

Response to the Audit Commission Consultation on Performance Indicator Set for the Service Assessment Treatment and Thresholds 2007/08

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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

1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority's response to the Audit Commission's proposals for treatment and thresholds of new performance indicators to be included in the 2007/08 fire and rescue service assessment.

2 Recommendations

The Audit and Performance Management Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

At the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority on 18 July 2007 officers informed Members of the Audit Commission's proposals for the Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08. The proposal for the Service Assessment element of the Framework will consider performance against 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) - 6 existing indicators from 2006/07 plus 4 additional indicators for 2007/08.

Following the Annual Meeting, the Audit Commission, in July 2007, published their proposals for the treatment and thresholds of the 4 additional performance indicators to be included in the fire and rescue service assessment. The four additional indicators to be included in the assessment are set out overleaf.



- F8 False alarms caused by automatic fire detection;
- F9 Calls to malicious false alarms;
- F11 Fires in non-domestic properties;
- F13 Percentage of fires attended in dwellings where no smoke alarm was fitted.

4 Consultation Exercise

Fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) were invited to respond during the short consultation period, which commenced in July and ceased on 30 August 2007. The consultation exercise sought responses to the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the proposed treatment and thresholds for the new indicators to be included in the 2007 fire and rescue service assessment (F8, F9, F11 and F13)? If not, then please state which treatments or thresholds you do not agree with.
2. Do you have any alternative proposals for how thresholds should be set on the new indicators (F8, F9, F11 and F13) to be included in the 2007 fire and rescue service assessment? If so, then please state which indicators.

In light of the short consultation period officers prepared and submitted a response on behalf of the Authority by the 30 August 2007 deadline, with a view to bringing a paper to the September meeting of this Committee.

5 Fire Authority Response to Consultation

The Authority's response to the Audit Commission consultation questions is given at Appendix A to this report.

After studying the consultation document officers have concluded that the proposed treatments and thresholds of 3 of the 4 newly proposed indicators are appropriate.

Concerns have once again been raised, however, regarding indicator F11 - BVPI 207 (Fires in non-domestic properties). Since the Audit Commission first suggested the use of this particular indicator in its Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 proposals for re-categorisation consultation paper (released in November 2006) officers have lobbied the Audit Commission and Communities and Local Government (CLG) regarding the flawed nature of this performance indicator. This culminated in the Chief Fire Officer writing to Andrew Hughes, Audit Commission Fire and Rescue National Policy Lead, on 16 March 2007, outlining the reasons why this indicator should be amended. A copy of this letter appears at Appendix B to this report.



The current performance indicator guidance published by CLG determines that non-domestic properties are all commercial premises subject to business rates. However, as most farmland and farm buildings are not subject to business rates, over 4,000 farms in Shropshire are not included in this indicator. This has a negative effect on predominately rural FRAs and, as a consequence, Shropshire's performance, like that of many other rural brigades, is undermined. The table at Appendix C highlights the difference in the performance of FRAs if the number of fires in farm buildings is taken out of the calculation. In the case of Shropshire, by removing farm fires from the 2005/06 performance tables (latest CLG verified figures) the Performance Indicator improves by 15%.

It has, therefore, been suggested as part of this Authority's consultation response that the indicator is amended or otherwise removed from the Audit Commission's suite of indicators.

6 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7 Legal Comment

The Local Government Act 1999 (Part 1) places a responsibility upon the Audit Commission to inspect compliance by best value authorities, principally in relation to the duty to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of functions, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. FRAs are best value authorities under the Local Government Act 1999.

8 Equality Impact Assessment

This report is purely an update on the Performance Framework Assessment for 2007/08 and so the recommendations within the report have no impact on people.

9 Appendices

Appendix A

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Response to the Audit Commission consultation on performance indicator treatment and thresholds

Appendix B

Letter from the Chief Fire Officer to Andrew Hughes reference performance indicator F11 - BVPI 207 (Fires in non-domestic properties per 1,000 non-domestic properties)

Appendix C

Table of Best Value Performance Indicator 207 with buildings of worship and agricultural buildings removed, 2005/06



10 Background Papers

Audit Commission

November 2006 - Performance assessment framework 2007/08 and proposals for re categorisations (Consultation)

July 2007 – Fire and rescue performance assessment 2007 and 2008. Consultation on performance indicator set for the service assessment treatment and thresholds.

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

14 February 2007, Report 19 – Audit Commission Consultation Exercise: Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 and Proposals for Re-categorisation – and minutes

18 July 2007, Report 17 – Fire and Rescue Performance Framework 2007/08 – and minutes

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.

Balanced Score Card	*	Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment	*	Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*



**Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
Response to the Audit Commission Consultation on Performance
indicator Set for the Service Assessment Treatment and Thresholds
2007/08**

Do you agree with the proposed treatment and thresholds for the new indicators to be included in the 2007 fire and rescue service assessment (F8, F9, F11 and F13)? If not then please state which treatments or thresholds you do not agree with.

Fire Authority Response

Indicator F8 – The Authority agrees with the treatment and thresholds for this indicator.

Indicator F9 - The Authority agrees with the treatment and thresholds for this indicator.

Indicator F11 - Throughout the entire consultation process for the Performance Assessment Framework 2007/08 the Authority has been aware of anomalies surrounding BVPI 207 – *Fires in non-domestic properties per 1,000 non domestic properties*. This has been raised on several occasions and as a consequence Chief Fire Officer Alan Taylor has written to Andrew Hughes (Audit Commission) and Cath Reynolds (Communities and Local Government) highlighting, in detail, the irregularity surrounding this particular indicator. A copy of the letter dated 16 March 2007 is enclosed with this response together with a supporting table (produced by CLG) demonstrating how the anomalies impact very unfairly upon rural Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Indicator F13 – The Authority agrees with the treatment and thresholds for this indicator.

Do you have any alternative proposals for how thresholds should be set on the new indicators (F8, F9, F11 and F13) to be included in the 2007 fire and rescue service assessment? If so then please state which indicators.

Fire Authority Response

The Authority has no comments relating to the indicator thresholds for all the suite of indicators. However the Authority questions how indicator F11 is calculated. An indicator that does not include farms and agricultural buildings in the denominator but includes them in the numerator is not a valid measure. As a consequence the Authority questions the merit in using this indicator in its present form and suggests it is amended or otherwise removed from the suite of indicators.

Andrew Hughes
Fire and Rescue Service National Policy Lead
Local Government Performance and Improvement Directorate
Audit Commission
First Floor, Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ

16 March 2007

GAT/LI
Let03li

Alan Taylor
Chief Fire Officer

01743 260201

Dear Andy

Fire & Rescue Performance Assessment 2007 – Performance Indicators

It was good to see you yesterday and I felt that the meeting was a great success. There appeared to be much greater consensus than I anticipated on the way forward with confirming BVPIs for inclusion in the fire and rescue service assessment 2007/08.

As discussed, the purpose of my letter is to confirm the difficulties that we have uncovered with indicator F11 as identified in your consultation document (page 29) i.e., BVPI 207 – the number of fires in non-domestic properties per 1,000 non-domestic properties.

There can clearly be no argument with the rationale you put forward that fire and rescue services should seek to reduce the number of fires in commercial properties, and that success will equate to a lower number of fires in such properties. As always, however, the difficulty lies in the detail. In the BVPI guidance for BV 207, the following definitions are given:

- 1) Non-domestic premises – the number of non-domestic properties in the fire authority's area. This figure is to be taken from the latest available National Non-Domestic Rates Provisional Contributions published by CIPFA. Non-domestic premises are those included in the BVPI Consultation Paper of 3 August 2004.
- 2) Fires – include both accidental and deliberate as reported on FDR1
- 3) HMOs – Exclude fires in HMOs

Using the above guidance is relatively straightforward and the number of non-domestic properties in Shropshire, for example, is easily established at 15,257. The difficulties arise when it is recognised that most farmland and farm buildings are not subject to business rates, and this means that 4,131 farms in Shropshire are not therefore included as non-domestic premises for the purpose of this indicator. Fires in farm or agricultural buildings are, however, recorded against BV207. In short, farms and agricultural buildings **are not** included in the denominator for BV207, **however**, fires in these buildings **are included** in the numerator.

We have had several discussions with colleagues at the Communities and Local Government (CLG) who have also recognised this as an anomaly which penalises quite severely those rural fire and rescue services with a high number of farms in their area. I have attached for your consideration a table compiled by the CLG which shows the impact of removing fires in agricultural buildings from the 2005/06 statistics (i.e., ensuring that the numerator and denominator are measuring the same incidents). As you will see the performance of the following nine rural fire and rescue services is improved by over 10%.

Cornwall
Gloucestershire
Hereford and Worcestershire
Lincolnshire
Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Shropshire
Somerset
Wiltshire

I would like to propose that, in view of the scale of these inequalities, action is taken to deal with the issue at this stage. Clearly there are two relatively straightforward solutions available as follows:

- 1) Increase the number of non-domestic properties in the fire authority's area to include farms e.g. in Shropshire's case from 15,257 to 19,388

Or alternatively;

- 2) Request CLG to remove fires in farm/agricultural buildings from those counted for the purpose of this indicator.

It would appear that the latter of these options can be most readily achieved, however, I accept that this is a matter for resolution between yourselves and CLG. I hope that I have not made too much of a meal of trying to explain this difficulty and if I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Once again many thanks for facilitating yesterdays meeting and I look forward to seeing you again when we reconvene in April.

Yours sincerely

G A Taylor
Chief Fire Officer

Enc

Cc Cath Reynolds, CLG

Appendix 3 - BVPI207 with buildings of worship and agricultural buildings removed, 2005/06

UPPER QUARTILE	FIRES	NON-DOMS	14.1	CURRENT SCORE	% IMPROVE
MEDIAN			12.5		
LOWER QUARTILE			10.1		
Avon	510	31,023	16.4	17.3	-5%
Bedfordshire	216	16,377	13.2	13.6	-3%
Berkshire	296	22,327	13.3	13.5	-2%
Buckinghamshire	311	19,616	15.9	16.7	-5%
Cambridgeshire	323	22,213	14.5	15.5	-6%
Cheshire	442	30,821	14.3	15.6	-8%
Cleveland	188	14,740	12.8	13.3	-4%
Cornwall	152	25,658	5.9	6.9	-14%
Cumbria	248	22,776	10.9	11.9	-9%
Derbyshire	304	30,292	10.0	10.8	-7%
Devon	490	41,405	11.8	12.8	-7%
Dorset	256	25,115	10.2	10.7	-5%
Durham	227	17,363	13.1	14.0	-7%
East Sussex	353	25,538	13.8	14.6	-5%
Essex	389	50,381	7.7	8.3	-7%
Gloucestershire	205	20,102	10.2	11.7	-13%
Hampshire	469	47,313	9.9	10.5	-5%
Hereford & Worcester	230	24,666	9.3	10.9	-14%
Hertfordshire	361	28,820	12.5	13.2	-5%
Humberside	390	28,485	13.7	14.4	-5%
Isle of Wight	80	5,867	13.6	14.1	-4%
Kent	471	48,012	9.8	10.6	-7%
Lancashire	748	50,722	14.7	15.6	-5%
Leicestershire	301	30,347	9.9	10.6	-6%
Lincolnshire	270	23,646	11.4	12.8	-11%
Norfolk	202	30,383	6.6	7.7	-13%
North Yorkshire	323	30,656	10.5	12.1	-13%
Northamptonshire	317	18,887	16.8	18.3	-8%
Northumberland	176	10,650	16.5	17.9	-8%
Nottinghamshire	383	29,951	12.8	13.3	-4%
Oxfordshire	192	18,499	10.4	11.5	-9%
Shropshire	200	15,257	13.1	15.4	-15%
Somerset	181	18,157	10.0	11.1	-10%
Staffordshire	389	31,719	12.3	13.0	-6%
Suffolk	212	24,458	8.7	9.3	-7%
Surrey	399	30,969	12.9	13.5	-5%
Warwickshire	202	16,146	12.5	13.4	-7%
West Sussex	267	23,425	11.4	12.2	-6%
Wiltshire	179	18,317	9.8	11.0	-11%
Greater Manchester	1,997	90,589	22.0	22.5	-2%
Merseyside	670	38,540	17.4	17.7	-2%
South Yorkshire	587	36,645	16.0	16.4	-2%
Tyne and Wear	677	31,004	21.8	22.2	-2%
West Midlands	1,284	90,811	14.1	14.2	-1%
West Yorkshire	756	74,598	10.1	10.8	-6%
Greater London	2,773	279,273	9.9	10.1	-1%

(1) 2006 data is provisional

(2) Communities and Local Government Ref: 05032007ben5