

Fire and rescue authorities: The crucial role of the new local performance framework



The purpose of this note is to support you in making the most of the new local performance framework and signpost key guidance and other documents that have recently been published. This note is not statutory or technical guidance and does not replace published or consultation documents.

our shared vision is better outcomes for local people

Communities' expectations are rising – we all want services tailored to our circumstances, and relevant to the needs of our local area. New challenges are emerging that impact different places in different ways and many of these challenges are too complex, cross-cutting and local for solutions to be imposed from the centre with finite resources.

Achieving these goals needs a new way of working:

- one that sees public sector organisations working together more to deliver better, more responsive services to local people;
- one that sees the public, private and third sectors striving together for improved prosperity with plenty of ambition for the future;
- one that sees central and local government agreeing the priorities for an area and working together to improve outcomes; and
- one that creates opportunities for local people to influence decisions about services and how they are delivered.

The new local performance framework is about two things: improving quality of life in places and better public services. It provides rigorous performance management to produce better outcomes through shared endeavour, between both local and central government, and between local partners. The development of more effective partnerships will help all to focus on priority outcomes with scarce resource. And, it will empower local citizens to have greater influence on how services are delivered and outcomes are achieved.

All of this will be difficult, and will require real cultural change. But the best and most successful partnerships will be those that use this moment to seize the opportunities for reform, raise the bar of ambition, learn from each other and work to engage and empower their local communities.

what is the new performance framework?

The new local performance framework, with its strengthened commitment to local as well as national priorities, provides a basis to reconnect citizens with government. The empowerment of citizens, through engagement in the design and delivery of services and other activities will provide an impetus to improve service quality and citizen satisfaction. Partnerships will benefit from encouraging choice, influence and user involvement throughout the process of developing agreements and delivering outcomes.

The vision of citizens for the area in which they live can inform the **Sustainable Community Strategy** which can describe how people want it to change over time and will reflect the priorities and perspectives of local authorities and all their delivery partners. Local authorities have a duty to consult widely when preparing their Sustainable Community Strategy.

National priorities, focused on cross-cutting outcomes, have been identified as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The **single set of 198 national indicators** will underpin these, covering all those national priorities which local authorities are responsible for delivering – either on their own or in partnership with others. These indicators will be used to measure performance in all areas over the next three years and implemented from April 2008.

New **local area agreements (LAAs)** form the heart of the new framework. They will help deliver the ambitions for the place and its people set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy – they are the agreement between central government, local authorities and their partners to improve services and the quality of life in a place. Although performance will be measured in an area against all 198 indicators, new LAAs will be the only vehicles for agreeing shared targets with central government. Each LAA will have **up to 35 national priority targets**. Local partners can also agree additional targets in their LAA to support improved local delivery and outcomes, though these will not be subject to performance monitoring by government. LAAs will be underpinned by a **duty to co-operate to determine LAA targets** on particular named public sector

bodies and a **duty to have regard** to them in the course of their business. Fire and rescue authorities will be subject to these new duties. There will also be 16 statutory targets on educational attainment and early years selected from the 198 indicators although these will not formally be part of LAAs.

The Audit Commission and six other inspectorates are jointly developing an outcome-focussed, proportionate and risk-based **Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)** which will be introduced from April 2009. Each year's CAA will have four elements:

- an area **risk assessment** identifying risks to outcomes and the effectiveness of their management;
- a scored **use of resources** judgement for each public body including fire and rescue authorities in the area;
- a scored **direction of travel** judgement for each local authority and fire and rescue authority in the area; and
- publication of performance data for each area against the set of **national indicators**.

Where other performance assessments exist for local authorities' partners these will continue and feed into the CAA e.g. Assessment of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) will provide data for police assessment. Where actions depend on partnership working with local authorities, the indicators and reporting requirements will be identical to those in the local performance framework.

The local public service inspectorates will be consulting on their joint proposals for developing the CAA in autumn 2007 and, following a period of trialling in a number of local areas, will consult again in summer 2008. The Audit Commission will additionally be consulting on changes to the fire and rescue performance framework for 2008.

The new local performance framework introduces a co-ordinated approach to support and intervention in local areas. The **National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy** aims to provide a stronger focus on supporting local authorities and their partners in achieving the priorities agreed through LAAs and meeting ambitious efficiency targets for local spending. Agreed by both central and local government, it will support a devolved approach with a stronger role for local government in challenging and supporting performance with greater levels of resource being channelled through **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs)**. Fire and rescue authorities may wish to consider through their regional management board how best to engage with the governance and work of their RIEP.

The new framework is designed to respond quickly and effectively to underperformance in local authorities and partners: initiating action to drive rapid and sustainable improvement, focussing on key problems (including isolated areas in generally high performing authorities), ensuring action is as effective as possible by co-ordinating activity and growing the role of the sector in supporting improvement and tackling performance issues. This will require changes to the way central, regional and sectoral partners work together to support improvement and manage intervention. Wherever possible, action will focus on sector-owned and driven activity. Where this is not effective, Government Offices (GOs) will play a key role in working with bodies that have a role in challenging and supporting improvement to ensure appropriate action is taken. Government retains its powers to formally intervene where problems are severe.

Government Offices will work with local strategic partnerships (LSPs) to provide them with support to help ensure that the partnerships' internal structures are robust and that all relevant partners are appropriately involved and engaged in both the partnership and LAA. This will include helping local authorities and partners in their negotiation of improvement targets in LAAs, reviewing progress and, where necessary, they will have a key role in co-ordinating actions that will challenge, support and as appropriate respond to underperformance.

what does the new local performance framework mean for fire and rescue authorities?

A new draft National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service was published for consultation in November 2007. This set out in more detail the national performance expectations for the fire and rescue services and the support central government will provide. This, together with the new local performance framework, offers the opportunity for you build on the work you are already doing with local partners and to further discuss, shape, and influence them. You are ideally placed to benefit from this new agenda - the core business is about assessing the risks posed to communities and then taking appropriate steps to mitigate those risks where possible.

The work of fire and rescue authorities already tells us that in many cases those most at risk from fire are those who are the most vulnerable in society, those less able to make themselves safe from or respond to a fire when it does occur. Many other partners may be working with the same client group, targeting different issues. The new performance framework encourages your authority and all partners to build on what you have already been doing by coming together to consider how best to tackle issues in a joined up way that delivers value for money. For example, your authority probably already works closely with your

local primary care trusts on a range of initiatives aimed at reducing smoking and making older people safer in their homes. As well as the advantages to public health of this work it also reduces the risks, and the impact, of fires. Your authority probably already also works closely with your communities to decide on the best approaches to community fire safety – from working with young people to ex-offenders. The new local performance framework places a new emphasis and importance on considering the views and opinions of the community in shaping service delivery – something that aims to make your business even more efficient and effective.

The new indicator set includes two indicators directly relevant to fire and rescue:

- number of primary fires and related fatalities and non-fatal casualties, excluding precautionary checks; and
- arson incidents

While many LAAs may not include a target against one or both of these indicators, the work you do in these areas and other programmes, taken forward with partners, will contribute directly to achievement against a range of other indicators. This is likely to include indicators such as improving the safety of children and young people, reducing crime and anti social behaviour, fatalities in road traffic accidents and reducing harm from use of alcohol and drugs.

Through the CAA process, the new performance framework will recognise and take account of the contribution your authority makes towards delivering against specific targets you have consented to, included in LAAs in your area. As part of CAA, the Audit Commission will continue to look at the corporate effectiveness of your authority and its delivery performance, in particular through the direction of travel and use of resources judgements for fire and rescue authorities; these are being developed from the current approach to contribute to CAA, and will therefore continue beyond 2009. CAA will therefore take account of functions such as the front-line emergency service your authority provides and the progress towards other National Framework priorities such as the Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Your authority will be required to co-operate with the local authority to determine targets for each LAA. Up to 35 of these will be national improvement targets and performance managed by central government. Local partners are free to agree additional local targets which will be agreed as part of the LAA. Further details on the negotiation process can be found in the operational guidance¹ whilst your statutory obligations are explained in the draft statutory guidance *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*^{2,3}.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/laaoperationalguidance>

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance>

³ You should note that this guidance may change as a result of consultation that will end on 12 February 2008.

In order to contribute to a wide range of LAA priorities effectively, your authority may want to consider evaluating existing partnership arrangements and using evidence to demonstrate the outcomes that have been delivered in the past through partnership working. Your authority may also wish to strengthen its evidence base, using evidence from evaluation work and from local performance indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness of partnership contributions. Communities and Local Government is developing a toolkit with the Fire and Rescue Service on approaches to LAAs and partnership working aimed at supporting Fire and Rescue Authorities in taking forward this agenda; this will be available on the Communities and Local Government website shortly. Many authorities already share relevant performance data on a daily basis with their partners. This close joint working will become even more important in effectively managing performance against jointly owned targets which will be the responsibility of all partners in the LAA which have agreed to help deliver that target, not just local authorities.

Community involvement, where appropriate, can help to improve service delivery and access to the community but it can also provide the community with the opportunity to shape and get more involved with local services. Many authorities have already established mechanisms for collecting the views of and consulting with their communities in developing their integrated risk management plans and community fire safety programmes.

You will also want to consider the appropriate balance of time and resource you wish to devote to working and delivering progress through LAAs and maintaining a focus on other core functions each service delivers independently. This is a matter for you as an authority to determine by considering the key outcomes you want to help deliver and how these fit with those of partners and those of the community. Partners will also need to consider how funding can best be brought together to deliver the area's ambitions. The Fire and Rescue Service also continues to see a huge expansion in its resilience activity and to continue to meet this demand, and the demands of efficiency and effectiveness, you will need to work with partners, ideally through the LSP. The Audit Commission will be considering the balance that each authority strikes through the performance assessment process that they develop for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

As set out in the operational guidance, when agreeing targets for inclusion in LAAs, partnerships may wish to consider how they will resource delivery of those priorities. The Government has significantly increased local authorities' flexibility over the use of their mainstream resources by moving at least £5 billion into general grants which are not ring-fenced. This will minimise the barriers to local authorities using their mainstream resources to support LAA priorities where they wish to do so, although local authorities and their partners are free to use their non-ring-fenced funding as they see fit.

Individual partners may wish to pool their mainstream resources, where this is possible, to take collective responsibility for the risks and challenges facing their local area, including using their combined resources to best effect. You might also wish to consider the possibility of shared commissioning across different public service providers to better meet the expectations of citizens.

what is happening next?

The inspectorates have recently published their first consultation on the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/consultation.asp

A consultation is also underway on the detailed definition of the 198 national indicators.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator

Draft statutory guidance, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities*, is out for consultation until 12 February 2008:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance

Further steps are set out in the timeline overleaf.

where can I find out more information?

More information on the role of the Fire and Rescue Service can be found in the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework document currently available for consultation on our website:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fire3

For information about the new performance framework and LAAs:

Communities and Local Government - Government's policy and guidance on the performance framework: www.communities.gov.uk

First part of two-stage guidance on the negotiation of LAAs:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/negotiatingnewlaas

Second part of two-stage guidance on Local Area Agreements Operational Guidance:

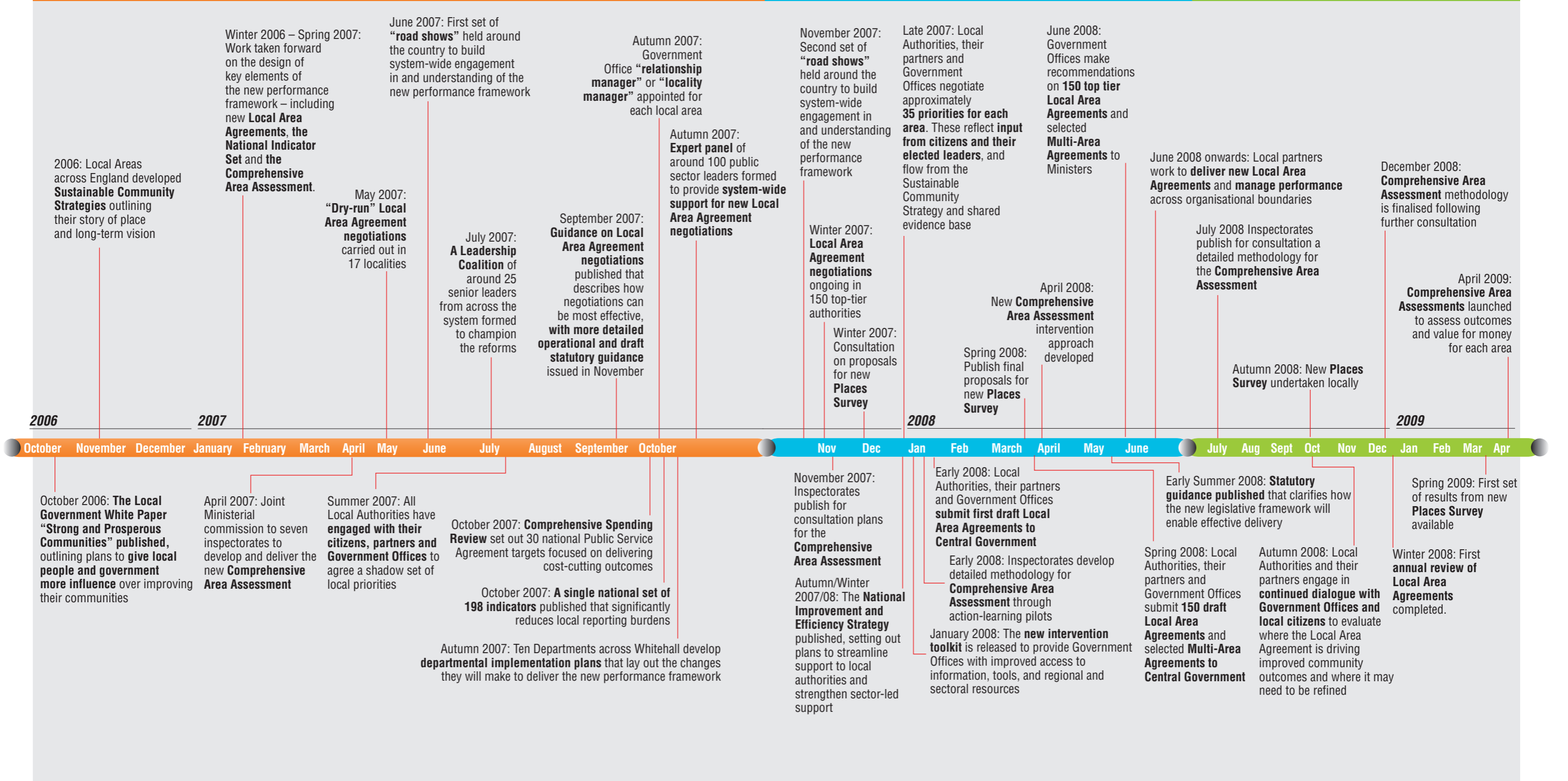
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment

Local Government Association: www.lga.gov.uk

Audit Commission – independent external assessment of performance by local authorities and other public bodies: www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Improvement and Development Agency – improvement and capacity building, and help for councils in delivering their strategic housing role: www.idea.gov.uk

the journey to delivery





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Published by the Department for
Communities and Local Government

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Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
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LS23 7NB
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Fax: 08701 226 237
Textphone: 08701 207 405
Email: communities@twoten.com
or online via Communities and Local Government
website: www.communities.gov.uk

Printed in the UK December 2007
on paper containing no less
than 75% post-consumer waste

Product code 07LGSR05025/f

