

Fire and rescue

National report

January 2006



Comprehensive Performance Assessment

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

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Summary

- 1 The 2003 Fire and Rescue White Paper¹ set out the improvement agenda for fire and rescue authorities, including the development of a performance assessment framework. Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) examines how well fire and rescue authorities are being run to meet the needs of local people and sets a baseline for measuring improvement. It does not give an opinion on how well fire and rescue authorities respond to emergency incidents.
- 2 Fire and rescue authorities are changing. The programme of modernisation aims to implement a more targeted and risk-based approach to prevention, protection and emergency response. While there is a clear appetite for change in fire and rescue authorities the pace varies substantially and improvement has not been achieved to the extent that might be expected.
- 3 Forty-seven per cent of fire and rescue authorities have been categorised as good or excellent. However, only a small proportion of fire and rescue authorities are performing across the board at above minimum requirements. Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities and authorities serving larger populations, with larger budgets, tend to perform better. Capacity and the ability to achieve economies of scale are an issue for many fire and rescue authorities, but some smaller fire and rescue authorities have achieved good performance despite capacity constraints. Partnership activity is starting to address these but authorities and government should seek to identify new ways of creating capacity and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.
- 4 Leadership within senior management is often strong but the best performing authorities combine this with a well-developed and active role for elected members to good effect. Elected members must play a greater role in providing leadership, scrutiny and political accountability in fire and rescue authorities. Good political and managerial leadership drives modernisation and improvement in fire and rescue authorities.

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

- 5 The fire and rescue service employs over 50,000 people. However, managing the skills and capacity of staff is a significant weakness for many fire and rescue authorities and none achieves top levels of performance. Firefighters and support staff are the backbone of fire and rescue authorities but further improvement is needed to ensure that they have the skills and support they need to deliver the modernisation agenda. There is also a reluctance to recruit to skilled posts, such as human resources and communications, from outside the service. Greater progress to implement fully the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) is essential to making the most of staff.
- 6 Managing and developing the skills of staff must also be supported by changes to working practices, such as making changes to shift systems or other working arrangements, to increase effectiveness and efficiency. Limited progress on this issue has meant that fire and rescue authorities are not fully realising their potential or their capacity to deliver on priorities such as community fire safety.
- 7 Diversity and equality are longstanding issues for the fire and rescue service, particularly in rural areas. Only 2.1 per cent of fire and rescue authority staff are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and only 2.4 per cent of the operational workforce are women. There is still much progress that can be made to improve diversity in the fire and rescue service both in relation to the composition of the workforce and the way in which the service engages with diverse communities.
- 8 Performance management underpins improvement across the fire and rescue service. It enables fire and rescue authorities to understand if they are making the most of their resources and maximising their impact to deliver on priorities. Performance management is the area where fire and rescue authorities most consistently under-perform. Almost two-thirds of authorities are only at or below minimum standards.

- 9 Fire and rescue authorities spent £1.7 billion of public money in 2003/04. While value for money is often considered it is less often delivered. This is restricting the ability to reallocate resources to where they are most needed, which is hampering improvement. Linking performance to spending is essential to running an effective fire and rescue authority. However, the links are not in place in many fire and rescue authorities. Metropolitan and larger authorities tend to perform better in their approach to use of resources and value for money.
- 10 The CPA process has already had an impact on strategic planning processes in almost all fire and rescue authorities. Furthermore, almost nine out of ten chief fire officers (CFOs) feel that CPA is a driver for change and a majority of chairs and CFOs would choose to go through the process again, even if it was not compulsory.
- 11 To bring about further improvement in the service delivered by fire and rescue authorities we have made a number of recommendations:
- **Fire and rescue authorities** should accelerate the pace of change by addressing working conditions and practices, seeking to fill skills gaps in key areas with those best placed to deliver them. They should improve performance management, support to and development of elected members and prioritise the achievement of equality and diversity in the service.
 - **Local government** should carefully consider the appointment of representatives to fire and rescue authorities to ensure that they are suitable and well equipped to provide strategic leadership.
 - **The government** should note that Fire and Rescue CPA appears to demonstrate a pattern of performance by different types of fire and rescue authority which merits further investigation.
 - **The Audit Commission** should continue to support improvement through development of a new assessment framework for fire and rescue authorities.

1

Background to CPA

- 12 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was developed as a tool to assist local authorities in delivering better services to local people. The 2001 Local Government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*^I introduced the concept of CPA for local authorities. The Audit Commission, working with other inspectorates and key stakeholders, developed and implemented the methodology for CPA, which examines how well authorities are delivering services to meet the needs of local people.
- 13 The Fire and Rescue White Paper^{II} published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003 set out an improvement agenda for fire and rescue authorities that included the development of a performance assessment framework. The Audit Commission developed the Fire and Rescue CPA methodology following consultation and pilot CPA reviews.
- 14 Fire and Rescue CPA is a corporate assessment which examines how the authority is being run. It assesses performance against local and national priorities and reflects a fire and rescue authority's response to the challenges it faces in meeting the needs of the community.
- 15 The methodology uses a self-assessment, a peer challenge element, peers on the assessment teams, and key lines of enquiry (KLOE) supported by detailed diagnostic guidance^{III} to enable judgements to be made, and a rules-based scoring system. CPA for fire and rescue authorities does not give an opinion on how well fire and rescue authorities respond to emergency incidents.
- 16 Fire and Rescue CPA was structured around a set of KLOE covering nine themes. The nine themes examined in this report are: leadership and priorities; a balanced strategy; governance and management; resources and value for money; people; performance management; achievement of objectives; achievement of improvement; and future plans.

I Available at www.odpm.gov.uk.

II Available at www.odpm.gov.uk/fire.

III Available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

- 17 Each fire and rescue authority is categorised on a five point scale of 'poor', 'weak', 'fair', 'good' and 'excellent'. The scores for each authority set a baseline for measuring improvement. Appendix 1 outlines additional detail on the CPA framework for fire and rescue authorities. The total cost to the Audit Commission of undertaking CPA of fire and rescue authorities was £4 million. This was funded through a grant paid by the ODPM to the Audit Commission.

Fire and rescue authorities in context

- 18 There are 47 fire and rescue authorities in England serving over 50 million people. Collectively, they spent over £1.7 billion of public money in 2003/04.
- 19 Fire and rescue authorities are undergoing an extensive programme of modernisation in line with the Fire and Rescue Services National Framework. This reflects a more targeted and risk-based approach to prevention, protection and emergency response. The total number of fire deaths recorded in the UK fell by 13 per cent to 516 in 2004/05 from 594 in 2003/04. This is the lowest figure in 45 years and reflects the progress made in community fire safety. In 2004/05, the number of injuries in fires in the UK fell by 11 per cent to 14,000¹.
- 20 All fire and rescue authorities are responsible for dealing with fires, delivering community fire safety (CFS) to address fire prevention, responding to road accidents, flooding and major emergencies. Day-to-day management of fire and rescue authorities is undertaken by the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) who is responsible to the community via a local authority member or members appointed to the fire and rescue authority.
- 21 There are four types of fire and rescue authority: county, combined, metropolitan and London.

¹ Fire Statistics Monitor Q1 2005, ODPM, Covering period up to 31 March 2005, Prepared by Fire Statistics and Research Branch, Issue No. 3/05, 13 October 2005. Figures for fire deaths are provisional. The number of injuries in fires in the UK in 2003/04 was 15,600.

- **County fire and rescue authorities.** There are 16 county fire and rescue authorities. This is one of a number of services provided by county councils in areas not affected by local government reorganisation. A portfolio holding local authority elected member fulfils the role of chair of the fire and rescue authority. County council overview and scrutiny committees play an important role in ensuring accountability of county fire and rescue authorities. They are funded by grants from government and a budget set by the county council. They tend to serve smaller populations than other types of fire and rescue authority. The population served by a county fire and rescue authority varies from 2,200 to 1.1 million.
- **Combined fire and rescue authorities.** There are 24 combined fire and rescue authorities which serve combined county council and unitary authority areas. For example, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority serves Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council areas. The fire and rescue authority consists of local authority elected members from constituent councils. The number of elected members varies from 12 in Bedfordshire to 25 in Avon. Combined fire and rescue authorities receive grants direct from government, set their own budget and set precepts on council tax. The population served by a combined fire and rescue authority varies from 391,000 to 1.7 million.
- **Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities.** There are six metropolitan fire and rescue authorities. These are made up of a number of metropolitan districts. For example, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority covers the area of the five metropolitan councils of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. The fire and rescue authority consists of local authority elected members from constituent councils. Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities receive grants direct from government and, like combined fire and rescue authorities, set precepts on council tax. Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities serve populations of between one and three million people.
- The **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)** is a functional body of the Greater London Authority (GLA). LFEPA has 17 elected members, including the chair, appointed by the Mayor, 9 from the London Assembly and 8 nominated, via the Association of London Government (ALG), by London boroughs. LFEPA is funded by the GLA through grants and precepts on council tax. LFEPA is the largest fire and rescue authority in England and serves 7 million people.

22 There is much variation in the scale of, and local circumstances facing, fire and rescue authorities. There are predominantly rural authorities with relatively small populations and others that are mainly urban with large populations. The two island authorities (such as the Isle of Wight) serve the smallest geographical areas and populations of all fire and rescue authorities. Population density similarly varies greatly. Numbers of fire and rescue authority staff range from 41 in the Isles of Scilly to nearly 7,000 in London.

The purpose of this report

- 23 Fire and rescue authority CPA reports were published in July and August 2005^I. The overall results are shown in Appendix 2. This report considers the findings of those assessments and:
- outlines the overall performance of fire and rescue authorities and the influence of local factors on performance;
 - identifies what fire and rescue authorities do well and areas for improvement;
 - identifies the actions required to secure future improvement; and
 - considers what impact CPA has had in driving improvement in fire and rescue authorities.
- 24 The report has been informed by the findings of a survey of Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) and fire and rescue authority chairs commissioned by the Audit Commission and undertaken by MORI. The survey asked CFOs and chairs for their views about the CPA process. 39 chairs and 43 CFOs participated in the survey and the findings can therefore be treated with some confidence. The survey found that there was broad support for the CPA process, among both chairs and CFOs. Further detail of the results of the survey can be found in chapter 8.
- 25 The findings of this report refer to all fire and rescue authorities in England. The 2004 Initial Performance Assessment of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) has been reconciled with the CPA process for fire and rescue authorities and has been included, wherever possible, within this report^{II}. However, the theme scores analysed in this report exclude LFEPA. This is due to variations in the assessment methodology employed for LFEPA compared with other fire and rescue authorities.

I www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire.

II A report outlining the findings of the LFEPA assessment in relation to CPA for the Fire and Rescue Service is available on the Audit Commission's website – www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire.

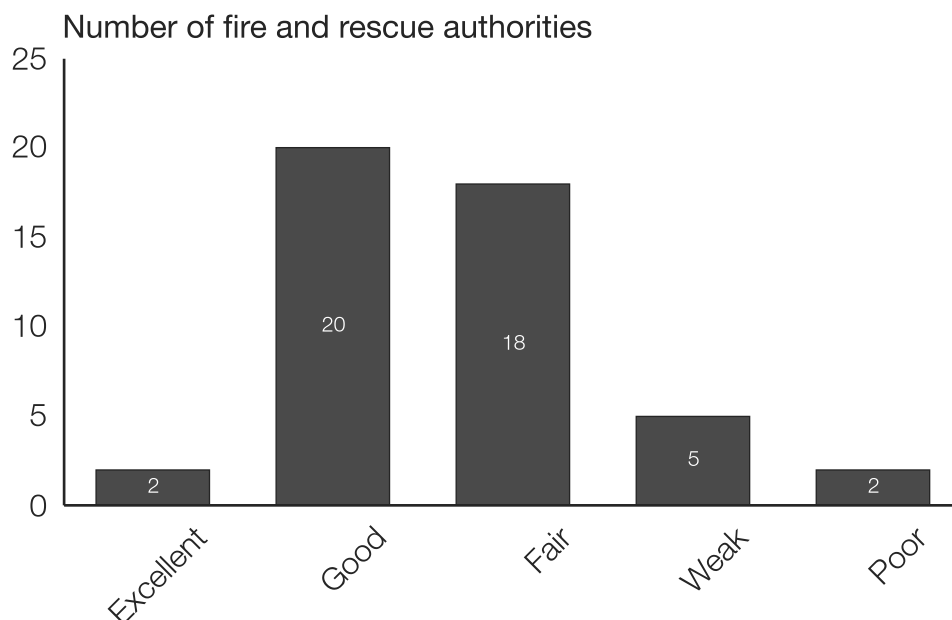
2

Overall performance in fire and rescue authorities

Summary of CPA categories

- 26 Forty-seven per cent of fire and rescue authorities have been categorised as good or excellent (**Figure 1**). However, only a small proportion of fire and rescue authorities are performing well across the board at above minimum requirements (seven authorities scoring 3 or more on all themes). A small number of fire and rescue authorities have a long way to go if they are to deliver better services for the communities they serve (1 authority scored 2 or less on all themes, where 2 is performing at only minimum requirements, adequate performance).

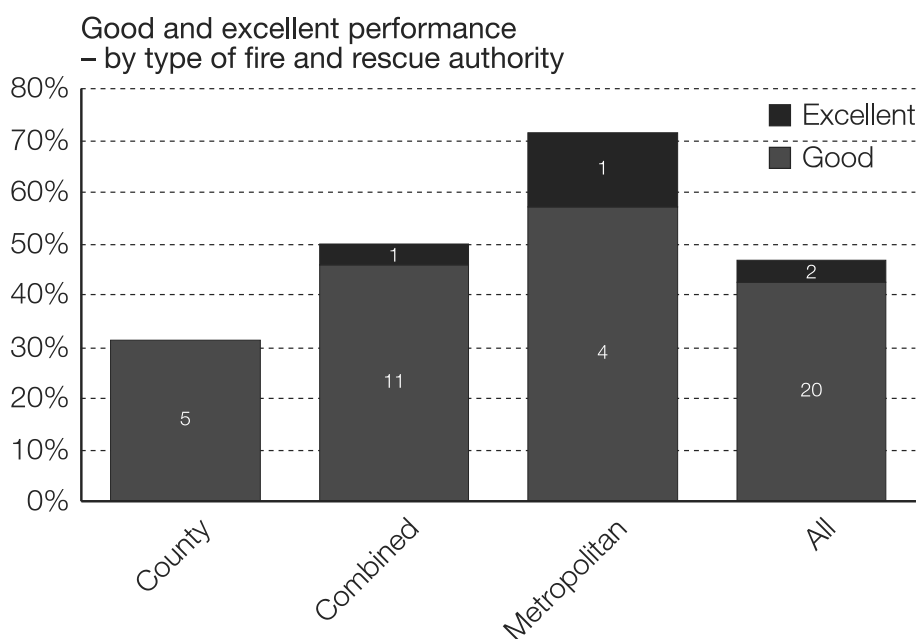
Figure 1
Overall performance in fire and rescue authorities



Source: Audit Commission

27 Overall, London and metropolitan fire and rescue authorities perform best covering almost two-thirds of the population of England. Sixty-seven per cent of metropolitan authorities are either good or excellent (**Figure 2**). Two fire and rescue authorities, Lincolnshire and the Isle of Wight, were rated as poor. Combined authorities also perform well overall while two-thirds of county fire and rescue authorities are rated as fair, weak or poor. County fire and rescue authorities generally serve smaller communities, employ fewer staff, have smaller budgets and spend less per head of population. Capacity and economies of scale are clearly greater issues for county fire and rescue authorities than for combined and metropolitan authorities. County fire and rescue authorities do not generally make best use of the wider county council support services as they do not share the same focus.

Figure 2
Fire and rescue authority performance by type of authority¹



Note: London (LFEPA) has been included within the metropolitan fire and rescue authority category. The Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly are included within the county fire and rescue authority category.

Source: Audit Commission

The influence of local factors

- 28 A fire and rescue authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is intended to take account of variations in local circumstances and characteristics to influence how local services are targeted and delivered. The challenges of urban or rural landscapes, diversity, deprivation and the built environment are already relatively well-developed drivers for targeting risk-focused activity in fire and rescue authorities.
- 29 There is no clear link between overall performance in CPA for fire and rescue authorities and deprivation levels. There is also very little indication that other local demographic factors constrain or enable performance. However, deprivation clearly influences the activities that fire and rescue authorities undertake and the risks that they manage. Some fire and rescue authorities in deprived areas are prioritising activity and developing initiatives in response to the fire risks associated with deprivation. This approach is successful in many areas and it is notable that some of the highest performing authorities are in some of the most deprived areas of England (Merseyside, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West Yorkshire).
- 30 Local circumstances do not dictate how well a fire and rescue authority performs. How an individual authority responds to those circumstances is the critical factor in delivering stronger local fire and rescue services. Population size is one factor that does show a small, but significant, relationship to overall performance¹. Fire and rescue authorities serving a larger population base have a tendency to perform better. However, serving a larger population is no guarantee of better performance and there are examples of strong overall performance across all sizes of fire and rescue authority. Shropshire and Wrekin, a good fire and rescue authority, serves the second smallest mainland population. Similarly, large authorities do not always achieve good or excellent status. Essex and Lancashire fire and rescue authorities have the sixth and seventh largest populations nationally yet achieve only fair performance.

¹ The correlation between total score for fire CPA and population of fire and rescue authority areas is 0.336 which means that population size explains 11 per cent of the variation.

- 31 Best value performance indicator (BVPI) performance (in fires, deaths, injuries and false alarms) is affected by local conditions. There are clear and very strong relationships between performance in these BVPIs and local deprivation. However, these do not substantially influence overall CPA performance. IRMP and associated annual action plans should recognise these factors and target activity by a fire and rescue authority accordingly. Deprivation shows no direct relationship to overall CPA categories or scores outside of the achievement themes.

Case study 1

Greater Manchester Fire Authority

Fire and rescue authorities can achieve good outcomes for local people against a backdrop of high levels of deprivation.

Greater Manchester is one of the most deprived areas in England and high levels of deprivation are reflected in high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. The Fire Authority has used the challenge of modernisation to begin to reshape its organisational culture, develop its workforce and improve its service delivery, through a well-defined future vision and an impressive performance management approach.

Deprivation alters the way the Authority operates, influencing many of its priorities and decisions on a wider scale than the specific initiatives and resources devoted to areas of deprivation. The Fire Authority shows clear commitment to community safety. Effective use of neighbourhood and strategic partnerships delivered by flexible and enthusiastic staff are valued by both partners and local people. There are many good examples of targeted local partnership activity having an impact on deprived communities; notable examples include the Firefly Project, Bury Reading Scheme and Target Fire providing Home Fire Risk Assessments in the 20 per cent most deprived wards of each of the ten Metropolitan Districts.

The links between high risk and high levels of deprivation are well understood and this is evident through a targeted approach to reducing deaths and injuries from fires. Providing the same level of community safety input to all sections of the community as part of a blanket approach is not seen as being the most effective use of resources.

Good analysis of local risk ensures that efforts and resources are targeted in the right place, balancing emergency response with a strong emphasis on prevention and protection and this is paying off.

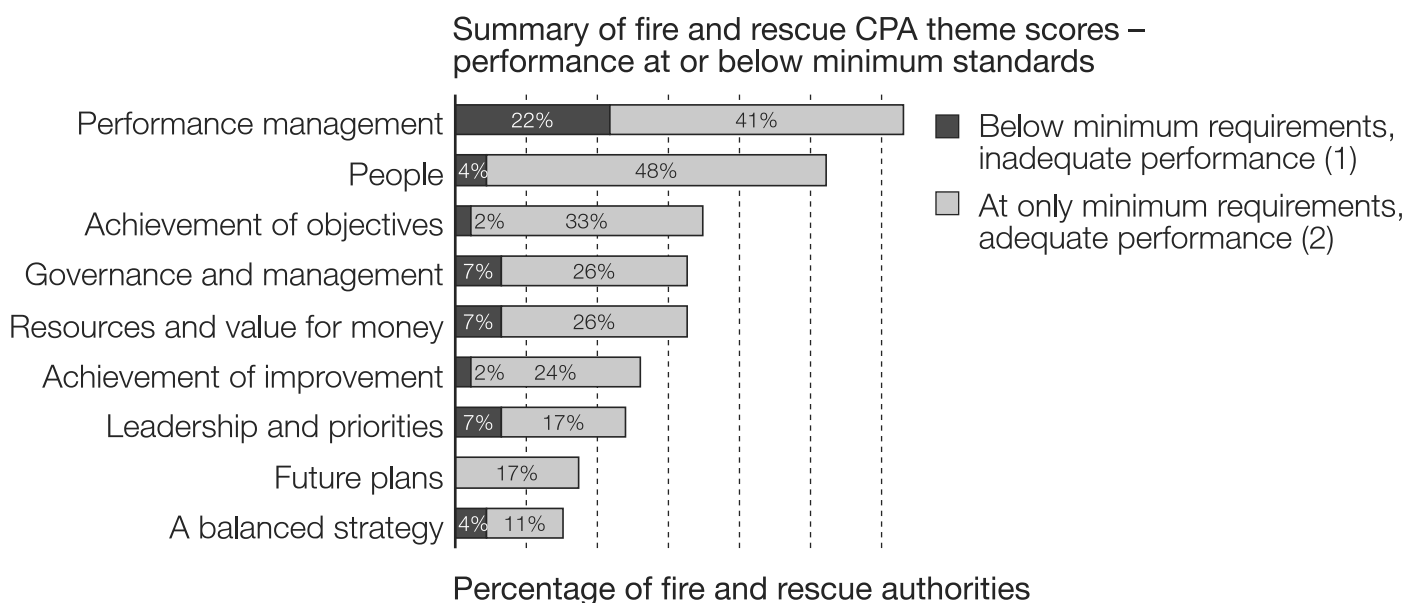
Source: Greater Manchester Fire Authority CPA Report 2005

Summary of performance against assessment themes

- 32 CPA for fire and rescue authorities asked three key questions: what is the fire and rescue authority trying to achieve?; how has the fire and rescue authority set about delivering its priorities?; and what has the fire and rescue authority achieved to date and, in light of that, what does it plan to do in the future? Most fire and rescue authorities have a good grasp of what they need to achieve and are making some progress in delivering their priorities. However, limited capacity (in governance, senior management and resources and in the skills to achieve value for money and manage performance) is constraining fire and rescue authorities' ability to move forward further or faster.
- 33 There are examples of fire and rescue authorities that perform well in all areas of the assessment. Performance well above minimum requirements was most consistently identified in an authority's approach to developing and delivering a balanced strategy and future plans. The themes of achievement of improvement and achievement of objectives are also areas where over two-thirds of authorities are performing well.
- 34 Performance management is the area in which fire and rescue authorities consistently under-perform. Sixty three per cent of fire and rescue authorities achieve at or below the minimum standard here (**Figure 3**). Performance management provides the mechanism for fire and rescue authorities to understand how they are delivering against their priorities and monitor the success of new initiatives. Furthermore, use of good quality information enables fire and rescue authorities to take appropriate action in response to actual performance. Good performance management, alongside leadership and governance, is fundamental to delivering successful fire and rescue services.

Figure 3
Summary of fire and rescue CPA themes achieving at or below minimum standards

This figure shows the percentage of authorities that achieved only at (score of 2), or below minimum requirements (score of 1) for each assessment theme.



Note 1: Each assessment theme within fire and rescue CPA was scored between 1 (below minimum requirements, inadequate performance) and 4 (well above minimum requirements, performing strongly).

Note 2: Excludes LFEPA.

Source: Audit Commission

35 Management of staff capacity to deliver priorities^I is a weakness across fire and rescue authorities and constrained by a cultural resistance to change. No fire and rescue authority achieved top scores here and fifty two per cent of authorities score only at or below minimum requirements. Weaknesses exist in the way that fire and rescue

^I Measured in the capacity: people KLOE theme.

authorities are developing the new skills (such as, for community safety activity) and the capacity of their staff, how they are changing working practices and how they are managing workforce diversity. Fire and rescue staff are essential to delivering modernisation. Managing and delivering the skills and capacity that staff need to deliver their new and developing roles is a crucial part of this process.

- 36** Almost a third of authorities perform only at, or below, minimum standards on delivering value for money. Only three authorities are performing at the highest levels in their approach to managing their resources and delivering value for money.
- 37** In the following chapters we will look at what we have learnt about fire and rescue authorities as a result of CPA and where improvement should be focused in the future.

3

Leading modernisation

Leadership, governance and management

- 38** Strong, effective leadership, both political and managerial, is key to strong overall performance. Leadership sets the tone of the organisation and drives fire and rescue authorities' response to modernisation. Commitment to modernisation by senior management has a positive impact that cascades to staff throughout an authority. CPA examined how fire and rescue authorities are led by assessing how well they demonstrate their vision and priorities, how well they engage with partners, communities and staff, and their ability to respond to change. Governance and decision-making arrangements were also assessed to examine how effective management was. This included an evaluation of accountability and awareness of responsibilities by elected members and management.
- 39** On the whole, fire and rescue authorities have good managerial leadership. High levels of ownership of the modernisation process across all levels of the service are prominent in good and excellent authorities. Effective engagement with staff to develop their understanding about the implications of modernisation for their roles, and for the community, is a clear way forward to greater levels of achievement.
- 40** Strong, corporate leadership can transform service delivery by translating strategic priorities into local action plans. Being clear about what is and is not a priority, and why, gives staff a better understanding of why change is needed and why difficult decisions may be taken. Most fire and rescue authorities clearly articulate their vision for their communities, often embracing the themes of community, safety or partnership. However, identifying and communicating non-priorities is an area that many, including many good authorities, are not consistently clear about.
- 41** Fire and rescue authorities can be broadly characterised as officer led organisations and the CFO is a key driver in delivering national priorities and modernisation. Well-developed and applied roles for elected members are not evident in many authorities. Elected members must play a greater role in providing leadership, scrutiny and political accountability in fire and rescue authorities. Some senior managers have not adapted to the cultural change required by a modern fire and rescue service. A small number of examples of autocratic leadership were identified, which hinder improvement and modernisation. Strong leadership needs to be coupled with well-developed and effective governance, management and decision-making arrangements. Better performing authorities consistently demonstrate both good leadership and governance.

- 42 Poor and weak authorities are particularly characterised by weak governance – both elected members and senior managers. Although many weak authorities exhibit clear vision and priorities, achievements are limited without the necessary decision-making and management capacity. County fire and rescue authorities, which use well-developed and embedded county council governance structures, are most likely to deliver above minimum requirements in this area.
- 43 The role of fire and rescue authority elected members is a key development area to ensure greater and proper political accountability. Proactive elected member engagement has a strong positive impact on authorities. This is particularly enabled through well-developed scrutiny roles and training support. Improvement here will provide clarity in the role elected members play in modernisation. While elected members are widely, but not comprehensively, involved in the development of key policies and strategies, including IRMP, there are few examples of elected members taking an active role in the appraisal of senior staff or regular engagement in performance and budget management.

Case study 2

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

Strength through leadership and governance is crucial to achieving at the highest level. Merseyside, an excellent authority, is the only fire and rescue authority to achieve maximum scores in both the leadership and priorities and governance and management themes.

Merseyside has made great strides to meet the challenge of modernisation. Leadership is strong and effective and the management of change is impressive. The fire authority has clear and realistic ambitions for itself as an organisation and for the communities that it serves. These are consistently expressed across all major plans including the IRMP.

Elected members play a key role in determining priorities and refining plans such as the IRMP. The introduction of a management board has led to an effective working and decision-making partnership between senior management and elected members. Elected members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and follow these enthusiastically. Elected member training is also appropriately prioritised. Staff have a good awareness of what the Authority is trying to achieve and understand their role in the delivery of objectives. There are strong corporate support structures following restructuring and reconfiguration of services, enhanced by service level agreements in some areas.

The Authority is clear about its priorities and is prepared to take difficult decisions. This is supported by an inclusive approach by senior managers that is inspiring confidence and loyalty in a workforce undergoing huge change. Staff and elected members are well-informed about why change is necessary and are engaged in the planning process. As a result of strong internal and external consultation and communication, partners and the public understand and support what the Authority is trying to achieve.

Source: *Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority CPA Report 2005*

- 44 The web-based Improvement Network^I, a partnership between the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), the Employers' Organisation and the Audit Commission, provides practical advice and information on improving leadership, governance and management issues. The network also provides links to other organisations that support improvement in local authorities. Audit Commission national reports, including *Corporate Governance*^{II}, are available to support improvement in management and governance in public services. The Audit Commission has also developed an improvement discussion tool addressing issues specifically identified as part of CPA for fire and rescue authorities and is developing an online strengths and weaknesses database. These will be available on the Improvement Network.

I www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk.

II www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

Internal communication and engagement

- 45 A well-developed approach to communication underpins performance and enables better delivery. Although good and excellent authorities, in most cases, already have relatively well-developed approaches to communication and engagement, there is clear recognition that this is an area that can be improved to deliver further benefits. Effective internal and external communication and engagement supports better service delivery. This includes developing increased capacity in staff, the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), community fire safety and equality and diversity approaches.
- 46 Providing choice in the ways staff are able to engage, and coordinate engagement with staff, helps to develop better-informed plans and strategies. This also, crucially, helps authorities to deliver their priorities because staff feel greater ownership of them. In a number of cases, the knock-on effects of open and inclusive contact with staff can also have a positive impact on relationships with representative bodies. For example, the constructive working relationships and consultation between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire and Rescue Authority and staff representatives is ensuring that positive working relationships contribute to developing and implementing IRMP and IPDS.
- 47 Levels of engagement vary both within and across authorities. Internal communication activity in fire and rescue authorities can frequently focus on informing staff rather than engaging with them. Strong approaches to engagement can encourage genuine ownership of priorities and initiatives which motivates staff to deliver better local services.
- 48 Most fire and rescue authorities are clearly trying very hard to communicate effectively with staff. However, engagement is often not achieving the level of impact that it is intended to, and there are some examples of information overload. Assessing the impact and penetration of messages is vital to ensure that efforts are not being wasted. Greater Manchester and Merseyside fire and rescue authorities are both good examples where recent increases in capacity and well developed communication and engagement activity is leading to improvements in staff engagement and community awareness.
- 49 The most effective fire and rescue authorities employ regular, two-way, face-to-face engagement in addition to communication material. These authorities recognise that discipline in responding to orders from higher ranking officers is necessary for staff in responding to incidents. However, they also recognise the need to develop alternative

management styles that enable staff engagement and empowerment. Delegating decision-making and providing genuine opportunities to influence initiatives outside of operational fire fighting are good examples of this. Conspicuous and approachable leadership at all levels of the service noticeably impacts upon levels of staff engagement with the modernisation agenda. For example, elected members and senior managers, regularly visiting stations to discuss the local and national agenda, provide opportunities to inform and gain feedback from frontline staff.

Box A

Factors supporting achievement in delivering leadership, governance and management

What supports achievement?

- Common commitment to modernisation and the vision of the authority.
- Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of senior officers and elected members.
- Good working relationships between elected members and officers.
- Comprehensive training and development for elected members.
- Partnership activity is targeted to deliver priorities and maximise impact.
- Clear and consistent decision making including opportunities for devolved decision making or budget management.
- Priorities and non-priorities identified using a well-developed risk-based approach.
- Comprehensive methods of partner, staff and community engagement that actively influence policy and priorities.
- Organisational changes are identified and acted upon to improve the service.
- Elected member scrutiny provides effective challenge and accountability.
- Constructive industrial relations.

Source: *Audit Commission*

4

Managing change

- 50 CPA for fire and rescue authorities tested how well authorities are developing and managing what they are trying to achieve. This was examined through their development and delivery of a balanced strategy (managing competing demands, responding to change and contributing to social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and crime reduction), their communication and engagement with the community, and how they manage performance and promote value for money.
- 51 Fire and rescue authorities have developed the services they provide, including their stations and staffing arrangements, over time in response to the needs of their communities. These communities and the risks they face change and in response, through IRMPs, the fire and rescue service must also change. Developing IRMPs, as part of a balanced strategy, is a prominent strength for most fire and rescue authorities. Effective IRMPs focus the work of the authority on clearly identified community needs and risks. These priorities also need to be integrated with other plans, for example financial plans or station plans, to ensure that activities consistently deliver the priorities of the authority. County fire and rescue authorities tend to perform less well in their delivery of a balanced strategy.
- 52 Significant changes to service provision from implementing integrated approaches to risk management are not yet widespread and further progress can clearly be made to benefit local people. While relatively small scale changes are being made, in most cases the impact of these is also small. Communicating the reasons for changes, particularly in relation to closing or moving fire stations, presents a particular challenge to fire and rescue authorities. They must strive to ensure that local people recognise the need to provide services that respond to changes in local risk and circumstances to provide wider benefits to the community.
- 53 Better performing fire and rescue authorities, where risk management is well-embedded, are now proposing to redeploy financial and human resources to support priorities in their IRMP. Examples include:
- in West Yorkshire, removal of appliances in low-risk areas and redeployment of staff to community safety work;

- in Cheshire, the creation of five dedicated CFS centres in high-risk areas; and
 - in West Midlands, negotiating shifts and changing working patterns to support flexible resourcing.
- 54 Linking fire and rescue authority priorities to partnership plans, including where relevant Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) strategies and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) community strategies, is challenging even for good and excellent authorities. Where these links are made they bring additional capacity to deliver on shared objectives.

Box B

Factors supporting achievement in delivering a balanced strategy

What supports achievement?

- SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) and prioritised strategy.
- Plans reflect local as well as national priorities.
- Strategies, especially IRMP, include wide-ranging approaches to CFS work.
- Established shift towards CFS focused through a well-balanced IRMP.
- Demonstrable shift of resources to prevention and protection with a clear strategy to deliver stretch targets.
- Resources are used flexibly and effectively to respond to changing circumstances.
- Seeking good practice and challenge from elsewhere.

Source: Audit Commission

Communicating and engaging with the community

- 55 Communicating and engaging with the community enable better policy development and planning in fire and rescue authorities, including the IRMP. It also enables partners and the public to understand and support what the authority is trying to achieve and helps to manage changes that can be sensitive within communities, for example, closing a fire station.

- 56** All fire and rescue authorities have developed approaches to external communication. These range from basic promotional activity disseminating messages, to well-developed, more complex, approaches using community engagement to influence priorities and local activity. Skills, knowledge and experience in this area are vital. However, many authorities do not have access to these requirements and need to develop more sophisticated approaches to communication.
- 57** Effective external communication enables partners and the public to understand and support what the authority is trying to achieve. Many authorities are striving to produce increasingly high-quality information in accessible formats with a consistent and recognisable brand image to promote their vision and objectives widely. This work is supported by the National Community Fire Safety Centre. In a number of cases this approach is helping to improve the profile of the fire and rescue authority and ensure consistent delivery of messages. Circulating plans and newsletters to the community and partners is commonplace and surveys of residents are relatively widespread. Fire and rescue authority approaches to surveys are generally underdeveloped in comparison to councils. Examining council approaches would provide a useful source of learning for the service.
- 58** The process of consulting and engaging must ensure that the findings feed into improving policy and service delivery. These are the outcomes that are recognised and valued by partners and local people. The best approaches in fire and rescue authorities balance communication and surveys against proactive engagement with the public and community groups. This demonstrates a positive shift from passive to active participation in delivering better local services that can be owned, refined and designed by the community and staff. Strong performance and honest feedback in this area demonstrate to stakeholders what changes are made following consultation.
- 59** As fire and rescue authorities focus on areas at risk, their approach to communication and engagement must reflect and respond to the needs of these areas. For example, deprived and vulnerable communities are frequently identified as being at greater risk. In some cases, different approaches to communication and engagement may be appropriate; for example, the use of minority ethnic languages or working with religious groups. Fire and rescue authorities must be more proactive in identifying particular minority ethnic needs as an essential part of their approach to addressing equality and diversity.

Table 1
Examples of effective community engagement

Communicating and engaging with the community is an integral part of ensuring that local priorities not only reflect statistical data about local risks but also the views and priorities of local people. Most fire and rescue authorities are developing their approaches but some examples of good practice were identified through the CPA process.

Fire and rescue authority	Activity
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	A residents' survey informs local priorities to feed into strategy and IRMP.
Shropshire and Wrekin	Scrutiny panels, focus groups, public meetings and internet communication are regularly used to inform improvement priorities.
Merseyside	Using local advocates from the community and voluntary sector to promote CFS in the community, deliver messages and information and feedback community views into the Fire and Rescue Authority's consideration of priorities and targets.

Source: *Audit Commission*

- 60 Working with young people is widespread in all types of fire and rescue authorities as they move to a role that includes prevention as well as protection. Fire and rescue authorities are actively identifying links between incidents and young people: working with schools, education programmes, young firefighters schemes and firesetter programmes, to name only a few. Impressive results are being delivered in many areas. In many fire and rescue authorities working with youth offending teams, SureStart, the Prince's Trust, education and social services departments is expanding capacity to deliver projects with shared outcomes. Where approaches to youth engagement are still developing, these exhibit more anecdotal evidence of impact, making it hard to quantify community and efficiency gains.

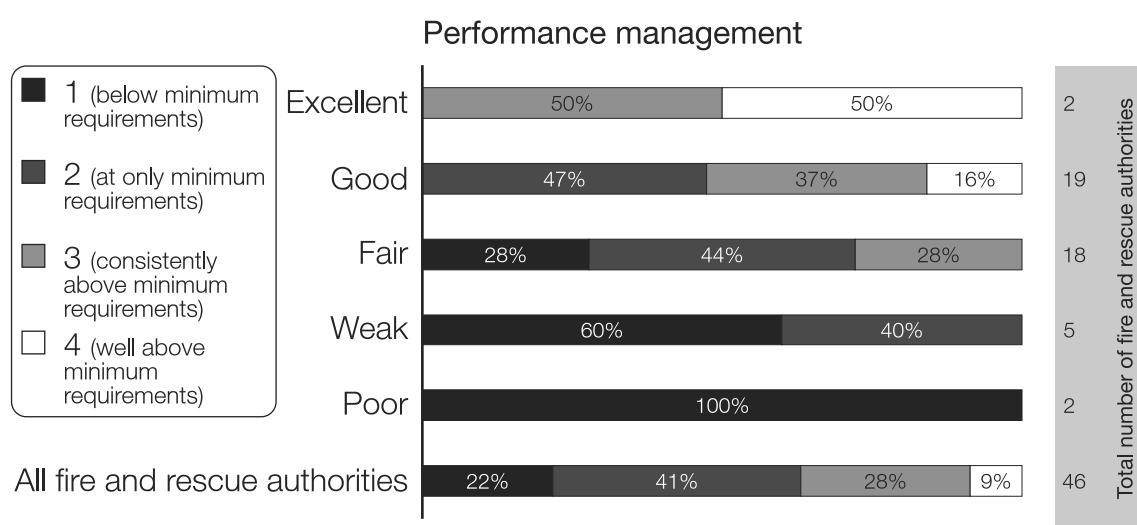
- 61 Better performers are distinguished by the breadth and extent of their approaches. These frequently target initiatives at specific groups or areas in addition to more wide-reaching visits to schools. In many cases, youth strategies would be a valuable next step to ensure that activity is structured and coordinated, appropriate training is in place and opportunities and benefits are maximised.

Performance management

- 62 Performance management is about taking action in response to actual performance to improve outcomes. This can be at an individual, team, station, area or authority level. It should also form part of an improvement approach to help identify what needs to be done, the best way to deliver improvements and how to maintain high-quality services. Good performance management has a close correlation with high-quality standards of performance in every CPA theme. Performance management is the area where most fire and rescue authorities consistently under-perform. Almost two-thirds of fire and rescue authorities achieve only at or below the minimum standard here (**Figure 4**).
- 63 A quarter of county fire and rescue authorities achieve below minimum standards for performance management. County fire and rescue authorities perform particularly strongly in terms of governance arrangements which tend to be linked to county council structures. However, a similar transfer of systems and experience in relation to performance management is less apparent and this area needs particular attention.
- 64 Developing an appropriate organisational culture is crucial to making performance management effective and ensuring that the most is achieved from established frameworks. Systems alone will not deliver good results if they are not used effectively.

Figure 4
Performance management

Overall, 37 per cent of fire and rescue authorities achieve above minimum requirements for performance management.



Note: Excludes LFEPA

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 3
Kent and Medway Fire Authority

Excellence in performance management can be seen to focus activity and delivery across authorities. The strongest examples of performance management were identified in Dorset, Greater Manchester, Kent and Medway and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue authorities.

Performance management in Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority is well-embedded and is enabling the Authority to meet its targets and deliver service improvements. Furthermore, financial and service planning are fully integrated. This approach is key to the robust decision-making processes evident within this effectively managed organisation.

The annual service performance plan includes targets for the next three years aligned to the Fire Authority's ten objectives and it reports on performance for the previous three years. This plan and the IRMP are supported by a more detailed corporate management action plan, which allocates responsibility for delivery to individual managers. The policy and performance unit is responsible for delivery of the IRMP, ensuring full integration with service planning. Targets are clearly cascaded down through divisional, station and personal action plans.

High-quality performance information is available to elected members and staff. Elected members receive monthly reports on progress against the management action plan and budget. These forecast year-end positions and highlight areas of under-performance and progress on performance indicators is reviewed quarterly. The online performance management system uses live data to identify adverse trends at an early stage. Local managers are empowered to divert resources to address under-performing areas, for example increasing CFS resources to tackle an increase in malicious rubbish fires.

There is a sound approach to risk management extending to financial and operational risks embedded within the Authority's business plans. These are regularly reviewed by elected members in line with the corporate performance management review cycle. Risk areas are assigned to appropriate officers and key controls put in place. The Authority's approach to risk management has enabled it to attract a 15 per cent insurance discount.

Through effective performance management, strong overall performance is being achieved and it is continuing to improve in areas where it has already achieved top quartile performance. Success is driven by effective leadership and robust corporate processes to ensure that challenging, but realistic, targets are set and that managers are given the resources and support capacity to deliver them.

Source: *Kent and Medway Fire Authority CPA Report 2005*

65 The Improvement Network^I provides practical advice and information on improving performance management for all types of local authority. The network is well placed to help fire and rescue authorities improve their systems and cultures. The Audit Commission and the IDeA also produce a number of guides to improving performance management and national reports, including *Acting on Facts*, *On Target*, *Aiming to Improve*, *Getting Better all the Time* and *Performance Breakthroughs*^{II}.

Managing resources and providing value for money

66 The resources and value for money theme in fire and rescue CPA focused on financial management arrangements, financial and service planning and processes in place for achieving value for money. Whether an authority is delivering value for money is considered as part of the achievement of objectives theme in relation to its priorities. The resources and value for money assessment for fire and rescue authorities focuses on the systems and processes that authorities have in place. It is not directly comparable with the use of resources (UoR) assessments for councils. UoR is a more thorough assessment of financial management covering a wider range of activities and the outcomes achieved. It also includes an assessment of how well value for money is being achieved by councils. The two types of assessment were developed to serve different purposes and are therefore not directly comparable.

67 Collectively, fire and rescue authorities spent £1.7 billion of public money in 2003/04. In individual fire and rescue authorities this ranged from £259,000 in the Isles of Scilly to £338 million in London^{III}. Authorities with larger overall budgets have a broad tendency to perform better^{IV}. However, this is not a cause-effect relationship and there are examples of strong overall performance in fire and rescue authorities with both small and large budgets. Dorset, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Shropshire and Wrekin fire and rescue authorities all have comparatively low budgets and cost per head of population yet achieve good overall performance. Similarly, large authorities do not exclusively achieve good or excellent status. Essex and Lancashire fire and rescue authorities have the sixth and ninth largest budgets nationally yet achieve only fair ratings. The size of fire and rescue authority budgets are closely correlated to the scale of population served.

I www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk.

II Available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk and www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk.

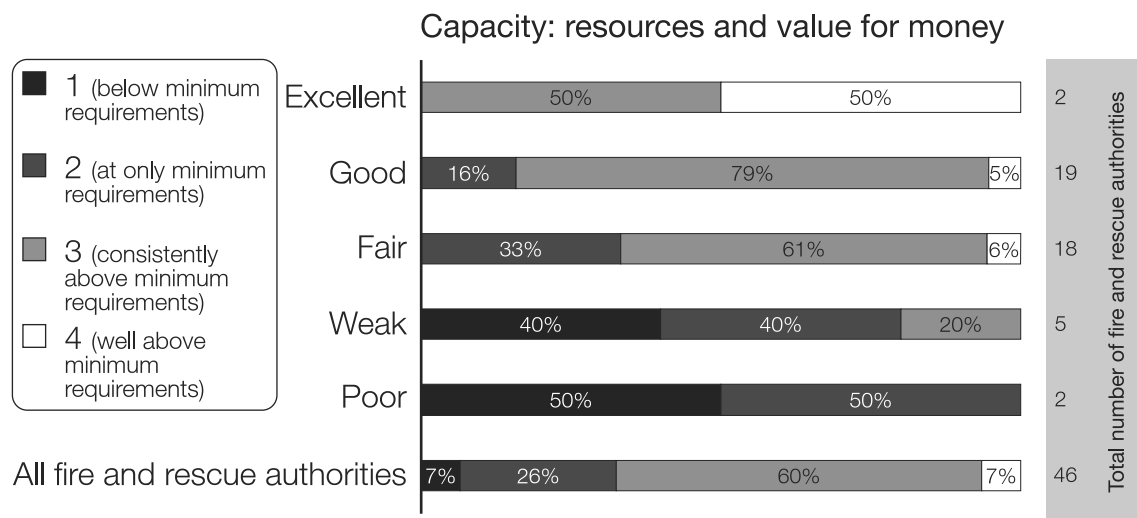
III Source: ODPM BVPI data for 2003/04.

IV The correlation between total score for fire CPA and total budget of fire and rescue authorities is 0.371 which means that budget explains 14 per cent of the variation.

68 Over two-thirds of fire and rescue authorities perform above minimum requirements in their approach to resource management and achieving value for money (**Figure 5**). Overall, financial management arrangements are sound but not outstanding. Only three fire and rescue authorities perform well above minimum requirements for their management of resources and value for money. Some authorities take advantage of and share well-developed systems with the local county council to bring in additional skills, capacity and scrutiny with good results. Not all of these authorities are county fire and rescue authorities.

Figure 5
Managing resources and value for money

Overall, 68 per cent of fire and rescue authorities are achieving above minimum requirements.



Note: Excludes LFEPA

Source: Audit Commission

- 69 Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities perform particularly well in the resources and value for money theme but 44 per cent of county fire and rescue authorities achieve only at or below minimum requirements. Metropolitan authorities tend to have larger budgets and serve larger communities enabling greater economies of scale. Like combined authorities, metropolitan fire and rescue authorities also tend to have greater control and autonomy over their total budget. County fire and rescue authorities are more likely to have smaller budgets, set by the county council, and lower expenditure per head of population. These authorities are less likely to achieve the critical mass needed to deliver value for money in some areas, such as procuring specialist equipment. However, value for money can be achieved.

Table 2
Examples of good practice

Managing resources and providing value for money can be found across all types of fire and rescue authority. Examples of good practice are summarised in the table below.

Authority	Good practice
Essex	Changing staffing arrangements at Ongar from whole-time to retained duty system firefighters and a reduction in the number of appliances at Dovercourt has saved £300,000. These savings are being reallocated to increase capacity in community safety work.
Merseyside	IRMP proposals to save £3.1 million of staffing costs to release £2.4 million for the advocate scheme and community safety projects. Additionally, managed overtime saved £130,000 which funded a small fires vehicle.
Norfolk	The decision to undertake the cleaning of personal protective equipment in-house resulted in a saving of £150,000 per annum.
Northumberland	Assets are shared with the ambulance service and SureStart to facilitate partnership working and maximise the use of available resources.

Source: *Fire and rescue authority CPA reports*

- 70** Getting the basics right (including budget monitoring, financial planning, asset management, procurement practices and costing plans) should be rigorously and consistently pursued. These provide the foundations of good financial management and the consideration of value for money. Further improvement in the coordination and delivery of these aspects of resource management is required even in many fair and good authorities.
- 71** Coordinating planning and budget cycles helps to allocate resources, identify efficiencies and reinvest savings in priority areas. This is a weakness in a number of fire and rescue authorities. Aligned budget and planning cycles are strengths in several authorities including Gloucestershire, Kent and Medway, Norfolk and Greater Manchester. Resources available for local delivery plans are not clear. There need to be clearer links between high-level corporate plans and local delivery plans. This helps to ensure that staff are aware of their responsibilities and accountability for resources in a way that is clearly linked to what they are delivering.
- 72** In better performing authorities, elected members and senior managers play a key role in ensuring value for money is an integral part of decision making. While effective financial management is part of the solution, challenge and scrutiny are vital. Elected members with well defined and clearly understood roles and responsibilities are working effectively with senior managers in the best performing authorities to achieve this goal. Cost must be balanced against anticipated outcomes to achieve value for money. Good performance management is essential here. Without the ability to clearly identify impact, value for money cannot be assured. High cost but low impact activity does not deliver value for money. This can only be avoided if timely and accurate information about costs and impact is available to inform decisions. Fire and rescue authorities can then focus their resources to greatest benefit and release efficiency gains to provide additional capacity. Approaches to partnership working are an example where fire and rescue authorities are making good progress in delivering value for money.
- 73** While value for money is often considered in fire and rescue authorities it is less often delivered. Chapter 7, examining achievement, looks in more detail at how value for money is achieved and shows that over a third of fire and rescue authorities are only at minimum requirements or below. Fire and rescue authorities need to examine how they can ensure that the transition from considering value for money to its delivery is followed through to fruition.

- 74 There is no clear relationship between cost of a fire and rescue authority per head of population and its ability to perform well overall. Many fire and rescue authorities do not make best use of their available resources. They must maximise their capacity and develop additional capacity through partnerships to deliver local priorities. These are the characteristics that underpin sound resource management and delivery of value for money.

Box C

Factors supporting achievement in managing resources and value for money

What supports achievement?

- Value for money inherent in decision making.
- Alignment and integration of budget and other planning processes.
- Effective financial management systems, challenge and scrutiny by elected members.
- Approaches to partnership activity are effective and targeted to increase local capacity.
- Using efficiencies to develop additional capacity in other areas.
- Strategic and proactive approach to external funding to bring additional capacity.
- Focus on delivering effective procurement and asset management to achieve efficiencies.

Source: *Audit Commission*

5

Making the most of people

Managing the capacity of staff

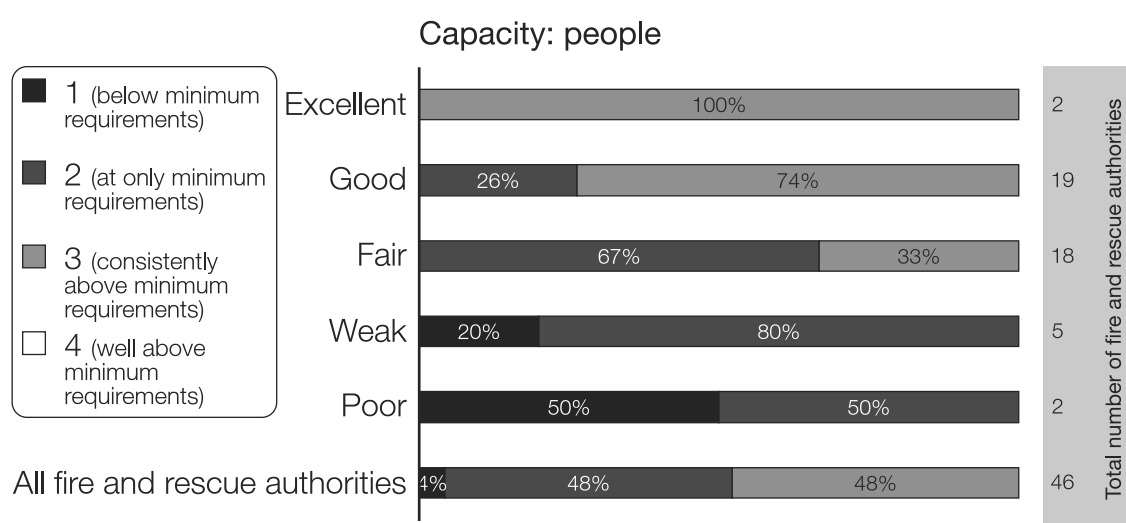
- 75 Managing the skills and capacity of staff^I is a significant weakness for many fire and rescue authorities. Over half of fire and rescue authorities achieve only at, or below, minimum standards (**Figure 6**) and county fire and rescue authorities tend to perform least well. No authority achieved the top score in this area (4 – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly).
- 76 The fire and rescue service employs a total of over 50,300 people, including 31,800 whole-time firefighters and 10,900 firefighters on the retained duty system. There are 6,200 support staff and 1,400 control staff^{II}.
- 77 Firefighters and support staff are the backbone of fire and rescue authorities but further improvement is needed to ensure that they have the skills and support to deliver the modernisation agenda.
- 78 Although authorities with smaller budgets and populations do have a tendency to perform less well, it is important to note that local factors (including deprivation and demographic indicators) and the whole-time/retained duty system split of the workforce do not significantly affect an authority's performance in developing the capacity of its people. Furthermore, having greater proportions of whole-time or retained duty system firefighters shows no significant relationship to performing better in CPA overall, although it does have an impact on the cost of the service.

^I Measured through scores in the people theme of CPA for fire and rescue authorities.

^{II} ODPM, Fire and Rescue Operational Statistics Bulletin for England and Wales 2003/04. Figures listed are for England only.

Figure 6
Managing the skills and capacity of staff

Overall, 52 per cent of fire and rescue authorities achieve only at or below minimum requirements. None achieve well above minimum requirements.



Note: Excludes LFEPA

Source: Audit Commission

79 Without developing or recruiting the skills needed in core areas, fire and rescue authorities will have difficulty in accelerating the pace of change. Specialist skills often need to be sought from outside the service. Uniformed staff are not always best placed to manage specialist services: for example, human resources (HR), information and communication technology (ICT), performance management, equality and diversity or communication. Authorities should seek to recruit the best person for the job after assessing what skills they need. As with any organisation going through a change process, proactive succession planning plays an important part in ensuring sustained medium- and longer-term improvement. This is a weakness in many, including some good, authorities, where there remains a reluctance to recruit to skilled posts from outside the service. However, there are examples where this is already taking place:

- Cheshire Fire Authority recognised skills gaps in addressing its HR challenges and is bringing skilled professionals into the organisation.

- Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority has appointed experienced and committed specialists in their own field, for example, experts in education and equality and diversity have had a marked impact.
 - Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority makes effective use of external specialist support providers, for example, occupational health support and ICT provided by an external organisation.
- 80 There is a significant, but relatively weak^I, relationship between the number of staff employed by a fire and rescue authority and its CPA performance. However, the number of staff employed reflects the size and nature of the population that an authority serves. There are clear examples of fair and weak authorities employing large numbers of staff, for example, Essex, Lancashire, Tyne and Wear and Humberside (fair) and South Yorkshire (weak). Good authorities including Shropshire and Wrekin, Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, employing some of the smallest workforces nationally, are making the most of their enthusiastic and motivated staff. Furthermore they are able to recognise their capacity weaknesses and build on their strengths. They also prioritise and bring extra capacity through partnership.

Case study 4

Devon Fire and Rescue Authority

Maximising retained duty system capacity to deliver objectives.

Devon Fire and Rescue Authority employs 1,584 staff consisting of 597 whole-time and control personnel, 835 retained duty system personnel and 152 support staff. 46 out of 58 fire stations are crewed by retained duty system staff.

The Fire Authority's vision and aims are clearly stated and it has prioritised what it is trying to achieve. The effective use of retained duty system staff is recognised as essential to delivering its objectives. The Fire Authority is ensuring that it has the right people to deliver its objectives through addressing recruitment and retention issues in the retained duty workforce.

^I The correlation between total score for fire CPA and total staff employed by fire and rescue authorities is 0.356 which means that population size explains 13 per cent of the variation.

The Fire Authority is willing to try alternative methods of delivery to improve its service. This has involved developing a more strategic approach to the use of retained duty system firefighters. It has developed a new duty system, based upon an annual salary and has concluded a pilot of the scheme. Subject to formal negotiations with the unions, once implemented it will enable the Authority to address issues of recruitment and retention, provide guaranteed cover on a shift basis and ensure greater flexibility in the use of retained duty system firefighters to assist with the work/life balance of staff. Furthermore, through an effective overarching HR strategy, the successful introduction of IPDS is helping to structure effective training and development for operational staff. This helps to ensure it has the skills it needs to deliver its services.

An effective response to non-fire emergencies is provided by the co-responder scheme which is successful, efficient, and well-regarded by the community and its partners. The service, provided mainly from retained rural stations, enables members of the community to receive rapid medical response to what is on many occasions a life or death situation. The scheme has been expanded, due to community requests and risk assessments, to include fifteen stations.

Source: Devon Fire and Rescue Authority CPA Report 2005

Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS)

- 81 IPDS helps manage the development of people so that they are best able to contribute to the effectiveness of a modern fire and rescue authority. Verification of the progress of modernisation was undertaken by the Audit Commission in 2004 and included an assessment of how well IPDS has been implemented in fire and rescue authorities. At that stage the Commission reported that IPDS might have been expected to have been further advanced nationally¹. Following a second phase of verification in 2004 it was identified that, although real progress had been made, many fire and rescue authorities still have work to do to assess fully and accommodate the resource implications of IPDS. Internal communication was revealed as an area where fire and rescue authorities could do better. While staff were increasingly well informed on the underlying information about how IPDS was being implemented in their authorities, there was evidence of concern and discontent among staff.

¹ *Verification of the Progress of Modernisation*, Audit Commission, March 2004.

- 82** IPDS remains a developing process and in some cases good progress has been made. However, it is still the case that IPDS might have been expected to be further advanced in most authorities. Much focus has been concentrated on delivering the processes necessary to implement IPDS, for example ICT systems or undertaking training needs assessments. The changes to the fire and rescue service that IPDS is intended to realise are not yet being achieved and there is little understanding, particularly among staff, of what that outcome will look and feel like. The need to make further progress to implement IPDS is a greater issue for fair, weak and poor authorities. However, good authorities still have progress to make in embedding IPDS within their systems and culture. Given the extent of under-performance in managing the capacity of fire and rescue authority staff, implementing and embedding IPDS should be a priority for fire and rescue authorities. Specific weaknesses were identified in 17 fire and rescue authorities including:
- slow or limited progress on IPDS implementation or plans;
 - benefits of IPDS not recognised by staff;
 - resources and information technology not adequately supporting implementation of IPDS;
 - IPDS not fully implemented for non-uniformed staff; and
 - uncertainty among staff regarding roles and responsibilities has hindered full implementation of IPDS.
- 83** Whole-time firefighters are frequently the principal focus of IPDS in fire and rescue authorities. As a result the benefits are substantially felt by these members of staff. In a number of authorities IPDS is not adequately extending training and other development opportunities to retained duty system firefighters or non-operational staff. As a result, the skills and experiences of retained duty system and non-uniformed staff are not being used to their full potential. Such ineffective use of staff increases the likelihood of poor outcomes in delivering the key function of community fire safety.

Changing working practices

- 84 By understanding local risks, through IRMP, and developing the skills needed, through IPDS, fire and rescue authorities have access to two of the key tools they need to change the shape of the fire and rescue service. However, fire and rescue authorities cannot change to a more targeted approach that addresses prevention, protection and emergency response effectively without changing the way that they manage their people. To do this shifts, working practices, roles and skills of fire and rescue authority staff must also change. To date, progress to achieve this goal has been both inconsistent and slow.
- 85 In many cases where changes have been put in place, these are related to single issues isolated from a wider approach to workforce planning. As a result, fire and rescue authorities are not fully realising the potential of staff, and capacity to deliver on priorities, such as CFS, is being severely limited. Where authorities have implemented changes to shifts or working practices, such as flexible working, staff have often not fully engaged with them or widely taken them up and the changes are often subject to local union opposition and action. Fire and rescue authorities should strive to address the more significant issues of implementing shift changes and re-focusing staff capacity to deliver their priorities. An emphasis on cultural change needs to accompany these new approaches. The benefits available can free up significant resources and capacity to deliver on local priorities.

Table 3
Changing working practice

Examples of progress made to change working practices were identified and are summarised below.

Authority	Changes made
Norfolk	Retained staff have had time allocated to deliver community fire safety initiatives.
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire	Systems are being trialled for part-time workers including modular training, and development of salaried part-time roles (as opposed to a retaining fee).

Authority	Changes made
Tyne and Wear	A review of the shift system has resulted in a 55 per cent increase in productivity through weekend working and changing the shift system by one hour. Nine-day fortnights have also been replaced by flexible five-day weeks. These changes provide additional capacity at station level to undertake Home Risk Assessments and other prevention activities.
Somerset	The use of job share, term-time working, secondary contracts for whole-time and retained duty system staff to create the community safety action team are examples of the authority being creative and flexible to ensure that conditions of service support individuals as well as the needs of the Authority.

Source: Fire and rescue authority CPA reports

Retained duty system staff

- 86 Retained duty system staff represent a quarter of operational firefighters in England and provide cover for large areas of the country. However, in many cases fire and rescue authorities are not considering flexible approaches for these staff.
- 87 Retained duty system staff are not being effectively involved in preventative fire safety, for example home fire safety checks or youth engagement. However, in most cases retained duty staff currently have limited time for training and or non-emergency response activity. In most areas the retained duty system is not conducive to the easy delivery of this wider role and in some cases relies upon additional voluntary activity if authorities have not budgeted to pay for their time. This is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. The lack of inclusion of retained firefighters in community fire safety work is reducing the capacity of fire and rescue authorities to deliver local and national objectives. Furthermore, in many cases, uncertainty about their role affects both morale and retention amongst retained duty system staff. A number of authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, and Devon, are currently striving to implement new systems for paying staff to tackle this issue and provide additional capacity to deliver on their priorities.

Box D**Managing the capacity of staff – factors supporting achievement**

Consistent characteristics of strong performance can be identified across the service – these are summarised below.

What supports achievement?

- A strong focus on equality and diversity.
- Engaged, committed, enthusiastic staff that recognise the benefits of modernisation.
- Understanding the skills available and developing or bringing in specialist skills where needed – particularly HR, equality and diversity, communication and performance management.
- Elected members and senior officers able to challenge old practices and respond to the need for change.
- Staff development based upon identified needs.
- Effective HR policies in place.
- Elected members are proactive in senior management objective setting and appraisal.
- Sickness absence policies and systems are robust and well managed.
- Effective succession planning systems in place.

Source: Audit Commission

6

Addressing equality and diversity

Equality in the workforce

- 88 Slow progress has been made in delivering on equality and diversity in many fire and rescue authorities. Only 2.1 per cent^I of fire and rescue authority staff are from black and minority ethnic communities (BME), against a population of 7.7 per cent nationally^{II}. Furthermore, only 1.5 per cent of the top five per cent of earners in the fire and rescue service are from black and minority ethnic communities^{III}. Although some progress is being made, there remains widespread under-representation from BME groups.
- 89 There has been a steady increase in the representation of women firefighters over the last three years. At 31 March 2004, women formed 2.4 per cent of the operational workforce compared with 2.1 per cent in 2002/03 and 1.7 per cent in 2001/02^I. A best value performance indicator identifying the percentage of women firefighters in authorities, introduced for 2005/06, will provide additional intelligence on progress by fire and rescue authorities. The performance indicator will evidence the delivery of a national target for women firefighters of 15 per cent by 2009. This will be a significant challenge for fire and rescue authorities, particularly in rural areas. Achievement of this goal will require almost half of successful applicants for whole-time or retained duty firefighter posts to be women each year until 2009. Achievement of this target will require a significant acceleration of recruitment of women firefighters. Achievement is better for higher earning women in the fire and rescue service but again, much progress can be made in this area. 4.8 per cent of the top 5 per cent of earners in the fire and rescue service are women.

I Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Operational Statistics bulletin, ODPM, covering operational statistics for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004.

II National Statistics, 2001 Census, Economic Activity by Ethnicity.

III Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Operational Statistics bulletin, ODPM, covering operational statistics for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. BV11b, Percentage of top 5% earners from minority ethnic communities, 2003/04.

- 90 Although there is no easy solution to achieving a diverse workforce there are some scattered examples where success has been identified. In London and Warwickshire, very different authorities, a strong focus on, and clear approaches to, equality and diversity are delivering good results. Changes to HR processes and targeted recruitment have contributed to delivering increases in BME representation within the workforce. London has the largest number (398) and highest proportion (6.8 per cent) of BME staff nationally while Warwickshire is performing above the national trend.
- 91 As might be expected, the percentage of fire and rescue authority employees from ethnic minority communities (Best Value Performance Indicator BV17) is strongly correlated to the proportion of the BME population in the community. With notable exceptions, fire and rescue authorities achieving well in this area are more likely to come from areas with larger BME populations.
- 92 Elected members and senior officers need to give clear signals to staff that equality and diversity are important issues. Leadership and focus on equality and diversity, combined with structured training across all levels and types of fire and rescue authority staff, provide sound foundations for improvement. Elected members often lack sufficient engagement with the equality and diversity agenda or do not have a clear understanding of what equality encompasses beyond a need to recruit more BME staff and women firefighters. Better performing authorities ensure that elected member training and support is provided to increase knowledge of issues facing the authority. This also helps to provide a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities in driving improvement in addressing equality and diversity.
- 93 Fire and rescue authorities concentrate focus on black and minority ethnic communities and women as the main focus of their efforts to address diversity and equality. Attention also needs to be paid to sexual orientation, religious belief and age, alongside the management and development of retained duty system and support staff. Fire and rescue authorities will benefit from applying a broader definition of equality and diversity, beyond that of gender and race, to open potential recruitment pools and help to stimulate fresh approaches to service delivery and planning.

- 94 Elected members and senior managers also need to encourage staff to take an active part in recognising and addressing equality and diversity in the workplace. Sponsoring staff networks for black and minority ethnic staff, staff with disabilities, and lesbian, gay or bisexual staff, provides organisations with useful resources to improve performance in equality and diversity, both internally and externally. Led by senior management and supported by HR, such networks help to build increasingly inclusive approaches.

Working with diverse communities

- 95 Equality and diversity extends beyond the important issue of staff diversity to encompass how fire and rescue authorities' staff ensure that services to and work with the community take full account of their particular needs and priorities. Although fire and rescue authorities recognise the need for an increased focus on equality and diversity, more investment is required to develop their capacity and access the staff skills required to deliver. While commitment is often expressed, insufficient focus and action to address equality and diversity issues are hampering fire and rescue authorities' success.
- 96 Activities undertaken to address diversity are substantially focused upon minority ethnic communities and gender issues, both internally and externally. However, there is widespread and successful practice identified of work with young people across the service. Through delivery of IRMP there is already a clear understanding, in most cases, of diversity within the community and a concentration on the most vulnerable communities. Using this knowledge, a number of fire and rescue authorities are striving to engage with and respond to the needs of the wider communities. Greater and inclusive engagement with communities is required and much further improvement can be made. As authorities improve they must extend their approaches to community engagement. Fire and Rescue Services work with young people is positive. However, the principles of such practices could also be applied to deliver services to older people, BME communities and faith communities.
- 97 Fire and rescue authorities should use opportunities, for example IRMP and CFS, to ensure that taking account of the needs of diverse communities is an integrated part of delivering local services. For example, Norfolk Fire Authority has put systems in place to enable three-way translation over the telephone in emergency situations and translation cards have been issued to frontline staff.

- 98 Although a wide variety of initiatives exist within individual fire and rescue authorities they are often not shared across stations. Furthermore, these are often, correctly, focused on local needs but are not always linked to a consistent strategy across the fire and rescue authority. A silo approach to non-operational service delivery and engaging with communities limits the spread of good practice. Well-developed strategies are needed here to co-ordinate activity. In many cases, little or no measurable impact can be identified for most community equality and diversity initiatives making it difficult for equality officers to gather evidence in support of action needed. Strategies and plans are in place to support equality and diversity in almost all fire and rescue authorities but are not fully delivering in practice and are often little used. These policies need to become integrated into the work of the authority.

Case study 5

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority

Working to address local equality and diversity issues.

The Fire Authority serves a diverse, multicultural community with varying degrees of affluence. Leicester itself is a very diverse city and the population in the surrounding area is spread across several medium and smaller sized towns and villages.

The Fire Authority's engagement with the community is effective. It has a diverse key stakeholder consultation list, in excess of 300, including the public, disability groups and faith groups. Through communication with its stakeholders, the Fire Authority is well placed to develop its strategic plan and vision. It understands the diverse needs of its community and has produced a comprehensive guide to the culture and diversity of the area to help staff understand the needs of people they might meet. Documents, such as the strategic plan, are available in five different languages and accessible formats.

The Authority is clearly committed to improving both internal and external diversity, for example, by continuously seeking to engage with the wider community through the recruitment of multi-lingual community safety staff. Elected members and the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer have overall responsibility for the disability, gender and race equality scheme and the commitment of managers is effective. A dedicated equality and diversity advisor has been appointed. Targets have been set to reach level 3 of the Equality Standard by 2007/08 and to improve the recruitment of ethnic minority and female employees and progress is regularly monitored. Impact assessments are

completed to ensure that policies do not discriminate, which has recently resulted in a revised recruitment process.

Although the workforce is not totally representative of the community, the Authority is looking to improve the diversity of its workforce by holding positive action campaigns as part of recruitment.

Source: Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority CPA Report 2005

- 99 A few authorities have a clear understanding of how activities impact on equality and diversity issues. This is frequently supported by recognised achievement in the Equality Standard for local government, for example, at Merseyside, Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland and West Yorkshire. Here, authorities are assessing plans and strategies, including IRMP and HR, to evaluate their impact upon diverse communities. These assessments are being used to make appropriate and well-informed changes where necessary, for example, recruitment policies and procedures. Refining and implementing race equality schemes and use of the Equality Standard for local government provide valuable tools to support improvement.
- 100 In a number of cases, county fire and rescue authorities' commitment to equality and diversity is focused corporately and supported centrally by the county council. As a result, efforts come strongly from a council stance and do not necessarily take full account of the specific needs of the fire and rescue authority or the national framework. The challenges and needs of fire and rescue authorities in addressing equality and diversity issues can be assisted by county council-wide support. However, approaches that focus on the particular needs of the fire and rescue authority must also be in place.

Box E

Delivering on equality and diversity – factors supporting achievement

Consistent characteristics of strong performance can be identified across the service.

What supports achievement?

- Senior management and elected members show clear commitment to deliver equality and diversity.
- Equality and diversity training, across all staff and elected members.

- Options to address staffing inequality are explored and implemented.
- A clear understanding of, and response to, the diversity of local communities.
- A willingness to learn from others.
- IRMP and other strategies are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the community.
- Focusing on diversity strategies, race equality schemes and the Equality Standard for local government.
- Widespread and inclusive communication, consultation and engagement and taking account of the views of all parts of the community within plans and strategies.

Source: *Audit Commission*

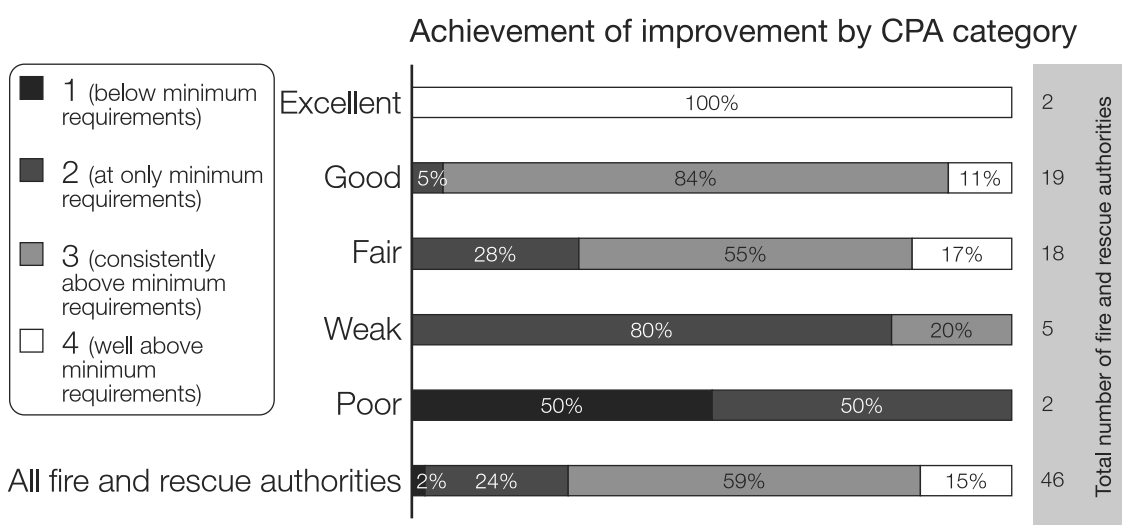
7

Achievement in fire and rescue authorities: then, now and in the future

- 101** CPA assessed the impact of what fire and rescue authorities deliver through two themes that tested achievement of objectives and achievement of improvement. The ability of fire and rescue authorities to plan for the future was also examined. CPA has already had a positive impact on fire and rescue authorities, but improvement is certainly not new to the service. CPA examined performance over recent years to assess the achievement of improvement and positive messages are widespread. Three-quarters of fire and rescue authorities are showing good progress over time and only one authority demonstrates inadequate performance in their area (**Figure 7**). Both achievement themes have a greater focus on best value performance indicators in addition to examining achievement against local priorities.
- 102** Achievement of objectives tests the level of performance being achieved by fire and rescue authorities in line with their vision and priorities, how effective their approach to prevention and intervention is and how well it demonstrates value for money. Only 9 per cent of fire and rescue authorities are well above minimum requirements in their achievement of objectives (**Figure 8**). Better-performing fire and rescue authorities are distinguished by their ability to achieve consistently or well above minimum standards in achievement of objectives. However, strong performance in achievement alone does not automatically lead to good or excellent status.

Figure 7
Achievement of improvement

Overall, 74 per cent of fire and rescue authorities are above minimum requirements in the achievement of improvement.

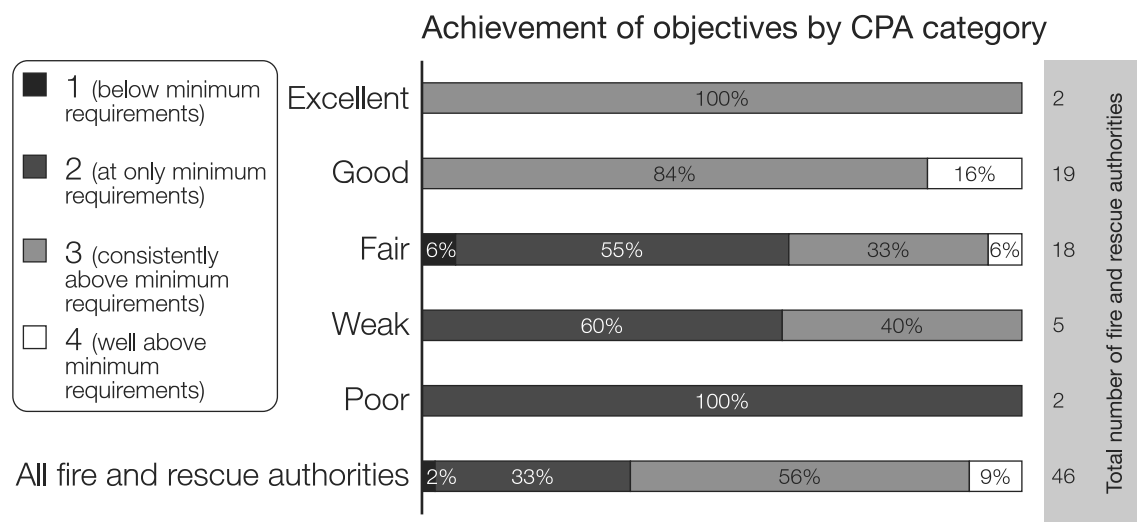


Note: Excludes LFEPA

Source: Audit Commission

Figure 8
Achievement of objectives

Overall, 56 per cent of fire and rescue authorities are above minimum requirements in their achievement of objectives.



Note: Excludes LFEPA

Source: Audit Commission

103 Best value performance indicators (BVPIs)^I are taken into account when making judgements about an authority’s achievement of objectives and achievement of improvement themes. Some performance indicators are affected by local conditions. There are clear and very strong relationships between performance in fires, deaths, injuries and false alarm BVPIs and local deprivation. However, PI performance shows no direct relationship to overall CPA categories or scores, outside of achievement of objectives and achievement of improvement. These two themes are influenced to some degree by (fires, deaths, injuries and false alarm) BVPIs.

^I Details of fire and rescue authority BVPIs can be found in Chapter 11 of *Best Value Performance Indicators 2003/04* published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and available on their website at: www.odpm.gov.uk.

Box F**Achieving objectives and improvement – factors supporting achievement****What supports achievement?**

- Clear focus on delivering high performance in priority areas.
- Good benchmarking activity and performance against family group.
- Effective medium- and long-term plans to secure sustained improvement.
- Focus on transforming processes to achieve value for money into achievement.
- Focused effort to deliver improvement on equality and diversity issues.
- Focus on achieving efficiency savings to enable additional capacity to be released.
- Strengthening emphasis and achievements in CFS targeted at vulnerable communities through the IRMP.
- Clear understanding of, and improvement in, customer satisfaction.
- Best practice shared and learnt from to strengthen approaches in weaker areas.
- Embracing innovation to deliver improvement.

Source: *Audit Commission*

104 Planning for the future is a strength of fire and rescue authorities. Future planning is the only assessment theme where no fire and rescue authorities achieved below minimum requirements. All authorities perform relatively well in their development of future plans although county fire and rescue authorities tend to perform less well with only 68 per cent achieving consistently above minimum standards compared to 83 per cent metropolitan and 92 per cent combined authorities. However, some fire and rescue authorities do not currently have the capacity to deliver against these future plans.

105 Future plans provide an opportunity for fire and rescue authorities to increase their self awareness through recognising and responding to their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Looking forward, IRMPs need to be increasingly supported by clear and costed annual action plans that are linked to SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) outcomes. Although currently under-exploited, future planning also provides an opportunity to outline future efficiency savings that can be translated into increased capacity to deliver.

Delivering community fire safety (CFS)

106 CFS activity carried out by fire and rescue authorities aims to help reduce the incidence of fire, deaths and casualties from fire, in line with expectations within the National Framework. This states that fire and rescue authorities should take a greater role in the proactive prevention of fires. Stemming from fire and rescue authorities' IRMP, CFS work should target at-risk groups and areas of greatest need and risk. Many authorities have not yet achieved the right balance between CFS and operational response roles.

107 Fire and rescue authorities are making progress on delivering CFS through their IRMP but this has been generally slow to develop and is yet to be a routine part of firefighters' jobs. There is a great deal of activity in relation to CFS across fire and rescue authorities (particularly youth engagement, arson reduction, home fire safety assessments and abandoned vehicles) but many programmes identify limited outcomes. Process and output is frequently measured, for example, fire safety presentations to 20,000 school children or 100,000 smoke alarms installed. However, use of SMART targets or effective impact assessment is not widespread. Breakthroughs in measuring CFS impacts stem from sound performance management systems and sufficient consideration of how impact can be measured at project inception stages. There are few local PIs or associated benchmarking data to support CFS work. While there are challenges in setting meaningful local PIs, particularly for smaller authorities where levels of deaths and injuries are low, new and relevant indicators should be sought. For example, these could examine trends in fires, whether smoke alarms are installed or home fire risk assessments undertaken.

- 108** In many cases CFS is delegated to station level where community knowledge and links can be used to greatest effect. Local knowledge and local focus can be invaluable but supporting this with strategic coordination and learning networks would help to improve activity and impact. However, these local initiatives are not routinely shared or evaluated.
- 109** With the slow delivery of IPDS and supporting training initiatives for CFS in a number of fire and rescue authorities, some firefighters do not yet have the skills required to undertake their wider role. This could include for example, engaging children in schools, talking to community groups, delivering home fire risk assessments or engaging with the public on CFS issues. Further improvements will be supported as IPDS embeds and training support for CFS grows across the service. In some cases slow delivery of IPDS is a reflection of an authority's level of commitment to modernisation. Better performing authorities demonstrate a strong cultural commitment to modernisation that is resulting in improved services and greater levels of achievement.

Case study 6

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Achieving improvement through community fire safety.

The Authority is building on a strong history of community fire safety activity. Overall, it is performing well against targets set and is achieving positive outcomes for local people. It is meeting its own objectives and delivering tangible benefits in communities.

Improving community safety by risk reduction is a clear aim in its Corporate Plan and IRMP. Staff are delivering CFS work through a wide range of projects and initiatives and the strength of partnership working is a key factor for success. The Authority is also using partnership and collaboration to help tackle wider social factors that impact on CFS, for example crime and anti-social behaviour.

Each fire station across West Yorkshire has a target for carrying out home fire safety checks (HFSCs). Approximately 135,000 households in West Yorkshire have been visited so far. Staff have contributed to enhanced service delivery in work with the delivery of HFSCs and the introduction of Strategic Standby of fire crews. This makes 25,000 additional staff hours of risk reduction and training activity available.

There are 11 dedicated CFS centres across West Yorkshire which provide facilities to a range of community groups. In addition, plans are being developed to transform a former fire station into a modern Interactive Youth Community Safety Centre to present opportunities for schools and youth groups to learn about fire safety in interactive ways. Local initiatives also engage with some of the more disadvantaged, vulnerable and excluded communities.

Since April 2003 hoax calls have reduced by 49 per cent, vehicle fires have reduced by 46 per cent and secondary fires have been reduced by 22 per cent. The Authority has good awareness of the barriers yet to overcome and there is clear momentum for change.

Source: West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority CPA Report 2005

- 110** Fire and rescue authorities are rich with initiatives and activities to address CFS, manage risks and improve services to the communities they serve. Every fire and rescue authority offers examples of local activities that are changing people's lives, many demonstrating tangible impacts locally. The range and extent of activity also point to a need to take stock and assess the level of impact and resources applied to deliver these initiatives to avoid 'initiative overload'. This will help to provide a sound understanding of what has been achieved and whether resources can be adjusted or reallocated to better effect.
- 111** The Fire and Rescue National Framework¹ identifies arson as the largest single cause of fires attended by fire and rescue services. Fire and rescue authorities are responding well and there are many examples of good practice in arson reduction and developing strong partnerships with the police and other partners. IRMP is increasing the effectiveness of data sharing and cooperation and is focusing activity. Arson reduction programmes are also able to demonstrate clear impacts, partially due to the more tangible nature of arson reduction, compared to some CFS activity. Arson reduction projects have a stronger cause-effect link to measurable outcomes than other less focused activity. A small number of authorities, that are still developing their approach to arson reduction, need to make progress in evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of their activity.

¹ Available at www.odpm.gov.uk.

112 The widespread distribution of similar schemes to clear abandoned vehicles and programmes working with disaffected young people, demonstrates that the service is sharing and using good practice nationally to deliver outcomes. Furthermore, targeted reductions of vehicle arson or malicious fires of up to 70 per cent are being achieved in some areas. The success of these and other schemes is delivering reductions in arson in many targeted areas. However, the level of success varies significantly. Fire and rescue authorities should continue to share their experiences and good practice to secure further improvement. Further development of consistent local performance indicators and benchmarking data at regional or national levels is also required to support this activity.

Developing capacity through partnership

- 113** Working in partnership to deliver local priorities will grow in importance. Although fire and rescue authorities are, in many cases, relatively new to partnership working, especially local strategic partnerships, they are keen and often proactive partners. Furthermore, partners tend to be enthusiastic about having the fire and rescue authority within partnerships. Additional capacity to deliver local and national priorities is being realised through partnership across the service. Arson reduction, youth engagement and CFS initiatives are delivering tangible outcomes for the community. Co-responding schemes in 11 authorities (5 in pilot stages) are starting to deliver community benefits. Three others are in development.
- 114** However, many partnership approaches lack a clear strategy to focus resources where the fire and rescue authorities' greatest priorities lie. As a result, like CFS, there is some evidence of initiative overload resulting from a lack of a coordinated approach to partnership activity. Use of available resources must deliver outcomes. Fire and rescue authorities should, with partners, seek to develop strategies and performance frameworks to evaluate the impact of partnership. While this is an area for development in fire and rescue authorities, this issue is also identified in local authority partnerships more generally. Improving partnership working is examined in the recent Audit Commission national report entitled *Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap*¹.

¹ *Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap*, Audit Commission, October 2005.

Case study 7

Dorset Fire Authority

Developing capacity through partnership.

The Authority is committed to partnership working and its work is well-regarded by partners. Partnerships are used effectively and deliver successful outcomes.

There are numerous examples of joint working to provide appropriate services with partnerships that are delivering notable improvements for the Authority and residents. For example, a heathland protection project has helped preserve an environmentally sensitive area and also reduced the number of fires by 60 per cent. The Authority has also freed up staff at station level to build links with local groups.

Partnerships and collaboration with other emergency services are robust and effective. This has led to shared use of premises in Lyme Regis, a joint PFI scheme for new buildings and the introduction of a successful co-responder trial with Dorset Ambulance Trust. The Authority is increasing capacity and delivering efficiencies through partnership working.

It is working well with LSPs and CDRPs, where it operates at both the strategic and tactical level to support achievements. Active involvement in two of the main Regional Management Board (RMB) work streams is allowing good practice to be brought in more quickly, particularly in HR issues.

Management of partnership work is sound. Staff have a clear view of how they contribute to the wider agenda and initiatives. The Fire Authority is a performance-focused organisation and this flows through to its partnership approach. There is good budgetary control over partnership working. Performance information is shared well with partners to improve cooperative working and the service provided to the community.

Source: *Dorset Fire Authority CPA Report 2005*

Innovation in fire and rescue authorities

- 115** As fire and rescue authorities strive to improve, innovation is playing an important role in service and efficiency improvement. There are examples of innovation across all categories of authorities. Better-performing authorities demonstrate an approach that embraces and promotes a culture of innovation.
- 116** Innovations have associated risks in their delivery. Particularly innovative authorities demonstrate the ability to make difficult decisions and are willing to empower staff to take organisational risks, assess impact and take remedial action if necessary. Smaller authorities are striving to innovate and make the most of stretched budgets to deliver best possible outcomes. Innovation does not have to be large in scale to have an impact.

Table 4

Innovation in fire and rescue authorities

Innovation was identified across all types of fire and rescue authorities. Some examples of innovation identified are summarised in the table below.

Authority	Innovation
Isles of Scilly	Using well-developed risk mapping to identify households with chip pans, the Authority found it more economical to replace all chip pans with deep fat fryers in response to the incidents of chip pan fires. As a result, there have been no recent fires caused by chip pans.
Lancashire	Its appliances have glass fibre body shells based on an innovative design which reduces weight, allows for more efficient storage of equipment, reduces collision damage and maintenance costs.
Norfolk	Global positioning system (GPS) and mobilisation software identifies the most appropriate vehicle to attend emergencies and supplies location and incident data alongside operational risk information directly to the vehicle. This enables a faster and more effective response.

Authority	Innovation
Northumberland	Using shared accommodation in partnership with SureStart is delivering efficiencies through a pooled maintenance budget.
West Midlands	A strategic reserve of 15 appliances provides a flexible resource available for use for community safety work and training, and emergency response should it be required. This is supported with changes to the shift system and working practices. The proposals have associated efficiency savings of £1.6 million per annum.

Source: *Fire and rescue authority CPA reports*

8

The impact of fire and rescue authority CPA

- 117** The Audit Commission asked MORI to survey fire and rescue authority chairs or portfolio elected members (chairs) and chief fire officers (CFOs) about their views of the CPA process. All were interviewed via telephone. 39 chairs and 43 CFOs participated in the survey, across the 47 fire and rescue authorities, in July 2005. The findings can therefore be treated with some confidence.
- 118** The research aimed to assess a number of aspects of the CPA process:
- perceived overall usefulness of the CPA;
 - perceptions of each aspect of the assessment process;
 - resourcing the CPA process;
 - impact of CPA on strategic planning;
 - proposed strategies to achieve improvements outlined by the CPA; and
 - future changes to a performance framework.
- 119** The overall picture is one of agreement with the CPA process, among both chairs and CFOs. Eight in ten CFOs feel that the benefits obtained from the process are, at least to a fair degree, proportionate to the staff resources they applied to the process. However, as CPA scores fall, so do the perceived benefits derived from the people resources utilised. CPA classifications were broadly in line with expectations and reflected performance, although around a third of chairs and CFOs thought their assessment was worse than expected. Two-thirds of chairs, but only half of CFOs, consider the framework an effective way of comparing authorities.
- 120** The scores for each fire and rescue authority are intended to set a baseline for improvement against the backdrop of the government's modernisation agenda, and to judge how well they are run. Many of the objectives of CPA are already being met, according to chairs and CFOs. Around three-quarters consider that CPA has challenged attitudes and performance, supports the management of change, and has given the authority a clearer sense of focus. Similar numbers feel positive about the reliability of the process – that the overall classification is based on sound evidence.

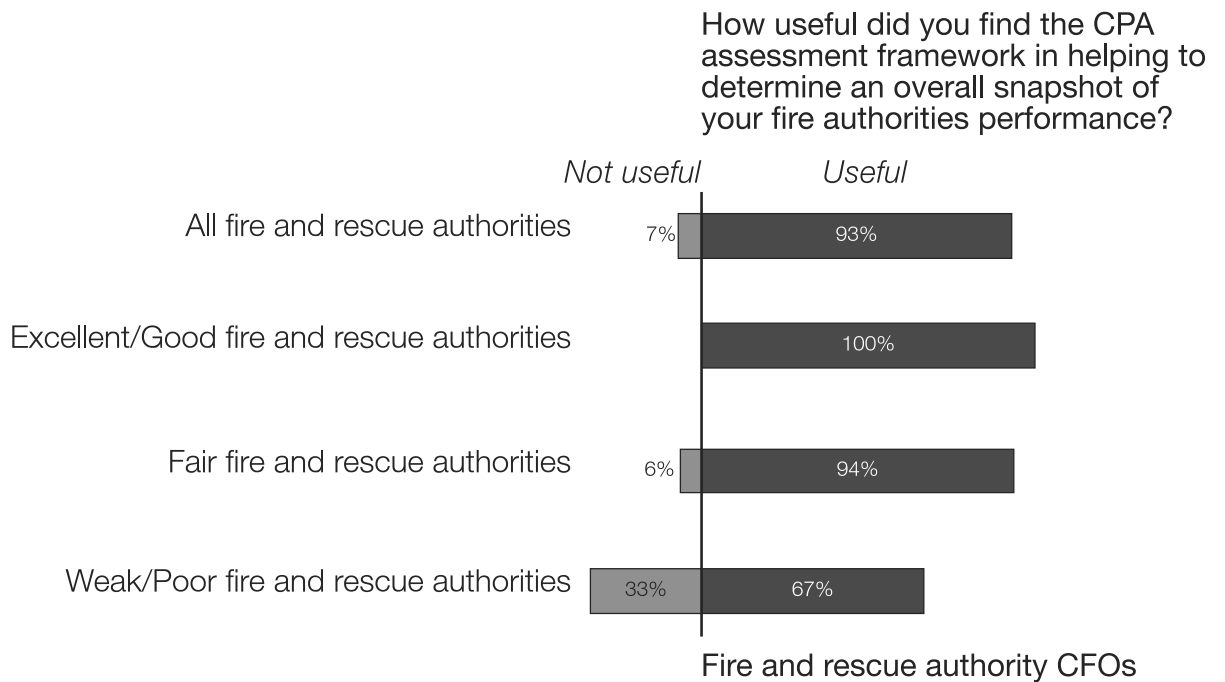
121 Almost two-thirds of CFOs consider that their views were taken into account by the Audit Commission in the development of the CPA process and during the consultation process while almost a third disagree.

The assessment framework

122 How positive CFOs and fire and rescue authority chairs/portfolio members are tends to be related to how well their respective fire and rescue authority performed overall in CPA. Better scoring fire and rescue authorities prove to be more positive about the process. In general, CFOs are very positive about the assessment framework overall, seeing it as a useful way of determining an overall ‘snapshot’ of their authority’s performance **(Figure 9)**.

123 CFOs are the most positive overall about CPA as a method of assessing their fire and rescue authority’s performance with just under three-quarters agreeing with this method of assessment. Chairs are slightly less positive but two-thirds are still in agreement.

Figure 9
Assessing performance



Source: MORI, based on a sample of 43 participating CFOs including 21 from good and excellent authorities, 16 from fair authorities and 6 from weak or poor authorities.

124 CFOs and chairs are unhappy with current BVPIs as measures supporting CPA. Current BVPIs do not reflect the full range of services provided by fire and rescue authorities for example, responding to road traffic accidents, flooding incidents or other rescue activity. Just under eight in ten CFOs and just over half of chairs say that BVPIs do not support the CPA process (a similar pattern also emerges with local government chief executives and leaders). This opinion is consistent with chairs and CFOs regardless of CPA score.

Peer review, on-site and self-assessment

125 Almost nine in ten CFOs think that the on-site assessment parts of the process are useful. The CFOs who disagree with how useful they are also disagree with their CPA judgement. Almost all CFOs were clear that including elected member peers in the on-site assessment is a good thing with no CFOs disagreeing. CFOs reaction to including fire and rescue service seconded staff in the process is slightly less positive with over one in six in disagreement. Nearly a third of CFOs consider too many staff were required to support assessors during the on-site assessment given the benefit they had got from it. CFOs agreement with the statement tends to escalate as their authority's rating falls.

126 CFOs are unanimous in thinking the self-assessment element is a useful aspect of CPA in helping them to determine an overall view of their authority's performance. More clarity on what is required in the self-assessment process and simpler, clearer guidance were most frequently suggested by CFOs as potential methods of improving the self-assessment element of CPA.

Change as a result of fire and rescue authority CPA

127 A majority of CFOs and chairs say that they would have made the changes arising from CPA anyway, closely reflecting the comments from chief executives and leaders in the Local Government Association's (LGA) evaluation of council CPA. Fire and rescue authorities have been striving to improve in recent years, particularly following the introduction of IRMP and IPDS. Given that the majority of fire and rescue authority chairs and CFOs feel that the CPA process has not brought about any significant changes in its own right, it would be expected that their CPA score will not have had a substantial effect on their priorities for improvement. However, this is not the case. Over half of authority chairs state that CPA has changed their authority's priorities for improvement. Just under half of CFOs say that their CPA has not changed their priorities for improvement compared with just over two in five who say that it has. CFOs who said that the CPA was not an effective use of their resources are less likely to feel that the judgement has impacted on their priorities than those that do.

- 128** The CPA process has already had an impact on fire and rescue authorities' strategic planning processes. Almost nine in ten CFOs state that CPA has had at least 'a fair amount' of impact on planning. Again this mirrors the opinion of chief executives in the CPA evaluation for councils. A similar picture emerges when CFOs were asked what effect they feel their classification will have on their strategic planning process in the future. Although nearly seven in ten CFOs think the impact will be 'a great deal' or a 'fair amount', almost three in ten feel there will be 'not very much' or 'no effect at all'.
- 129** Almost a third of chairs and over half of CFOs think their authorities will need help from external organisations to enable them to address the issues raised by CPA. CFOs stated that they were most likely to need to work with the Chief Fire Officers Association, the Audit Commission, IDEA, ODPM, LGA, and Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) on issues raised by their improvement proposals. Asking exactly what type of help CFOs would anticipate they would need from external organisations, the top three responses were:
- almost four in ten thought 'capacity building in weakest areas' would be needed;
 - over one in five thought some kind of 'financial support' would be necessary; and
 - almost one in six thought they would need some sort of 'consultancy advice'.
- 130** Asking CFOs if their authority would be recruiting more staff in any particular area to address the issues raised by CPA, almost six in ten do not anticipate taking on anyone at all. Of those CFOs planning to recruit, over a quarter anticipate recruiting to a corporate unit and one in five to a service area.

Future assessment of fire and rescue authorities

- 131** Overall, almost three in ten chairs, regardless of their authority's score, think that an assessment process should take place every three years – almost one in four consider every two years would be more appropriate and nearly one in four consider that CPA should be repeated 'proportionally in line with risk'. Among CFOs, almost half would prefer CPA to be repeated 'proportionally in line with risk' and one in five think it should take place every three years.

- 132** Were CPA not compulsory, a majority of chairs (over four in five) and CFOs (over eight in ten) would choose to go through the process again. Those more reluctant to take part again or make more significant changes again tend to be from fair, weak or poor fire and rescue authorities. Almost nine in ten CFOs think future priorities should be informed by the outcome of the CPA regime.
- 133** A greater 'operational assurance' element, 'greater self-regulation' and 'more peer assessment' were identified as the main changes that CFOs and chairs would seek within a future assessment framework. However, chairs and CFOs were very positive overall with their experience of CPA. Over seven in ten chairs think CPA is a driver for change either a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' and almost nine in ten CFOs agree with this statement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, of those CFOs not agreeing that CPA is a driver for improvement, four in five of them disagree with the judgement by the Audit Commission.

9

Next steps for supporting improvement in the fire and rescue service

- 134** Following the publication of the assessments for fire and rescue authorities in July and August 2005, the Audit Commission will continue to develop a framework for future assessment of fire and rescue authorities.
- 135** Through its audit and inspection activities the Commission will target its future work with fire and rescue authorities where it can have greatest effect and in line with the guiding principles of Strategic Regulation. Our proposals will reflect the need to:
- promote value for money, better financial management and improved financial reporting;
 - drive improvements in public services that people value, by challenging the fire and rescue authority from the perspective of service users and diverse communities;
 - deliver good governance, greater accountability, better decision making and the proper conduct of public business; and
 - drive improvement in the use of performance information, data quality, data analysis, information management and the public accessibility of relevant information.
- 136** Improvement activity and support is also being undertaken currently, including:
- performance improvement by fire and rescue authorities. Fire and rescue authorities should consolidate and build upon strengths and tackle weaknesses to improve overall performance and secure further improvement;
 - action by the Audit Commission. Planned assistance for improvement planning and coordinated support to fire and rescue authorities; and
 - action by government. ODPM will provide coordinated work to support weak and poor fire and rescue authorities to improve in key areas.

- 137** In light of the findings of this report the Commission has been considering proposals to develop a framework for all English fire and rescue authorities that will monitor and drive improvement post the 2005 CPA assessments. The work will take forward the principles and tools developed for local government and will tailor them to meet the needs of fire and rescue authorities.
- 138** The Commission will soon consult with fire and rescue authorities and stakeholders on how to do this but it is envisaged that the work will be based around developing and applying the following:
- an **annual service assessment**, consistent with the Local Services Inspection Forum principles, that will form part of the CPA for single tier and county councils from 2006 onwards. The methodology used will be directly applicable to all types of fire and rescue authority and will have greater emphasis on service delivery, including operational performance, than fire and rescue CPA;
 - an annual assessment of improvement (or deterioration) through a scored **direction of travel assessment**; and
 - an annual **use of resources judgement**. This will assess the authority across a broad range of financial issues, and provide a scored judgement on whether the fire and rescue authority is providing value for money.
- 139** The assessments will be outcome focused and be reported in the fire and rescue authority's annual audit and inspection letter. The assessments and judgement identified above would, if brought together, give a strong evidence-based picture of the progress a fire and rescue authority has made since its original CPA. They would not themselves result in a change in CPA category; however, they could form the basis for determining if consideration of recategorisation (up and down) is appropriate at some point in the future.

Recommendations

This report raises a number of issues that should be considered and addressed by fire and rescue authorities and stakeholders to support further and sustained improvement.

Fire and rescue authorities should:

- Improve their approaches to performance management to inform decision making and improve outcomes. Better performance management systems, that integrate service planning with financial management will also provide a stronger foundation for delivering and assessing value for money.
- Provide improved training, support, and development opportunities for elected members. This should seek to ensure that elected members are well engaged and have the skills, knowledge and ability to fulfil their role in providing leadership, scrutiny and political accountability in fire and rescue authorities.
- Focus on delivering equality and diversity including a coordinated approach to the recruitment and retention of staff. Equality and diversity training should be an integral part of training for all staff and elected members.
- Extend and coordinate their approaches to community engagement, paying particular attention to the needs of diverse communities. This should include working with young people, older people, black and ethnic minority communities, deprived communities and faith communities to deliver services that better reflect and respond to the needs of these communities.
- Continue to use IRMP to deliver a more targeted approach to prevention, protection and emergency response. For this to be effective it must go hand in hand with improvements to the way that the fire and rescue authorities manage their people. Changes to shifts, working practices, roles and skills

of fire and rescue authority staff should be accelerated to ensure that authorities are best placed to deliver modernisation.

- Identify skills gaps and develop or recruit the expertise needed in core areas such as human resources, performance management, communications and ICT.

Local authorities should:

- Carefully consider the appointment of representatives to fire and rescue authorities to ensure that they are suitable and well equipped to provide strategic leadership.

Government should:

- Note that Fire and Rescue CPA appears to demonstrate a pattern of performance by different types of fire and rescue authority which merits further investigation.
- Consider what additional support can be provided to fire and rescue authorities to address equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service, particularly around recruitment and retention.

In addition, the Audit Commission will:

- Continue to support improvement planning with fire and rescue authorities. This should include identifying ways to monitor, measure and report on progress from the CPA baseline assessment. These will also take account of operational assurance issues.
- Identify how it can better tailor its services to fire and rescue authorities. This will deliver a seamless local service, deliver relevant and proportionate audit and inspection, and promote service improvement and user focus. It will also aim to improve the dialogue and the flow of information between the fire and rescue authority and the Audit Commission.

Appendix 1 – How fire and rescue authorities were assessed

The Audit Commission's approach to understanding and analysing each fire and rescue authority's performance was structured around a set of key lines of enquiry (KLOE) with three overall questions and nine themes. The key questions and nine themes were:

A What is the fire and rescue authority trying to achieve?

- 1 Leadership and priorities
- 2 A balanced strategy

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

- 3 Capacity: governance and management
- 4 Capacity: resources and value for money
- 5 Capacity: people
- 6 Performance management

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

- 7 Achievement of objectives
- 8 Achievement of improvement
- 9 Future plans

In addition to the nine themes, the Fire and Rescue CPA review teams used five diagnostic tools (guidance designed to assist the teams) to help assess the evidence put forward by each fire and rescue authority. Each of the diagnostics helped the CPA review team to form robust and credible judgements. The diagnostics, like the KLOE, assist the CPA review team in their examination of the fire and rescue authority's performance and ability to improve. The five diagnostics tools being used are:

- community fire safety;
- equality and diversity;
- integrated personal development system;

- integrated risk management planning; and
- partnership working.

The KLOE and diagnostics can be found at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire

Each fire and rescue authority was classified on a five point scale of 'poor', 'weak', 'fair', 'good' and 'excellent'. To achieve this classification each of the nine themes was assessed using the following scoring system:

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

Each theme carried the same weight and the overall classification was determined by applying the following rules:

Category Rules

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.

Appendix 2 – Fire and Rescue Authority CPA scores at August 2005

Fire and Rescue Authority	Type of fire and rescue authority	Overall score
Avon Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Bedfordshire and Luton Fire Authority	Combined	Weak
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Combined	Weak
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Cheshire Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Cleveland Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Fair
County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service	County	Fair
Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Fair
Devon Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Good
Dorset Fire Authority	Combined	Good
East Sussex Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Essex Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Good
Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Auth	Metropolitan	Good
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Good
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Good

Fire and Rescue Authority	Type of fire and rescue authority	Overall score
Hertfordshire Fire Authority	County	Fair
Humberside Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Poor
Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Fair
Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Excellent
Lancashire Fire Authority	Combined	Fair
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Combined Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Poor
London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority	London	Good
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority	Metropolitan	Excellent
Norfolk Fire Authority	County	Good
North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Combined	Good
Northamptonshire Fire Authority	County	Weak
Northumberland Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Fair
Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire & Rescue Authority	Combined	Fair
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Good
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Somerset Fire Authority	County	Fair
South Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority	Metropolitan	Weak
Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority	Combined	Good
Suffolk Fire Authority	County	Fair
Surrey Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Good

Fire and Rescue Authority	Type of fire and rescue authority	Overall score
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Auth	Metropolitan	Fair
Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Good
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority	Metropolitan	Good
West Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority	County	Fair
West Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority	Metropolitan	Good
Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority	Combined	Weak

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