money with efficiency savings secured alongside improved quality of service.

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- 62 Other examples of effective use of resources include County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service which saved £1 million by changing the number of firefighters on each fire engine without compromising safety. A review of the duty system freed up 1,000 days of firefighter time for community safety work. Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service saved £640,000 by introducing retained cover at Kendal and achieved further savings through a more risk-based fire inspection scheme. Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service achieved £2.48 million in savings over the past three years, exceeding its efficiency target of £1.64 million through improved procurement and adopting a regional approach to fire investigation.

- 63 Five fire services dealt with major floods in their areas last year. The Audit Commission report *Staying Afloat* (Ref. 4) showed that the total extra cost to these services was just over £2 million, ranging from £250,000 in Hereford and Worcestershire to at least £735,000 for South Yorkshire. Most of these costs are staff related. They include overtime and extra payments to local firefighters and payments to neighbouring services which lent staff and equipment under mutual aid agreements.
- 64 Services are improving efficiency through better procurement. Kent Fire and Rescue Service has set up joint insurance arrangements with other fire services. It shares support services with local councils and is reviewing its vehicle purchase scheme to deliver efficiencies.
- 65 Tackling operational issues such as hoax calls is improving value for money through fewer unnecessary call-outs. London Fire Brigade reduced hoax calls by 20 per cent since 2005/06. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service improved its call management approach and as a result hoax calls fell by 39 per cent. The Service is using the money saved to improve community safety.

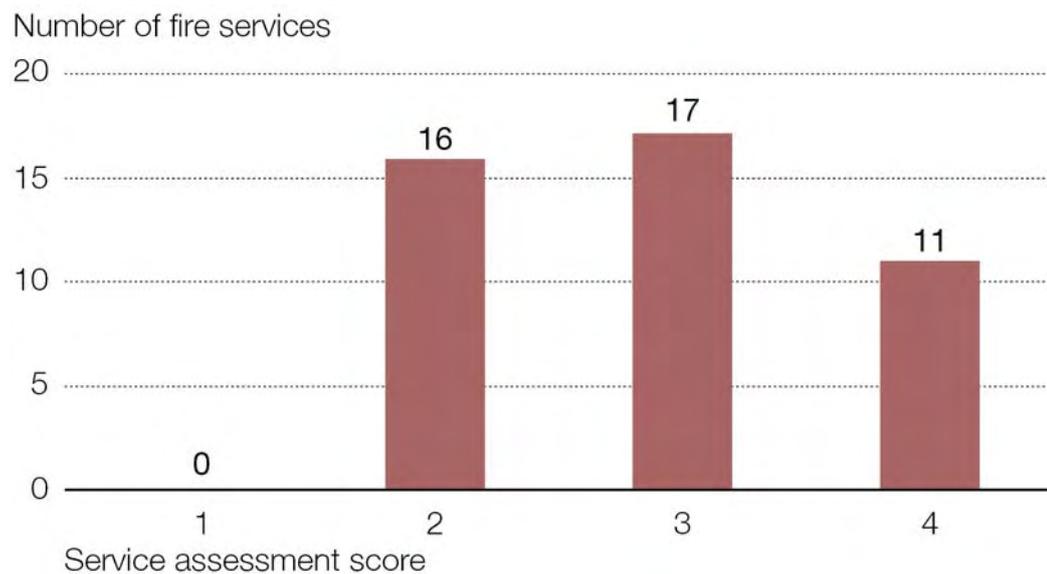
# 4

## Service assessment

- 66** The fire and rescue service assessment comprises two elements: the operational assessment of service delivery (OASD) carried out in 2006; and an analysis of performance information for 2006/07. The operational assessment element focuses on how well a fire service plans to respond to emergencies and prevent incidents. The performance information element brings together a suite of best value performance indicators to measure the outcomes from the fire service's work in responding to fires. The measures include:
- the number of primary fires;
  - deaths and injuries resulting from fires; and
  - the number of deliberate fires.
- 67** The 2007 service assessment is not directly comparable with the 2006 assessment as the Commission, in consultation with the sector, included a number of additional performance indicators to reflect performance better.
- 68** Adjustments for deprivation are made where there is a clear link between local deprivation and performance, for example, fires occurring in high occupancy, deprived neighbourhoods. The service assessment is scored on a four-point scale: 1 (inadequate); 2 (adequate); 3 (performing well); 4 (performing strongly).
- 69** Two fire services, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service, and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service do not have a 2007 service assessment because they achieved a score of excellent in the 2005 CPA and are therefore exempt from this assessment. The Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service is also excluded this year as it is not required to publish a number of national performance indicators.
- 70** The service assessment shows that:
- 11 fire services (25 per cent) are performing strongly;
  - 17 fire services (38 per cent) are performing well; and
  - no fire service is performing inadequately.

**Figure 7****Service assessment scores 2007**

All fire services provide at least an adequate service.



**Source:** Audit Commission

## Key findings from the service assessment

- 71** 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.
- 72** The 2006 OASD assessments found that 6 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 that fire services perform less well in emergency response than protection and prevention.
- 73** 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 retained staff and staff above the 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 were found to be well managed in all services.
- 74** In 2008, the Audit Commission will assess how fire services have addressed the issues identified in the operational assessment. We will report our findings as part of the direction of travel assessment in 2009.
- 75** In this year's service assessments, the combined score for performance indicators and the 2006 OASD, 11 fire services (25 per cent) are in the highest category of performing strongly; 18 (41 per cent) are performing well; 15 (34 per cent) are performing adequately; and no service has inadequate performance. In general terms there has been no significant change in the service assessment scores nationally in the last year.
- 76** All services are on track to deliver national targets for reducing primary fires and are performing well against the national targets for reducing deliberate primary fires.
- 77** All but four services (10 per cent) are also on track to achieve or exceed the national target for reduction in fire deaths by 2010. The exceptions are: County Durham and Darlington; Greater Manchester; Lancashire and West Yorkshire fire services. These services together serve almost 7 million people. Cleveland, Humberside, South Yorkshire fire services and London Fire Brigade have all made progress in reducing deaths this year and have brought performance back on track since last year.
- 78** All fire services are on track to meet the government's target for reducing total numbers of fires and they are performing well against national targets to reduce arson. However, while targets are being met there are concerns that performance is starting to level off. This may have implications for performance in future years.
- 79** Seven services (16 per cent) are among the poorest performers for the number of fires where a smoke alarm was not fitted in the property. Fire services should target their fire prevention work at those who are most likely to suffer fires. Fitting smoke alarms in the homes of the most vulnerable relies on having a good knowledge of the local community. It is also one of the most effective ways of preventing deaths and injuries from fire.

# 5

## Future assessments of fire and rescue services

### Performance assessment in 2008

- 80 The Audit Commission will continue with the current approach to performance assessment of the fire service in 2008. This will enable direct comparison to be made with previous years' scores and will enable the Commission to assess fire services' improvement.
- 81 Until 2009 the Audit Commission will provide fire services with the opportunity to apply for a revision of their 2005 fire CPA category through a new corporate assessment. This will be carried out where fire services can show significant and sustainable improvement in outcomes for local people and good progress against the national framework requirements. New fire CPA scores will be reported on completion of the corporate assessment.
- 82 The Commission may also consider carrying out a corporate assessment for fire services that show a significant decline in performance. The evidence for this decline in performance would include the annual performance assessment and other information available to the Commission.
- 83 Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service have applied to have a new corporate assessment. Their new fire CPA category will be reported later in 2008.

### Comprehensive Area Assessment

- 84 Fire CPA is being replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) from April 2009. CAA will provide the first independent assessment of the prospects for local areas and the quality of life for people living there. It will assess how well fire services work together with local councils, the police and other agencies to improve the quality of life in the local area.
- 85 CAA will put the experience of citizens, service users and local taxpayers at the centre of the new local assessment framework. It will have a particular focus on those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. This means that CAA will look at how local public services work in partnership to tackle the challenges facing their communities. It will:

- act as a catalyst for improvement in the quality of life for citizens, the experience of people who use services and value for money for taxpayers;
- provide a source of independent information and assurance for citizens, users and central government; and
- help to coordinate, rationalise and target inspection, improvement support and intervention where they are most needed.

**86** Fire services will be expected to demonstrate clearly that they:

- understand the risks and diverse needs of the communities they serve;
- are clear what this means for their priorities and their partners' priorities;
- use accurate local data and intelligence to plan, prepare and resource priorities;
- work with partners to deliver agreed local priorities; and
- evaluate their work to show that priorities are being delivered.

**87** The main inspectorates responsible for assessing public sector organisations and services are developing CAA together. They are: the Audit Commission; Commission for Social Care Inspection; Healthcare Commission; HM Inspectorate of Constabulary; HM Inspectorate of Prisons; HM Inspectorate of Probation; and Ofsted. The new CAA framework will be in place from April 2009. A joint inspectorate consultation on CAA was published in November 2007 (**Ref. 5**).

**88** The Commission will continue to work closely with the fire and rescue sector and other stakeholders to develop our approach to assessing the service from 2009 onwards.

**89** More information on CAA can be found at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa).

# Appendix 1

## Summary of assessment scores

The table overleaf displays the 2005 fire CPA score followed by the 2007 direction of travel, use of resources and service assessment overall scores. Services are listed in alphabetical order. The change from the 2006 score is also shown where applicable. The 2007 service assessment score is not directly comparable to the 2006 score.

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 and rescue authority's scorecard on the Audit Commission website: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire).

### Notes

↑	Up one category
↓	Down one category
↔	No change in category
No Score	Indicates that the authority does not have a current fire CPA score
N/A	This assessment is not applicable for the authority

Fire authority	2005 fire CPA score	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment
		2007	Change from 2006	2007	Change from 2006	2007
Avon Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	3	↔	2
Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority	Weak	Well	↑	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	Strongly	↑	3	↔	4
Cleveland Fire Authority	Fair	Well	↔	3	↔	4
Cornwall Fire And Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	↔	2	↓	2
County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	3	↔	2
Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	↑	3	↔	4
Derbyshire Fire Authority	Fair	Well	↔	3	↔	3
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority Prior to 1/4/2007 this FRA was:	No Score	Adequately	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
– Devon Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	N/A	N/A	3	↔	3
– Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	N/A	N/A	3	↔	3
Dorset Fire Authority	Good	Well	↔	3	↔	4
East Sussex Fire Authority	Fair	Well	↔	3	↔	3
Essex Fire Authority	Fair	Well	↔	2	↓	4

Fire authority	2005 fire CPA score	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment
		2007	Change from 2006	2007	Change from 2006	2007
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	↑	3	↔	3
Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	↔	4	↔	2
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	↔	3	↔	4
Hereford And Worcester Fire And Rescue Authority	Good	Adequately	↓	3	↔	4
Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	3	↔	3
Humberside Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	2	↓	3
Isle Of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority	Poor	Adequately	↓	2	↔	3
Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Well	↑	2	↔	N/A
Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority	Excellent	Strongly	↑	4	↔	N/A
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	Fair	Strongly	↑	3	↔	2
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority	Good	Adequately	↓	3	↔	2
Lincolnshire Fire Authority	Poor	Well	↑	3	↑	3
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	Good	Strongly	↑	3	↔	3
Merseyside Fire And Rescue Authority	Excellent	Well	↔	4	↔	N/A
Norfolk Fire Authority	Good	Adequately	↓	3	↔	3
North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Adequately	↓	3	↔	4

Fire authority	2005 fire CPA score	Direction of travel		Use of resources		Service assessment
		2007	Change from 2006	2007	Change from 2006	2007
Northamptonshire Fire Authority	Weak	Adequately	↔	3	↔	2
Northumberland Fire Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	3	↔	3
Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	↔	3	↑	2
Oxfordshire Fire Authority	Good	Well	↑	3	↔	4
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	Good	Well	↔	3	↔	3
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	↔	3	↔	2
Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Adequately	↔	3	↔	2
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	↔	3	↔	2
West Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority	Fair	Adequately	↓	3	↔	3
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Good	Well	↓	4	↑	2
Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority	Weak	Adequately	↔	3	↔	4

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