

CPA Report

July 2005

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Fire & rescue comprehensive performance assessment

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

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Introduction

- 1 In the Fire and Rescue National Framework for 2005/06¹, published in December 2004, the government outlines how performance management in the fire and rescue service will be assessed by the Audit Commission. This report arises from a CPA (“Comprehensive Performance Assessment”) review carried out as outlined in chapter 8 of the National Framework. It gives the results from our review of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority. We used the CPA methodology published by the Audit Commission.
- 2 Our on-site work took place in April 2005. We received a self assessment from the fire authority and a set of judgements from the external auditor. Both were taken fully into account in the course of our work. A summary of the auditor’s judgement is given as appendix 1 to this report. The judgements we have made are based on the evidence we saw before and during our visit, and on any further information supplied to us by the fire authority during our discussions with them in the course of preparing this report.
- 3 CPA is an assessment, at the corporate level, of how well the authority is being run. It does not give an opinion on how well the fire service responds to emergency incidents. The official version of this report is also available on the Audit Commission’s web site at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire.

¹ The Government is responsible for setting clear priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire and Rescue National Framework does this by making clear the Government’s expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service; what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and what support Government will provide.

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Executive summary

- 4 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is rated by this assessment as **excellent**. CPA is an assessment, at the corporate level, of how well the authority is being run. It does not give an opinion on how well the fire service responds to emergency incidents.
- 5 High levels of deprivation in Merseyside particularly in the urban centres are reflected in high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. The degree of challenge this presents for the authority is experienced by few other fire authorities. There are large numbers of deliberate fires including arson attacks linked to criminal behaviour and frequent attacks on fire fighters and appliances. Despite this difficult context, the authority is achieving well in its priority areas and consistently improving its overall performance. A comprehensive and innovative approach to community safety is delivering significant, measurable outcomes in some of the most deprived areas. Work with young people is having real impact in terms of changing behaviour and attitudes, and developing responsibility and citizenship.
- 6 The authority has risen to the challenge of modernisation and made great strides in reshaping its organisational culture and its service delivery towards better protection of its most vulnerable communities. Members and staff are delivering improved services that balance reliable emergency response based on challenging local standards with good protection measures and effective prevention strategies. Good intelligence systems and reliable data sources enable it to plan well and target efforts and resources to achieve maximum benefit in high risk areas. A robust IRMP integrates with corporate strategies and drives clear operational plans that are well managed to achieve the targeted outcomes.
- 7 The authority has a good understanding of its communities. It has developed impressive initiatives such as its community advocate scheme to better connect with those that are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Effective, well managed partnership working is helping to achieve its own goals and tackling wider social issues. The authority recognises that it has an important role to play in developing safer and more sustainable communities. For example, business continuity is prioritised because of the fragile economy in some of its communities and the need to attract and sustain inward investment. Consultation is enabling partners and local people to influence the authority's planning and service delivery and combined with high quality communication ensures the support of local people and partners.
- 8 Leadership is strong and effective. The management of change is impressive. The inclusive approach of senior managers is inspiring confidence and loyalty in a workforce that is undergoing huge change. A clear commitment to organisational and individual development means that staff and elected members are clear and enthusiastic about their roles. Appropriate human resources management is in place and the authority is making good progress on IPDS. However, the authority is still in the process of introducing a robust individual appraisal system.
- 9 As well as planning for the medium term, the authority anticipates longer term challenges and is building capacity to meet them. Sound financial management and governance arrangements are in place. Risk management and performance management are developing well. Costs have been comparatively high for some years but the authority is getting to grips with this and can show clear efficiency savings achieved through a strengthened focus on value for money.

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Summary of assessment scores

A What is the fire authority trying to achieve?

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Score</i>
Leadership and priorities	4
A balanced strategy	4

B How has the fire authority set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity: Governance and management	4
Capacity: Resources and value for money	4
Capacity: People	3
Performance management	3

C What has the fire authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

Achievement of objectives	3
Achievement of Improvement	4
Future plans	4
Overall CPA score	Excellent

Scoring key:

- 4 Well above minimum requirements, performing strongly
- 3 Consistently above minimum requirements, performing well
- 2 At only minimum requirements, adequate performance
- 1 Below minimum requirements, inadequate performance

In coming to an overall CPA score, we applied the rules table set out below:

Excellent	No scores of 2 or 1. At least four scores of 4.
Good	No scores of 1. At least seven scores of 3 or more.
Fair	No more than two scores of 1. At least five scores of 3 or more.
Weak	No more than three scores of 1. At least six scores of 2 or more.
Poor	Any other combination of scores.

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Context

The locality

- 10 Merseyside is a metropolitan area in the North West of England encompassing the local authorities Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral. It covers an area of 653 square kilometres and has a resident population of some 1.4 million. It stretches from Southport in the north to Speke in the south and Newton le Willows and the M6 in the east and the Wirral in the west. There are some areas of affluence, for example in West Wirral and North Sefton, but large areas of Merseyside fall within the highest ratings of social deprivation.
- 11 Research suggests a link between local socio-economic factors and the incidence of fires. There remain large pockets of deprivation with high levels of social exclusion and crime. The indices of multiple deprivation indicate that 40 per cent of the wards in Merseyside are ranked in the top 5 per cent of the most deprived wards in England. In addition, all the local authorities in Merseyside are within the top 20 per cent of the most income-deprived in England and Merseyside has held Objective 1 Status since 1994. Merseyside has an increasingly aged population, particularly in Sefton and Wirral. The number of pensioners living alone in Merseyside has increased by more than the national average in ten years and the numbers with long term debilitating illness increased by 30 per cent. This creates further significant risks for the fire authority. Older people are at high risk of fire especially if they are poor, live alone, have limited mobility and smoke and/or drink alcohol.

The fire authority

- 12 Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (the 'fire authority') is a local authority created by the Local Government Act 1985. It is made up of 18 elected representatives appointed by the constituent local authorities. The number of councillors from each district is determined by statute and in most cases is representative of the political composition of the council. There are 2 from Knowsley council; 6 from Liverpool city; 4 from Sefton; 2 from St Helens; and 4 from the Wirral. There is no overall political control.
- 13 The Fire and Rescue Service is managed by a management team comprising the chief fire officer (CFO), his deputy CFO, one assistant CFO, the Executive Director of Law and Human Resources (HR), and the Executive Director of Finance, ICT and Procurement. The organisation is divided into functional departments dealing with operational performance, fire safety, service support, strategic planning, HR and operational planning. The service employs 1,600 uniformed, control and support staff. There are 26 wholetime community fire stations, including one retained pump, providing emergency response to fires and other incidents and carrying out community fire safety work.

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What is the fire authority trying to achieve?

Leadership and priorities

- 14 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 15 The fire authority has clear and realistic ambitions for itself as an organisation and for the communities that it serves. It aims to make its fire stations an integral part of their local communities. Its vision - *to make Merseyside a safer community* is underpinned by clear objectives for *prevention and protection; emergency response; business continuity; and, organisational development*. These are consistently expressed across all major plans including the integrated risk management plan (IRMP), service plan and community safety strategy. Priorities are based on a well developed understanding of local needs and incorporate the requirements of the National Framework for fire and rescue authorities.
- 16 Strong, effective and inclusive leadership is transforming service delivery through translating strategic aims and objectives into local action plans. Staff have a good awareness of what the authority is trying to achieve and understand their role in delivery of the objectives. Elected members play a key role in determining priorities revising and refining key plans such as the IRMP.
- 17 The authority is building a sound approach to external consultation. It consulted widely when developing and revising its IRMP. It works with local people in the design of local projects for example working with Age Concern and community groups to better engage with vulnerable older people. It is committed to accessing all sectors of the community. Three members have been appointed as equality champions (one from each party) and the equalities steering group is chaired by an independent equalities expert. This gives clear signals to staff and public that this is a key issue for the authority. Consultation and communication with minority groups is developing well. For example, consultation with minority ethnic communities through the bilingual steering group. The authority is continually refining its approach for example revising its consultation strategy.
- 18 External communication is strong so that partners and the public understand and support what the authority is trying to achieve. The authority produces high quality information in a range of formats with a consistent and recognisable branding of the vision and objectives. This has developed its local profile and ensured consistent delivery of its messages. Internal communication is also effective. Staff and members understand and support the priorities. They are well informed about the rationale for change and engaged in the planning process.
- 19 The authority is clear about its priorities and prepared to take difficult decisions. For example, introduction of new approaches such as the search and rescue team and changes to staffing of appliances. Members are fully involved in implementing such decisions in their local communities, for example in Southport.
- 20 The authority's priorities for community safety align with local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRP) strategies. However it is not fully integrated into the five local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and so there is a lack of alignment of its wider aims with community strategies.

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A balanced strategy

- 21 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 22 The authority has developed a sound understanding of the challenges faced by the communities it serves. Merseyside has a diverse and challenging risk profile. The authority's sound risk based planning is reflected in a comprehensive and well balanced IRMP. Through reliable research and well developed local intelligence it knows where the areas of high risk are and who are most vulnerable. For example, the authority's robust 'fatal fires' analysis helps to guide community safety activity, through a planned programme of intervention, outreach and awareness raising. It is using this to target resources to reducing highest risk. Its priorities are derived from four key objectives for prevention, protection, emergency response, organisational development and business continuity. The inclusion of business continuity reflects the authority's appreciation of the impact of economic and social costs of fires in business premises in an area that has high levels of poverty and unemployment.
- 23 The authority is recognised nationally and internationally for its innovative approach to community safety. In 1999, ahead of national guidance, the authority set itself the ambition of carrying out home fire risk assessments (HFRA's) and installing smoke detectors in every household in Merseyside because it was convinced that this offered significant protection for communities. Its programme is on track and over 200,000 of these assessments have been carried out, resulting in the fitting of over 300,000 smoke detectors. An essential part of this approach has been to target the most vulnerable and commission external academic research to evaluate and strengthen its approach.
- 24 A well developed understanding of the diversity of its communities has led to a range of imaginative strategies to reach the most vulnerable and excluded people. For example, the authority employs advocates to improve access to and protection of specific community groups including those from minority ethnic communities such as the Chinese, Yemeni and Somali communities; people with hearing impairment; carers; and, older people. The Fire Support Network consists of large numbers of volunteers who work in their local communities promoting fire safety and carrying out HFRA's.
- 25 The authority makes a clear contribution to improving the quality of life for those who live and work in the area. It is committed to playing its part in safeguarding the environment and achieved ISO 14001 – the environmental management standard. Recognising the links between deprivation and antisocial behaviour it has good projects such as well established fire cadets, youth teams and the Prince's Trust programmes that engage and influence disadvantaged and excluded young people especially those who are at risk of becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 26 Partnership working is strong. The authority works in partnership with groups such as the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation to improve health and health inequalities and with local councils to reduce nuisance on estates through joint anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO's). Fire-fighters work in local schools not only providing good education packages but also offering positive role models especially in areas with a history of mistrust of emergency services. For example, a fire-fighter is embedded in an extended school within a significantly

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disadvantaged area. This is having a direct impact in reducing the frequency of attacks on fire-fighters, incidents of arson and hoax calls. It is an active member of Merseyside CDRPs and their task groups but involvement at the strategic level in LSPs is not consistent. There are established and effective links in areas such as St Helens and Knowsley but less involvement in the Liverpool City Partnership.

- 27 Emergency planning is strong both in terms of building resilience with other emergency services and responding flexibly to emerging challenges and threats. The authority has a nationally renowned search and rescue team and is a major player in the national USAR implementation programme. The authority is to take the lead on inshore rescue for the tidal River Mersey as well as being actively involved in planning for the impact of the capital of culture programme.

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What is the capacity of the fire authority to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity: Governance and management

- 28 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 29 Governance arrangements are sound and comply with CIPFA/SOLACE codes of corporate governance, probity and ethical arrangements. The standards committee works well, has good relations with the monitoring officer and its objectivity strengthened by an independent chair. There are robust anti-fraud, corruption and whistle-blowing policies. There are good working relationships between members and officers, and members particularly value the open and inclusive approach of senior managers. This results in constructive, mature debates about issues and a common commitment by members and management to the modernising agenda and the authority's vision.
- 30 Members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and follow these enthusiastically. Member training is appropriately prioritised and the authority is to adopt the member development charter; which includes personal development plans and definition of member competencies to further clarify their roles and build on their effectiveness. Members frequently visit their local fire stations interacting with staff and partners. The limited involvement in some of the LSPs does restrict opportunities to influence community strategies but the authority is addressing this through active engagement at the most appropriate level.
- 31 The fire authority is actively involved in the regional management board (RMB) and plays a key role in driving forward the regional agenda. The authority plays a key role in the RMB's progression of the six priority areas of the National Framework taking the lead on regional training. It leads nationally on the CFOA social exclusion and transport groups and ODPM fireworks group and internationally on the European hotel safety group and safety in tunnels group.
- 32 Management structures work well supporting prompt and effective decision making and clarity of purpose. The introduction of the management board has led to an effective working and decision making partnership between the executive leadership team (ELT) and members. This is a forum, open to all members, where ideas can be openly and frankly explored at an early stage.
- 33 The corporate leadership team (CLT) offers strong leadership and has the confidence and support of staff and members. Managers share a firm commitment to moving forward and openness to new ideas combined with a strong emphasis on value for money and measurement of impact. As a result, industrial relations are improving after a long period of serious unrest. The authority does not yet have a strategic approach to succession planning although it has a draft strategy currently under review.
- 34 There are strong corporate support structures following restructuring and reconfiguration of services. In a number of areas service level agreements have been drawn up to ensure clarity of purpose and delivery. There is an effective use of external specialists support providers, for instance, occupational health support

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and information communications technology (ICT) provided by an external organisation. Although, in some areas the ICT infrastructure is not keeping pace leading to over reliance on paper records, there is a strong commitment to e-government and to e-learning with key senior officer and members acting as e-champions.

Capacity: Resources and value for money

- 35 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 36 Financial management is sound and is supported by effective plans, including a five year medium term financial strategy. This allows the authority to plan ahead, anticipating the implications of future income and expenditure. There is a well-developed financial risk management process and rigorous monitoring. The scheme of financial delegation strikes a good balance between control and flexibility; for example, including regular monthly meetings between finance officers and all cost centre managers. The authority has strengthened its financial position in recent years which has allowed it to use reserves and contingencies to smooth the impact of issues such as pensions and fire fighters' pay. Members are fully involved in key financial decisions and are kept informed by comprehensive quarterly budget monitoring reports. The budget for 2005-06 supports growth in the priority areas of the IRMP as well as identifying efficiency savings and there is combined reporting of progress. This integration of corporate and financial planning is making sure that priorities are supported and the implications of decision clearly understood.
- 37 The approach to asset management within the authority is developing, initially through a property conditions survey that prioritised work in a five year capital budget, and has also identified a number of sites for disposal. Energy audits are also linked into the capital programme. The development of a more strategic asset management plan is underway. The approach to procurement is strong. Contract management is thorough and the procurement policy establishes a number of principles which cover major areas such as partnership working for procurement, whole-life costing, and sustainability. Developments in e-procurement are underway. A range of procurement arrangements are used to support innovation in service design and also drive improvement and a planned approach to efficiency savings. This has resulted in identifiable savings, such as 25 per cent on the costs of uniforms.
- 38 A focus on value for money underpins the authority's operations. Efficiency savings of £1.5 million were identified for the 2004/05 budget and the introduction of more efficient and effective working arrangements are expected to increase savings in this area to £2.7 million by 2006/07. Financial implications are considered in all committee reports.
- 39 The authority makes effective use of partnerships to increase capacity and contribute to the achievement of its own and partner's goals. Many of its community fire safety initiatives are delivered through partnerships. For example with Age Concern, the Prince's Trust and housing associations. The authority is drawing in external funds for example through its business continuity contract and Neighbourhood Renewal Funding of £105,000 for 2005/06 to provide advocate posts and domestic sprinkler systems in the most vulnerable homes.

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- 40 Partnership work is well managed. For example, the effective Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation partnership is based on a good understanding of common goals and clear contractual arrangements with regular monitoring and evaluation (for example, through six monthly evaluations). This makes accountabilities and responsibilities clear but there is sufficient flexibility to allow for new ideas to be brought forward. It is also well integrated with other initiatives, such as older people's advocates and the Fire Support Network. A lead officer is nominated for every partnership with responsibility for regular meetings to ensure delivery of agreed objectives. The authority is seeking to further improve its strategic approach and has drafted an overarching partnership strategy which provides a framework for assessing partnerships, and detailed guidance.

Capacity: People

- 41 This theme is scored by this assessment as 3 – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 42 The authority has a clear understanding of the people and skills it needs to deliver its priorities and is committed to developing a workforce that is well trained and competent. Senior management have the appropriate skills and qualities required to lead an effective modern fire service and to further develop leadership capacity, a comprehensive management development programme is in place at supervisory, station and group level.
- 43 The management of change is impressive. Skills gaps are identified and filled and restructuring is strengthening middle management for example through the creation of 'station locality managers'. Recruitment and development are based on assessment centres. The authority's approach has been adopted by the RMB and its assessors regularly take part in assessment centres across the region. The pace of change is supported by a leadership development programme to increase skills and motivation. Constructive and productive relationships with local representative bodies allow for emerging issues to be discussed at an early stage with a greater chance that consensus will be achieved. Training and development of staff together with a flexible approach to work/life balance means that many staff felt valued and supported by the authority. This has helped maintain morale and willingness to change during a challenging period.
- 44 Appropriate HR policies are in place with a draft HR strategy providing an overarching framework. The authority is committed to IPDS it has role maps for all uniformed staff and is well on way to completing workplace assessments. Skill profiles have been drawn up for each station based on local risk as identified in IRMP and competencies established for non-uniformed staff. This has allowed the authority to more effectively target its resources ensuring each area has the right skills mix. Extensive work has been carried out to develop a staffing model which will be used to inform usage of the crew level maintenance team. A new appraisal system is planned to link development with performance and achievement of objectives. There is an effective system for dealing with stress including an innovative scheme targeted specifically at senior management.
- 45 The authority has introduced new working patterns such as the availability of flexi- time for uniformed day staff as well as non-operational staff. This has led to increased flexibility for staff, for example, some fire fighters are working three weekend nights (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) and the small fires vehicle is being staffed through the use of pre-arranged overtime. There is innovative use

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of staff groups such as the incident management team and the search and rescue team to develop others. Such crew based training has led to a substantial increase in the amount of training days delivered. A first retained system has been introduced in Southport and the use of retained staff is expanding.

- 46 Effective use of volunteers to deliver the authority's aims for prevention and protection in local communities is being maintained through the Fire Support Network enabling over 300 volunteers who work in their local communities to be trained to deliver services such as HFRA's and also using their local knowledge to improve the authority's understanding about local needs.
- 47 The authority is addressing diversity issues. It has an extensive equalities action plan, a race equalities strategy, a fairness and equality at work policy which outlines acceptable behaviours and a new policy on disability. These provide a good platform to build a fairer more tolerant working environment. The equalities action plan has been structured around the three levels of the local government equality standard although the degree of progress made is unclear.
- 48 Steps have been taken to improve the diversity of the workforce, for example, by taking a proactive and integral approach to reviewing appliances and equipment the authority has made it much easier for all parts of the community to become involved in working for the authority. Appliances have been redesigned to accommodate people of smaller stature and in addition there are well thought out positive action policies targeted at recruiting from under represented communities. The numbers of women, disabled and ethnic minorities have increased throughout the workforce but this has not been reflected at senior level.
- 49 There are some minor weaknesses in relation to human resources management. For example, although a robust managing attendance policy has been introduced it has not yet impacted fully on the audited absence figures. Effective occupational health procedures are helping to reduce ill health retirement figures but more could be done in this area. The lack of progress in job evaluation is also causing frustration particularly for staff in temporary posts.

Performance management

- 50 This theme is scored by this assessment as 3 – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 51 Risk management has a high priority within the authority and it has made considerable progress in the past year in firmly embedding risk assessment and management into financial and operational planning. The assessment of risk forms a key part of all project and activities. A "risk check sheet", including all appropriate risk assessment information accompanies all reports submitted to CLT. Members are involved at all key stages of assessing the corporate risks facing the authority. The authority is continuing to refine its approach liaising with similar authorities to identify and emulate best practice. Members recently approved a new risk register and policy. This is overseen by the risk management group and a lead officer and member have responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the risk register.
- 52 Reliable management information systems are used effectively to monitor and manage performance. The authority closely monitors progress against national and local performance indicators clearly linked to the four corporate aims.

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Performance data is widely available to all levels of staff which tracks progress against indicators and shows the impact of specific initiatives, such those tackling vehicle fires. Monthly reports against all local and national indicators go to CLT and quarterly reports to the policy and finance committee. There is also a monthly "Stats Digest" published which contains a wide range of operational performance information showing the trends on a monthly basis for the last six years and comparison between stations. This is used by local managers to ensure that performance is managed within their area.

- 53 Performance management is enabling the authority to drive better outcomes for example greater reductions in deliberate vehicle fires, malicious false alarms calls and accidental dwelling fires in 2004/05. The authority also effectively uses external evaluation to identify how to improve performance and impact, for example in relation to its HFRA programme and advocates scheme.
- 54 The authority's plans demonstrate a clear flow from vision to delivery on the ground. For example, station plans and departmental plans reflect the aims of IRMP and the service plan. It sets challenging but realistic targets with clear lines of accountability and responsibility, evident through the allocation of service plan objectives to a named responsible officer who is responsible for its progress and successful achievement within the agreed timelines. Clear success criteria are also identified for new initiatives but although these are clearly linked to national performance indicators there is an over emphasis on output measures.
- 55 A current weakness is that objectives are not cascaded to individual level through a robust staff appraisal system. This means that although staff have a good understanding of how their work feeds into station and departmental plans it is more difficult for managers to set individual targets and manage performance against them. Also, although the authority can demonstrate some well managed projects it recognises that, in order to deliver its more ambitious aims it needs to develop a more consistent, corporate approach to project and programme management.

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What has the fire authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

Achievement of objectives

- 56 This theme is scored by this assessment as 3 – consistently above the minimum requirements and performing well.
- 57 There are large numbers of anti-social behaviour fires, relatively sophisticated arson attacks linked to criminal behaviour and frequent attacks on firefighters and appliances within the area covered by the authority. Performance against national indicators when compared to fire authorities nationally and with a ‘family group’ of similar authorities reflects this local context. Figures for 2003/04 show that the number of fires and calls to fires in Merseyside were greater than anywhere else in the country. Total calls per 10,000 people were 198.5 compared to the national average of 90.52 and group average of 141.04; primary fires were 58.9 per 10,000 people compared to a national average of 34.45 and group average of 47.49; and, accidental fires in dwellings per 10,000 were 27.31 compared to the group average of 25.24 and national average of 18.37. However deaths and injuries from fires were proportionately low. Deaths were average for the group at 0.66 per 100,000 people and only slightly above the national average of 0.52; injuries from accidental fires were at the national average of 9.33 and well below the group average of 12.03 with only one authority performing better. This indicates that, although it had to deal with many more fires, its speedy emergency response and enhanced protection when fires break out reduced their impact.
- 58 False alarms from automatic fire detection apparatus were 165.67 per 1,000 compared to the group average of 142.65 and national average of 128. Calls to malicious false alarms per 1,000 people at 1.6 calls were above the group average of 1.45 calls and national average of 0.75 calls. High numbers of hoax calls correlate with the areas of high deprivation and anti-social behaviour.
- 59 The authority is achieving well in its priority areas. In 2004/05 it achieved 98 per cent of IRMP targets; 92 per cent of financial targets. Objectives for emergency response are achieved through local standards for fire cover based on life risk introduced in 2004. All targets were met or exceeded and more challenging targets are set for 2005/06. This means that local people receive a higher quality response than previously delivered under the national standards. Objectives for increased protection for those at highest risk are also being achieved. Older people in Merseyside are at high risk especially if they are poor, live alone, have limited mobility and smoke and/or drink alcohol. The authority is reducing risks through a range of projects. Older person's advocates identify the most vulnerable in their localities through health centres, the British Legion, Age Concern and social services and then deliver protection systems and safety advice. Around 1,500 carers of older people have been trained to carry out HFRA. Its disability/ mobility advocates and deaf advocates provide enhanced protection systems for people with special needs including domestic sprinklers. Its 60+ initiative has involved over 1,700 schools and youth groups resulting in over 6,000 HFRA's, 42 per cent of which were for people over 60 years. This success in reducing the risk to vulnerable older people and enabling more to remain living in their own homes led to its Beacon status award in 2004.

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- 60 The authority is achieving its objectives for prevention through a well developed approach to community safety set out in a robust strategy which links well with the IRMP. Staff, volunteers and partners have a good understanding of the objectives and are well trained and supported. Performance is managed and evaluated to ensure that aims are met. Work with young people is achieving impressive results through good schemes building personal responsibility and citizenship and projects for more problematic young people which are reducing anti social behaviour and attacks on firefighters. For example, feedback from partnership working with Parklands school highlights impact on the behaviour and attitudes of the most challenging pupils. Legislative fire safety is a key factor in the authority's approach to preventing emergencies. It has made changes to its technical fire safety role ahead of expected legislation, for example, through the Fire Smart partnership which offers risk assessment via the internet. In 2004 the authority received an award from Association of British Engineers for its sponsorship and installation of sprinklers in domestic and commercial properties.
- 61 In line with IRMP objectives for business continuity the authority, has a 'no cost' contract with a national salvage agency to provide a rapid response for local businesses after a fire. Getting business back into action is crucial in an area that suffers from employment problems and this is a good service that feedback shows is much appreciated. The income generated is ring fenced for community safety activities for example funding the successful Croxteth Youth Team.
- 62 The authority is achieving wider objectives for improvements in quality of life. Merseyside has the second highest incidence of smoking related lung cancer in the country and the authority identified that 56 per cent of fires in 2003/04 were due to discarded cigarettes and resulted in four deaths. Its partnership with the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation provides targeted risk assessments, promotes and supports cessation of smoking and fire safety education. Fire stations are open and accessible to the local community for example, providing 20 station-based gyms for the Heartbeat campaign for supervised exercise for people recovering from cardiac surgery. These are well used and customer feedback is extremely positive. It is delivering new services, for example a comprehensive 'After the fire service' to victims of dwelling house fires. There is good joint work with the other emergency services. Its co-responder pilot with the ambulance service has responded to over 300 calls in 2004 saving at least one life.
- 63 A strengthened focus on value for money is achieving efficiency savings and improved productivity. The IRMP led to savings of staffing costs of £3.1 million releasing £2.4 million for the advocate scheme and community safety projects. Managed overtime saved £130,000 which funded a small fires vehicle. Efficiency savings were invested in a vector command simulator which reduces the days lost through staff attending external training. Partnerships brought in £0.7 million in 2004/05. The authority has secured a new city centre fire station consistent with IRMP and funded by a developer at no capital cost. Imaginative procurement and effective best value reviews secure more cost effective delivery. Despite these achievements costs for 2003/04 per head of population, although improving, were £44.07 - above the group average of £42.82 and national average of £36.83.

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Achievement of improvement

- 64 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 65 The authority has achieved sustained improvements over the past five years. Comparison with its family group shows that it is improving at a greater rate than others. Despite high levels overall it is managing to reduce numbers of fires as well as the impact they have. The total number of anti-social behaviour (secondary) fires reduced from 18,985 in 2002/03 to 11,616 in 2003/04. Deliberate property fires are down from 1,496 in 2001/02 to 1361 in 2003/04 and on track to fall to 1,085 in 2004/05. Hoax calls fell from 3,629 in 2000 to 2,175 in 2003/04 and 1,420 in 2004/05. The authority is not yet meeting its challenging targets for automatic fire alarm reduction but has halted the increase. Levels of improvement are impressive given the context and constraints within which it operates. For example, Low Hill fire station is the busiest in the country and one of the busiest in Europe but manages to deliver a successful community fire safety programme.
- 66 There has been a sharp decrease in injuries from fire over the past five years from 24.86 per 100,000 people in 2001/02 to 16.33 in 2002/03 and to 9.33 in 2003/04. The trend in fire deaths is also downwards with an overall 30 per cent decrease since 2000 although the small numbers are affected by isolated events as was the case in 2004/05 when numbers rose. Accidental dwelling fires fell from 1,936 in 2001/02 to 1,612 in 2003/04 and to 1,450 in 2004/05. The HFRA programme is a critical factor in the achievement of these improvements. The authority led the way nationally with a free smoke alarm/HFRA programme in 1999 aiming to reach every home in Merseyside. It has achieved around 300,000 homes to date with smoke alarm operation increased from 38 per cent in 2000 to 48 per cent in 2004. An independent report in 2003 identified this programme as the most extensive and comprehensive being undertaken nationally. Impact analysis showed that it contributed to reductions in dwelling fires and fire injuries even when figures are adjusted to allow for national downwards trends.
- 67 The authority is successfully tackling major problems with arson. Funding from the arson control forum is supporting a three year programme by the Arson Reduction Task Force. Five arson reduction advocates based in each district area work closely with CDRPs to tackle local problems. The authority's own data is bolstered by local intelligence from other agencies for example neighbourhood wardens, PCSOs and, increasingly, local people. There are many examples of successful initiatives and projects such as action to address large scale tipping and serial fires in Aintree and Liverpool and improved management of void properties in Birkenhead and St Helens. There is a major campaign underway tackling wheeled bin fires. The fire setting material removal scheme undertaken with Liverpool city council resulted in a 44 per cent reduction in nuisance fires during October 2004 with approximately 72 tonnes of materials removed. FACE – UP programmes for offenders convicted of arson are reducing repeat offending. Overall, since its introduction the arson task force has achieved a 40 per cent reduction in nuisance fires and a 20 per cent reduction in vehicle fires.
- 68 Sophisticated analysis of what is improving and why, means that the authority has a good understanding of the barriers to improvement and can develop strategies to overcome them. For example, analysis of performance against national indicators includes factoring in the impact of multiple deprivation so that

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it can better benchmark its performance and identify causal factors. Analysis of the relation of dwelling fires to deprivation showed that the main influential factors are levels of income and child poverty. As a result, it is using mapping systems to identify 'hot spots' where income levels are low and child poverty is high so that it can target prevention campaigns and ensure speedy emergency response.

- 69 Resources are strengthened and refocused when circumstances change. In 2003/04 the authority identified an emerging and disturbing pattern in the use of fireworks to fashion major incendiary devices. Devices were used to 'blow up' cars and telephone boxes and represented a major threat to life. The authority working with the police created FIRST (Firework Incident Research Safety Team). In its first year, the team successfully reduced incidents by 79 per cent and has been influential nationally, for example driving the recruitment of specialised workers in Felixstowe, the major importing centre for fireworks. It also has a strong international reputation for best practice and shares its expertise with other countries that are experiencing the emergence of this new threat.
- 70 The change in culture in the fire authority is inspiring confidence in partners and commitment from staff and this is directly contributing to the improvements that it is achieving. It has built good community relations that enable it to win support for campaigns and attract large numbers of volunteers. The advocates scheme ensures that a wide range of people know about and can access services to keep them safer. There is a clear focus on meeting the needs of all community groups. For example, the bi-lingual advocates are helping to reach minority ethnic minority groups and fire safety education and protection systems are improving in those communities through campaigns such as the winter survival programme. There is particularly positive feedback on the work of the advocates for people with hearing impairment. The authority is highly regarded by its partners including the emergency services and local authorities. The public's recognition and appreciation is evident from compliments received; 'after the fire' surveys; local consultation with older people; and, feedback on specific initiatives. Evaluation of its HFRA and advocates programmes shows that communities feel safer from the risk of fire. Direct feedback also shows that local businesses recognise and value the authority's improvements in business continuity.
- 71 The authority acknowledges the challenges and constraints of working not only in an area of high deprivation but also one that presents significant risks associated with large urban areas, tourist attractions, major football grounds and an expanding airport. As a fire authority it uses its high profile regionally and nationally to promote a better image for Merseyside.

Future plans

- 72 This theme is scored by this assessment as 4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 73 The authority has robust plans in place to take forward its ambitious agenda including its service plan; five year financial strategy; and, five year capital programme. Targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) and accountabilities and responsibilities clear. Plans such as the community safety strategy and financial plan are well integrated and for 2005/06 the service plan and IRMP2 are to be merged. The authority is strengthening its strategic planning function through increasing capacity in knowledge management, performance management, and project and programme management, but would benefit through further integration of plans, linked to clear outcomes and objectives.

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It is also building capacity to support current and future service delivery, for example refining corporate services such as ICT provision and continuing development of the strong network of fire service volunteers.

- 74 As well as planning for the short and medium terms the authority anticipates longer term challenges. For example, assessing the impact of the aging population; preparation of flood maps against anticipated climate change; and, projections of the impact of pensions and regional issues. It is actively involved in planning for the impact of Liverpool's capital of culture preparations both at a strategic level and also through the secondment of two members of staff to the project team.
- 75 Plans are regularly reviewed and updated through a clear internal challenge. The IRMP was revised in line with national guidelines. The IRMP2 builds on success as well as targeting improved performance. Refocusing of the services plan led to reduction in the number of objectives from nine to four. Response standards are being refined as more risk based information becomes available and initiatives that have been piloted such as the use of non-uniformed station managers (locality managers), and targeted response vehicles have been evaluated and mainstreamed as part of IRMP2.
- 76 The authority is self aware and actively seeks and responds to external challenge. It learns from others as well as from its own experiences. It responds well to feedback from inspection and audit, and it uses external consultants to challenge its approaches. Internally, members are competent and confident in challenging policy and service delivery especially via the management board. The ELT and CLT provide opportunities for constructive challenge and debate from senior managers. Best value reviews provide challenges to existing approaches. Since obtaining the Beacon Authority status, the authority has become a mentor to Cleveland and London Fire Authorities, sharing its good practice but also learning from them. The authority also learns from its partners working with community groups and other statutory agencies to better understand the needs of its communities. For example, refining its approach to the bi-lingual advocates' scheme following external feedback and evaluation.
- 77 A clear commitment to organisational and personal development characterises a learning culture that encourages innovation and supports alternative solutions that maintain and drive improvements. The 60+ project, fire bike project and highly successful advocate scheme are examples of such initiatives. The Contestable Research Fund was set up as part of IRMP and funds innovative research targeted at priority areas.
- 78 Overall the authority has a clear direction of travel and a strong commitment to continuously refining its approach to maintain its impressive record of achievement. As well as planning for the medium term the authority anticipates longer term challenges and is building capacity to meet them.

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Summary of theme scores and strengths / weaknesses

A What is the fire authority trying to achieve?

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
Leadership and priorities <i>Score 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong, effective, inclusive leadership • Clear and consistent vision and ambitions • Clear ownership of the change agenda • Good understanding of community needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation needs to be refined to take account of feedback and partnerships
A balanced strategy <i>Score 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong commitment to community fire safety • Contributes to wider social initiatives – quality of life issues • Engages with diverse communities/vulnerable groups through advocates • Reflection of national framework in key plans • Responds appropriately to new risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in Local Strategic Partnerships is variable at the strategic level

B How has the fire authority set about delivering its priorities?

Capacity: Governance and management <i>Score 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and strong governance arrangements • Good working relationships between members and officers • Common commitment to the modernisation agenda and the vision of the authority • Effective decision making and management structures • High regional and national profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee succession planning • IT infrastructure developments not yet having an impact
Capacity: Resources and value for money <i>Score 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sound financial management – 5 year medium term strategy and other financial plans • budget supports growth in priority areas • good financial awareness – officers and members • progress on asset management plan and managing assets • diverse range of procurement activity and effective processes for their management • effective use of partnership working to increase capacity to deliver, including joint procurement • highly positive approach to a wide range of partnership working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic context for asset management plan is still being developed • Strategic approach to managing partnerships is being further developed but does not contain an exit strategy
Capacity: People <i>Score 3</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly motivated, enthusiastic workforce • Developing HR practices to fit the modernisation agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff appraisals not yet fully in place • Some HR strategies are in development or not yet impacting

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sound progress – IPDS • Flexible use of staff – work/life balance • Effective fairness and equality at work policy • Increased the diversity of the workforce – volunteers used to increase capacity 	
<p>Performance management</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management has high priority – risk register and risk management policy • Regular reporting of performance information – use to monitor and manage – wide range of performance information – internal and external use • Suite of LPs to help evaluate and help achieve priorities • Can demonstrate improvements in delivering against priorities • Realistic and challenging targets in many areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management skills still need to be developed • Not all targets are SMART and focus on output rather than impact

C What has the fire authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

<p>Achievement of objectives</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving in priority areas • Community safety prevention work is effective, targets those at highest risk • Continued and strengthened emphasis on community safety • Evaluation of community fire campaigns and initiatives • Effective approach to non-fire emergencies • Challenging local standards of fire cover • Focus on value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs comparatively high • Mixed performance against 2003/04 performance indicators – no strong areas
<p>Achievement of improvement</p> <p>Score 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear sustained improvements over a significant period of time • Clear improvements delivered in challenging areas • Meeting the needs of vulnerable/hard to reach groups • Good analysis of barriers to improvement and resulting response • Perception - partners & communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although demonstrating improvement, not meeting targets in all areas
<p>Future plans</p> <p>Score 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open to external challenge and learns extensively from others • High level of self awareness • Good collaborative relationships with other fire authorities • Innovation is encouraged, contributes to high performance of the authority • Long term focus – future challenges to the authority and the community are anticipated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further integration of plans – clear objectives and outcomes

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Scoring key:

- 4 Well above minimum requirements, performing strongly
- 3 Consistently above minimum requirements, performing well
- 2 At only minimum requirements, adequate performance
- 1 Below minimum requirements, inadequate performance

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Appendix 1 - Appointed auditor assessment

79 Appointed auditors are asked to score five areas which relate to the statutory code of audit practice. When scoring each area a range of issues are taken into account. These issues and the score that has been given in each area are set out in the table below.

Area for auditor judgement	Grade	Issues included in this area
Financial standing	4	Setting a balanced budget Setting a capital programme Financial monitoring and reporting Meeting financial targets Financial reserves
Systems of internal financial control	4	Monitoring of financial systems An adequate internal audit function is maintained Risk identification and management
Standards of financial conduct and the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption	4	Ethical framework Governance arrangements Treasury management Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption
Financial statements	4	Timeliness Quality Supporting records
Legality of significant financial transactions	4	Roles and responsibilities Consideration of legality of significant financial transactions New legislation

Scoring and Calibration:

- 4 good
- 3 adequate
- 2 adequate overall, but some weaknesses that need to be addressed
- 1 inadequate

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Appendix 2 - Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 80 This comprehensive performance assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 extends the Commissions powers under sections 10 to 13 of the Local Government Act to inspection of a fire and rescue authority's compliance with its duty to "have regard to" the Fire and Rescue National Framework prepared by the Secretary of State.
- 81 The main elements of the assessment were:
- ◆ a self-assessment completed by the authority;
 - ◆ accredited peer challenge to inform the authority's self-assessment;
 - ◆ a corporate assessment of the authority's overall effectiveness in supporting services to deliver improvements; assessed with the aid of the following diagnostic tools:
 - a. Community Fire Safety (CFS)
 - b. Equality & Diversity (E&D)
 - c. Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS)
 - d. Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP)
 - e. Partnership working
 - ◆ appointed auditor assessments of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice; and
 - ◆ audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments.
- 82 The assessment for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place from 6 April to 15 April 2005.
- 83 This report has been discussed with the authority, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the authority.