

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

# RESPONSE TO AUDIT COMMISSION PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK 2006/07

## 1 Purpose of Report

This report outlines Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's proposed response to the Audit Commission's consultation questions contained within the Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07 consultation document.

## 2 Recommendations

Members are requested to:

- a) Consider the proposed response to the Audit Commission's consultation questions; and
- b) Approve, if acceptable, the response on behalf of the Fire Authority to the consultation questions.

## 3 Background

On May 10 2006 Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority was presented with a report, which outlined the Audit Commission's proposals for auditing fire and rescue services in 2006/07. The document, which has been circulated to all fire and rescue authorities for consultation, seeks feedback on six overarching areas, underpinned by a number of supplementary questions.

The Audit Commission's overall approach to measuring improvement and performance in fire and rescue authorities will be through a performance framework, which includes a Use of Resources, a Direction of Travel and a Service Assessment.

The Use of Resources assessment will assess the Fire Authority across a broad range of financial issues and provide a scored assessment, including whether the Fire Authority is providing value for money. The Direction of Travel assessment will consider the level of improvement, or deterioration, in performance following Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2005.

The final element of the audit process will be a scored Service Assessment, which will have an emphasis on service delivery and include an Operational Assessment of the quality of service delivery.



In seeking feedback on their framework the Commission welcome responses from fire and rescue authorities in relation to the following six areas:

- The main proposal of the performance framework;
- The Use of Resources assessment;
- Direction of Travel assessment;
- Service Assessment;
- Reporting and categorisation; and
- General.

At the Fire Authority meeting on 10 May Members agreed that a response should be developed by officers for consideration by the Strategy and Resources Committee. This report details the Authority's response to the Commission's questions. Members of the Strategy and Resources Committee are requested to consider and, if acceptable, agree the responses to each question. The questions and proposed responses are set out in appendix to this report.

## 4 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## 5 Appendix

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Proposed Response to the Audit Commission Performance Framework 2006/07

## 6 Background Papers

### Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

The Fire and Rescue National Framework Document 2005/06

The Fire and Rescue National Framework Document 2006/08

### Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

10 May 2006, Report 17, Audit Commission Consultation – The Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2006/07

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

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

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Ged Edwards, Programme Manager, on 01743 260208.



# Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

## Proposed Response to the Audit Commission Performance Framework 2006/07

### 1. MAIN PROPOSAL

#### 1.1 Do you agree, or disagree, that the proposed Performance Framework for the fire and rescue authorities will provide a clear picture of improvement or deterioration in service since the baseline Fire and Rescue CPA assessment?

##### *Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority fully supports the proposed Framework, which seems to follow a logical progression along a value chain considering economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By using the CPA Improvement Plan as a baseline, the proposed process would appear to paint a picture of progress, or indeed deterioration, in overall performance against the previously published CPA Improvement Plan.

The three elements of the Framework, supported by the key performance indicators, most of which have been available and reported upon since 1999, should enable the Commission to make a balanced and robust judgement on authorities' performance.

#### 1.2 Are there other factors the Audit Commission should take into account to measure performance in fire and rescue authorities?

##### *Fire Authority Response*

Whilst the Fire Authority feels on balance that the process appears robust, it is concerned that no adjustment has been made for the issue of sparsity. The previous standards of fire cover took account of rural factors in terms of the A – D risk attendance times. The Fire Authority recommends that KPI F5 – 'Percentage of accidental dwelling fires confined to room of origin' should have a sparsity adjustment factored into it. The indicator, by its very nature, disadvantages authorities covering large rural areas (with consequently longer attendance times) and not adjusting for sparsity would disadvantage these authorities further.

### 2. USE OF RESOURCES

#### 2.1 Do you agree or disagree that the Key Lines of Enquiry for Use of Resources assessments in fire and rescue authorities are appropriate? If not, please outline your areas of concern and proposals for improving them.

##### *Fire Authority Response*

The value for money Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) contained within the Use of Resources element makes reference to authorities making 2.5% efficiency savings. This is inconsistent with the £105 million (5.67%) across-the-board saving required by the Fire and Rescue Service, quoted in the earlier editions of Fire and Rescue National Framework and reiterated in the latest 2006/08 document (Paragraph 7.2). Additionally, guidance issued in Fire Service Circular 48/2005 (as referred to in the Framework document) is clear that not all fire and rescue authorities have the same capacity to make efficiency savings and therefore it appears inconsistent that all fire and rescue authorities will be measured against the same efficiency benchmark.



### **3. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL**

#### **3.1 Do you agree or disagree that the Direction of Travel Key Lines of Enquiry will enable the capture of the fire and rescue authority's improvement since the baseline Fire and Rescue CPA and the likelihood of continued improvement? If not, please outline your areas of concern and proposals for improving them.**

##### *Fire Authority Response*

The Direction of Travel KLOE appears to be logical in terms of evidencing improving outcomes and assessing progress in terms of not only implementing improvement, but sustaining improvement into the future.

The descriptors that accompany the KLOEs are clear and demonstrate succinctly what the Fire Authority needs to demonstrate to meet the requirements of the KLOE.

Point 2.3 in Table 7 of Appendix 1 states - Does the authority have the capacity to deliver its plans? The Fire Authority feels this should be reworded to include also capability and be demonstrated with evidence of competence, for example appropriately trained staff. Paragraph 2.5 of the National Framework document actually refers to capacity in terms of resources and expertise and, as such, the Fire Authority believes this should be the case with the direction of travel KLOE.

### **4. SERVICE ASSESSMENTS**

#### **4.1 Do you agree or disagree that the performance indicators used give an accurate reflection of service outcomes of fire and rescue authorities? Are there other national indicators you suggest we use in the Service Assessment?**

##### *Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority very strongly agrees that 7 out of the 8 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are appropriate measures, as they focus on outcomes. However, the Authority is concerned that consideration to KPI F8 – 'Number of non fire related incidents attended per 10,000 population' should be revisited.

Whilst the inclusion of such an indicator makes good sense, we feel that there is a good case for excluding all life risk incidents and not just those related to fire. We feel that the excluded incidents should include, for example, Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), Water Safety and Hazardous Material Incidents. With regard to RTCs in particular there is now a clear legislative requirement to attend these types of incident, and we would not like to see Fire and Rescue Authorities with extensive road networks in their area penalised in the PIs for complying with legislation.

As a fire and rescue authority that has been focussing on performance management and outcomes for many years, we are extremely pleased that the Audit Commission is now including these measures within their performance framework. If anything we believe that they should be given more prominence over the service assessment on the grounds that these outcomes are the result of many years of activity, whereas we have some doubts about the validity, consistency and objectivity of the proposed service assessment.



**4.2 Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for the treatment of performance indicators; the calculation of performance indicator thresholds and the distribution of performance indicators around the thresholds set out in appendix 2?**

*Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority fully endorses this proposal, which it feels is a fair measurement of performance. The thresholds reduce volatility and consider the issue of deprivation, where appropriate.

**4.3 Do you agree or disagree with the method proposed for determining the fire and rescue Service Assessment set out in appendix 2 to be appropriate?**

*Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority has concerns with the structure and layout of the Service Assessment KLOEs. Unlike the use of resources KLOEs the lack of KLOE descriptors for the Service Assessment element of the Framework may lead to an inconsistency of approach between different assessors. The Use of Resources KLOE links the evidence expected by an assessor to the descriptor, which allows an objective judgement to be made. The Authority feels that the lack of a descriptor directly linked to the evidence required may lead to ambiguity and lack of consistency.

**4.4 Do you agree or disagree with our proposals to score missing BVPI data below the lower threshold?**

*Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority fully endorses this proposal. All fire and rescue authorities have been required to submit BVPI data since 1999. The Authority sees no reason why returns would be submitted with incomplete data.

**5. REPORTING AND CATEGORISATION**

**5.1 Do you agree or disagree with our proposal to report the baseline Fire and Rescue CPA score with the results of the Performance Framework?**

*Fire Authority Response*

The Fire Authority agrees with this proposal. The CPA score is the baseline, by which the Commission will judge service improvement or deterioration. Therefore, it is wholly appropriate to include the score with the results of the Performance Framework.

**6. GENERAL**

**6.1 Are there any other observations you wish to make on the proposals in this document, or any suggestions for improvement?**

*Fire Authority Response*

The Framework requires authorities to produce a self assessment document for Direction of Travel and the Service Assessment. To ensure consistency of approach and to meet the Commission's expectations the Authority suggests a self assessment standard template should be provided by the commission to fire and rescue authorities.

