

Corporate Assessment Report

June 2008



# Corporate Assessment

Cleveland Fire Authority

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## Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the FA engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of FA activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

What is the FA trying to achieve?

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

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

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

## Executive summary

- 3 Cleveland Fire Authority (FA) is performing well. It has made good progress since its last corporate assessment in 2005.
- 4 The FA has a clear vision and objectives for what it wants to achieve in terms of corporate and service improvement and in delivering wider social outcomes. Its ambitions meet the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities, and reflect the needs of the communities across Cleveland. It has a strong understanding of its local socio economic context. It works well to ensure this understanding is reflected in its strategies and plans so that it can make a valuable contribution. The FA has not yet engaged fully with partners on developing a joint vision leading to shared objectives. Partners recognise and support the FA's own corporate objectives.
- 5 Community leadership is developing in support of the FA's ambitions. The Chief Fire Officer champions community needs and raises the profile of the FA's contribution to multi agency working. Members are supportive and committed to furthering the FA's role in community safety. Operational partnership working is extensive and delivering improved community outcomes. The FA has recognised it needs a more strategic approach to partnering and is beginning to evaluate its involvement to ensure efforts are focused to best effect.
- 6 Engagement is well established with key stakeholders but the effectiveness of communication and engagement mechanisms with staff is mixed. All stakeholders recognise and are supportive of the FA's ambitions, which is helpful in ensuring the service reflects community needs. The FA's thorough understanding of local risks is gained from good quality analysis of performance and demographic information. This helps with a targeted focus on the most vulnerable communities who face a high risk of injury or death from fire.
- 7 In seeking to balance national, regional and local priorities to support its ambitions, the FA has identified too many vague annual priorities. As a result stakeholders do not understand the FA's priorities. It risks unfocused work, reduced value for money (VfM) and not being able to sustain improved community outcomes. Many plans lack outcome focused measures of success in order to determine the extent of the FA's contribution and impact in delivering community outcomes. The FA is highly ambitious and keen to make a positive contribution to delivering better quality of life and reduced risk for local people. As its financial position becomes more challenging it risks spreading its resources too thinly to sustain improvement.
- 8 A more risk based approach to fire cover is matched with a planned and targeted approach to prevention. There is commitment to community safety and prevention work. The FA has made good progress in the last five years in moving its focus and significant resources into this area with good results where there was greatest risk. This strengthens the change of service focus while maintaining an effective response service. Resources are being used more effectively and the risk is reducing for the most vulnerable communities within Cleveland.

- 9 Sound corporate governance, clear roles and responsibilities in decision making and some clear leadership is helping deliver against the FA's ambitions. There is a strategic commitment to diversity with the FA taking steps to ensuring its workforce is representative of its community. Many staff are committed and enthusiastic which helps secure ownership of change. There are morale issues among some staff who feel less engaged with senior managers and change within the service.
- 10 The FA is modernising its approach with capacity released through implementing some changes to staffing structures and crewing arrangements. More aspects of modernisation have yet to be implemented. The FA has a strong resource base and so far has been able to achieve significant efficiency savings. Options to achieve more cashable savings, for example through implementing further changes to crewing arrangements, are being progressed. Financial and risk arrangements are sound and partnership working is enhancing capacity and delivering improved outcomes.
- 11 A sound performance culture is helping to drive improvement. There are strengthening links between financial and performance management. FA performance information and analysis is good quality and widely shared with partners. Effective action is taken to tackle areas of highest risk or under-performance. The FA is taking steps to tackle performance management of partnerships but this is not fully in place.
- 12 Through investment in areas of highest risk and need, the FA is improving its performance in most operational areas. Since 2004/05 79 per cent of comparable performance indicators have improved. There has been a significant reduction in primary fires and injuries from accidental fires. Through focusing its efforts on community safety and targeting specific problems and areas within Cleveland, fire related anti social behaviour and arson are reducing. Deliberate fires have reduced by 66 per cent in the last three years due to targeted action with partners. However, these remain a problem for the service as rates are some of the highest in the country.
- 13 Most targets for operational response and prevention activity are exceeded. Overall there is a downward trend in the number of incidents attended. This is due to focused prevention activity, including an extensive operational partnership working through programmes of home fire safety visits, youth engagement, road safety campaigns and targeted arson reduction programmes. Good local knowledge is used to target and secure improved outcomes for the most vulnerable. Community advocates and volunteers engage directly with many of the area's diverse communities. Diversionary and education initiatives and approaches, such as the Learn and Live road safety campaign, demonstrate significant impacts and outcomes for many communities, and secure positive feedback from participants. Satisfaction levels are good from residents and users of the service and service quality from the user's perspective is recognised by external awards.

## Areas for improvement

- 14 In order to sustain improved outcomes for the community and ensure a strategically focused organisation, the FA should tackle the following areas for improvement. These are identified as being of most benefit to the authority's continuous improvement.
- 15 The FA should take a more strategic approach to partnership working through developing shared objectives with its partners. A consistent approach to developing a joint vision for what it is seeking to achieve with its strategic partners would aid the FA's strategic planning. This will enable the FA to better focus its resources and engage in partnerships linked to achieving its objectives. This would support the continued effective delivery of its ambitions for the area.
- 16 The FA needs to identify clear service priorities and ensure these are supported by specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed plans and targets. This would ensure the effective focus on what is most important to sustain improved outcomes and continue to reduce the level of risk locally. In particular it should seek to develop these with all key stakeholders to aid a shared approach in tackling local problems and secure ownership.
- 17 The FA should seek to improve the effectiveness of its mechanisms to communicate with and engage all staff. This would aid a shared understanding and inclusive approach to delivering continuous improvement.

## Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	3
	Performance management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	4
Overall score: Good		
CPA category		
*Key to scores		
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		

### Scoring rules for determining CPA category

<b>Excellent</b>	<b>No scores of 2 or 1. At least two scores of 4</b>
Good	No scores of 1. At least four scores of 3 or more
Fair	No score of 1
Weak	No more than two scores of 1. At least three scores of 2 or more
Poor	Any other combination of scores

# Context

## The locality

- 18 Cleveland Fire Authority (FA) serves a population of approximately 553,000 (mid-year estimate 2007) in an area of 597 square kilometres in the north east of England. This area sits at the mouth of the River Tees and covers the four local councils of Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland.
- 19 The FA serves a predominantly urban densely populated area, which shares some characteristics with metropolitan fire authorities in terms of its socio economic profile. According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) the population is largely White British with the main concentration of non-White and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities living in Middlesbrough and Stockton. Migrant communities from Eastern Europe are growing.
- 20 Cleveland has large pockets of deprivation with associated high levels of social exclusion, crime and incidents involving fire. Based on the national indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) 43 per cent of wards are in the worst 10 per cent nationally and two wards are in the ten most deprived in the country. Research strongly indicates links between socio-economic factors at a local level and fire related incidents.
- 21 A range of factors in Cleveland increase the risk of death and injury from fire. The decline of heavy industry in the area has led to high levels of unemployment with fewer economically active people than the national average. There are above average rates of teenage pregnancy and the number of single parent households is 25 per cent above the national average. National data shows that people on the lowest incomes are 16 times more likely to die in a fire and 5 times more likely to be injured. Overall the crime rate is 19 per cent above the national average with high levels of criminal damage and fires related to anti-social behaviour accounting for 90 per cent of all fires in the area. Health statistics demonstrate high levels of smoking, alcohol and substance misuse. Levels of chronic health diseases are among the worst nationally. This all impacts on the level of risk for some vulnerable communities.
- 22 In addition there are a range of hazards in the area, some located near to housing. Cleveland is a major production centre for the chemical industry with 12 per cent of the country's Control of Major Hazards (COMAH) sites located there. The area includes the Hartlepool nuclear power station and a gas power station at Wilton. The port handles over 50 million tonnes of cargo a year making it one of the largest ports in the UK by tonnage.
- 23 Cross sectoral partnership working in the area focuses heavily on regeneration and has attracted significant amounts of external funding and investment. This has improved the quality of housing, local people's skills and knowledge, provided jobs, which helps reduce the risk of fire and related deaths and injuries.

## The FA

- 24 Cleveland Fire Authority (FA) is a combined fire authority created in 1996. The Authority consists of 23 elected members drawn from four Borough Councils (BC). Stockton on Tees BC sends seven members, Redcar and Cleveland BC and Middlesbrough BC six each, and four are from Hartlepool BC. The current political representation is twelve Labour, four Liberal Democrat, four Conservative and three Independent. There are five committees: Policy committee, Joint Consultative committee, Standards committee, Performance Scrutiny committee, and Service Delivery Scrutiny committee.
- 25 The FA has delegated the management of the service to the Chief Fire Officer. His role focuses externally on building relationships and partnerships. The day-to-day management of the service lies with the Executive Director and senior management team of seven officers. The FA is a member of a wide range of strategic regional and sub-regional bodies including the North East Fire and Rescue Regional Management Board and the Safer in Tees Valley partnership.
- 26 Cleveland FA has 15 fire stations, 9 of which are staffed by whole time fire fighters and 6 by retained fire fighters<sup>1</sup>. The FA employs 549 whole-time firefighters, 82 retained firefighters, 27 control room staff and 116 support staff. It has a total of 23 fire engines with 15 special/reserve appliances.
- 27 In 2007/08 the FA increased the council tax precept by 4.5 per cent resulting in a band D council tax of £55.95, which is slightly lower than the national average of £59.43. It set a balanced revenue budget of £31.8 million for 2007/08. It has allocated £436,000 from its balances and £100,000 from efficiency savings to the Government grant of £21.9 million and raised £9.4 million from the council tax. Efficiency savings of £2.5 million have been achieved by the end of 2006/07 well above its target of £1.5 million. Projected savings by the end of 2007/08 are £4.6 million. Reserves were at £4.1 million at the close of play, over 12 per cent of the net budget. The capital budget forecast for 2007/08 is £0.5 million. This includes £150,000 for a water tender.
- 28 The Audit Commission carried out a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the FA in 2005. This assessment judged the FA's overall performance as 'fair'. In September 2006 an Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) was carried out using methodology devised by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). This assessment of how well the FA is planning, organising and delivering its operational services rated the FA as performing strongly. In the Audit Commission's direction of travel assessments for 2006 and 2007 the FA was rated as 'improving well'.

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<sup>1</sup> Retained firefighters are volunteers who carry a pocket alerter and respond to calls from work or home both day and night. They attend the same type of calls as full-time staff.

## What is the FA trying to achieve?

### Ambition

- 29 Cleveland Fire Authority (FA) is performing well in this area. Its strong understanding of the local community and the risks it faces is reflected in its clear vision and objectives for the area. Member and officer leadership continues to develop with good commitment to tackling wider social issues of the area. Ambitions reflect national and local agendas well. Communication with some stakeholders has been effective in helping shape FA strategies but not all stakeholder engagement is fully effective. A more strategic approach to partnering is developing.
- 30 The FA has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve for its communities. '*Our Journey to Excellence*', the Strategic Plan 2005/06 to 2008/09 and the *Safety Improvement Plan*, its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2007/08, set out its vision 'to be the best fire and rescue service at protecting local communities'. Four objectives support this statement, they are:
- preventing loss of life and injuries from emergency incidents and reducing the risks in the community;
  - providing excellent community safety services delivered by a competent and diverse workforce;
  - being an active partner in improving the quality of life for local people; and
  - delivering value for money services.

These objectives translate well the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2006, the national efficiency agenda, and aims for contributing to wider community outcomes.

- 31 The FA's strong understanding of local risk and communities informs its ambitions. Its good knowledge base is gained through a variety of qualitative and quantitative information. For example information is collected from fire service volunteers and advocates and their direct engagement with communities traditionally regarded as hard to reach. The FA comprehensively analyses and shares demographic, incident and profiling data to identify risks within its area, much of which partners hold. Data sources include Fire Services Emergency Cover (FSEC), local authorities, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), and the private sector. These are used well to identify risk and predict future risks. As a result the FA uses its intelligence to focus its ambitions on contributing to wider social outcomes.

- 32** Strategies and plans translate ambitions into the IRMP and local plans, seeking to balance intervention, prevention and protection. The objectives and actions in the IRMP and associated service plans tackle National Framework requirements. Not all action plans are SMART<sup>2</sup> but do reflect the local risks and context. As a result the FA has policies and plans in place appropriate to levels of risk and potential incidents in the area.
- 33** Members support the FA's ambitions and work cross party to assist in achieving them. They have a good understanding of the local context and champion the needs of local communities. Members participate in setting the FA's overarching objectives. They have a role in identifying priorities through considering annually reported options appraisals, analysis of need and stakeholder views. Officers brief members regularly on emerging issues that will influence the priority setting process. Members' approach to providing clear strategic direction to the FA is developing.
- 34** The FA's communication and engagement with external stakeholders on its own strategies and plans is effective. Its communications strategy and Framework for consultation and engagement set out its approach. Partners and local communities are supportive of the shift of effort from response to prevention and protection and there is understanding of the FA's ambitions. This ensures support for its ambitions and joint ownership of approach.
- 35** Internal communication and engagement is not fully effective. There is clarity about what the FA is seeking to achieve throughout the organisation. However, some frontline staff consider there are few meaningful opportunities for them to help shape the service's ambitions through engagement with the FA leadership. The most recent staff survey found many staff feeling unable to express their opinions to members and senior management. Internal communications through Directors visits to stations, briefings, newsletters, consultation groups and the intranet have variable success and impact. This affects the continued ownership of change and a shared approach to meeting ambitions.
- 36** Community leadership continues to develop well. Partners acknowledge the Chief Fire Officer's contribution to championing the needs of the community and raising awareness of the FA's role in a multi-agency approach to tackling local problems. District managers are active within Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to support safer and stronger communities within the area. The FA is represented on several Cleveland based partnerships, such as the Safer in Middlesbrough partnership, and on regional organisations, such as the Regional Management Board (RMB). However, FA members' understanding of the role of the RMB is not strong. Overall partners recognise the FA as taking appropriate steps to provide effective community leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timed

- 37 A more strategic approach to partnerships is emerging. The FA contributes to key partnerships such as CDRPs, LSPs and Safeguarding Children Boards. It is working to ensure partnerships are productive and has recognised it has work to do to ensure that all partnership working is focused on making a significant impact on wider agendas, such as health and cohesion. As a result it is starting to evaluate partnership working. It leads the development of the Regional Control Centre (RCC) on behalf of the RMB and has established a regional board to manage the project, its funding and delivery. The FA engages well with partners at an operational level to deliver cross cutting work beyond its prevention and protection role, such as on healthy eating and diversionary programmes for young people.
- 38 The FA has not engaged partners in developing an explicit joint vision and shared quality of life ambitions. Within the four Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in the Cleveland area, the FA's contribution is restricted to fire related objectives, indicators and targets. Although there is a clear intention in the FA's own strategies, such as on young people and health, to contribute to wider community outcomes, this is not explicitly expressed within the LAAs or their underlying plans. The FA works well collaboratively to tackle arson reduction through improved youth engagement, but there are no shared objectives within partners' children and young people plans to demonstrate a strategic and co-ordinated approach. The FA is beginning to use its influence to shape partners' strategies for cross cutting areas. At present the FA cannot be confident that its contribution is sufficiently integrated within key partner strategies to ensure a solid long term approach to improving the well-being of the area.

## Prioritisation

- 39 The FA is performing adequately in this area. The FA understands well and seeks to balance national and regional priorities with local priorities to support its ambitions. However, it has too many generic priorities which are not ranked. As a result it risks operational work not being informed by strategic priorities and not sustaining improved outcomes for local people. Numerous consultation mechanisms provide stakeholders with opportunities to share their views but it is not clear how these views shape priorities. Significant commitment and resources are given to community safety and fire prevention work. Good financial planning and risk analysis effectively underpin service planning but there is more to do to ensure the quality of service plans is consistently high.

40 Core service priorities are vague and not well defined. Annual priorities for 2007/08 are consistently stated in FA corporate documents. These are:

- provide diverse services matched to community needs;
- improve the organisation's performance;
- adopt an enabling role to build capacity with partners;
- greater integration of services with partners;
- investment in our people;
- provide value for money;
- provide more community choice in services delivered;
- reduce corporate and community risks;
- strengthen organisational values; and
- contribute to developing sustainable communities.

They reflect national requirements and the FA's own vision and objectives and link through to corporate plans, such as the IRMP. But there are too many of them and some are vague and not fully defined. As a result partners and staff do not have a good understanding of the FA's priorities. In addition there is a risk that safety and prevention work becomes diluted with lesser priority work undertaken. Officers are not always clear where the boundaries of their work lie and become involved with dealing with issues best dealt with by other agencies. As the FA widens its role, a lack of clarity on its priorities risks a loss of focus on sustaining improved community outcomes.

41 Lesser priorities are not clearly stated. Members and staff view everything the FA does as equally important. The FA's 'can do' attitude and enthusiasm to make its contribution to improving the quality of life throughout the area is positive. But as its financial position changes and is more challenging, a sharp focus on identifying and communicating its key priorities becomes more important. The draft IRMP for 2008-2011 begins to set out areas where the FA considers it could do less. Without this it risks not being able to sustain its focus on what is most important to help it achieve its broader vision.

- 42 It is not clear how feedback from stakeholders is used to inform overall service priorities. There are numerous opportunities for key stakeholders to comment on FA proposals and share their views. The IRMP is consulted on widely. Annual member and officer away-days focus on priority setting and budget planning. There are good opportunities for local people to share their concerns and expectations, for example at 'face the community' sessions and through joint action and problem solving groups involving voluntary sectors and community representatives. However, as local concerns and problems are not clearly reflected in service priorities, it is not clear how feedback from key stakeholders has shaped or amended priorities. It is not obvious where members have influenced priority setting and how the needs and expectations of partners and local people are reflected in the FA's priorities. As a result the FA risks stakeholders not supporting the direction taken and losing its own focus on what is most important locally.
- 43 The quality of service plans is mixed which impacts negatively on the FA's ability to measure quality of life outcomes. Strategies and plans are based on achieving or exceeding national targets, reducing community risks and link with the FA's ambitions. However, not all action plans are SMART<sup>3</sup>. For example, 'Our journey to excellence', the strategic plan 2005/06 to 2008/09, identifies key areas for improvement, but does not define what outcomes are sought as a result of planned action. Plans to promote social cohesion and well-being lack outcome focused targets to measure levels of success. District and station plans lack specific measurable actions. In addition targets are not always realistic, for example on sickness absence, although this is improving. The FA has delivered real improvements on reducing fire risk but at present is unable to quantify the extent of its contribution to wider social outcomes.
- 44 Risk analysis and awareness effectively underpins and informs strategy development. Highly effective community profiling and risk mapping tools are used well and local risk knowledge is strong with systems in place to identify emergent risks and capture intelligence. Good use is made of the National Intelligence model and the FA's Intelligence Unit produces high quality strategic assessments. Specific resources are allocated to risk mitigation and dedicated staff have clear roles in incident monitoring. The FA relies heavily on intelligence and research to assess changing levels of risk. It routinely moves resources to higher risk areas. Operational staff use the GIS (Geographical Information System) based system to examine incident profiles. Based on the findings, district managers move resources to ensure effective local response to, for example, deliberate fires and vehicle fires. This well developed strategic approach to risk assessment has reduced risk levels in most of the 88 wards within Cleveland in three years.

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<sup>3</sup> Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timed

- 45 Financial planning focuses effectively on corporate objectives and delivering the IRMP. In setting its budget strategy members and managers have considered existing and future risks and challenges. With an adequate resource base to deliver its corporate objectives the FA has been able to direct resources to areas of highest risk where the impact will be greatest. The FA carries out zero based budgeting each year to assess annually service costs. The target for efficiency savings has been exceeded and there is commitment to service reviews and cost-based assessments to secure further savings in the short to medium term. The draft IRMP for 2008-2011 shows a range of risk-assessed options which demonstrate how the FA can continue to deliver its priorities against a reducing revenue budget. This ensures an effective and efficient focus of resources.
- 46 The FA's contribution to emergency planning is effective. It played a key role in helping to secure a Beacon award for emergency planning in the area through its work with the joint area emergency planning unit of the four local councils and the police. It also plays an active role with partners to manage effectively the chemical and industrial hazards in the area to ensure local resilience. Joint arrangements are up-to-date, supported by risk based response arrangements, monitored and regularly reviewed. A good system is in place to respond effectively to emergency situations in the area.
- 47 The FA has shifted significant resources to prevention and improving safety and to tackle high risks. A key focus was to reduce accidental dwelling fires and resulting deaths and injuries. To do this the FA has focused resources on home fire safety visits which are seen as the most effective way of tackling this problem. In 2007, £1.9 million was invested in community safety activity following a review of the usage of equipment and changes to crewing arrangements. Dedicated youth engagement, arson reduction and community safety teams were created to enable a greater focus on community focused initiatives with partners. Through an analysis of its Emergent Risks Register senior managers allocate resources and review priorities routinely according to an assessment of trends and performance. As a result the FA is meeting the requirements of the National Framework and delivering approaches to tackle short and long term problems.

## What is the capacity of the FA to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

### Capacity

- 48 The FA is performing well in this area. It is using its capacity to deliver against its corporate ambitions. Roles and responsibilities are understood and the FA is gradually modernising its approach in line with national expectations. Good partnership working enhances the FA's own capacity to realise community outcomes. Human resources management supports the delivery of change. The FA's commitment to diversity is embedded. The focus on improving value for money is strong with effective financial and risk management. There is more to do to ensure continued ownership of change and a fully engaged workforce.
- 49 Corporate governance arrangements are sound. Members are engaged and committed to the work of the FA. Arrangements comply with established codes of governance and the committee structure assists with contributions to strategy and policy. The two Scrutiny committees divide their focus between policy work and scrutinising performance. Recent reviews include the extension of the co-responding scheme and moving to a regional control room. However, formal meetings sometimes focus too much on operational detail limiting the use of member capacity to plan strategically. Overall effective corporate governance enables the FA to focus on wider community safety.
- 50 Member and officers roles and responsibilities are clear. There are specific service leads and champions for cross cutting areas, including diversity, but these roles are still developing. Member training and development increases member capacity and all have Personal Development Plans based on individual and corporate needs. The member induction programme includes skills development opportunities, such as standards and budget training, and equalities and diversity. This has supported stronger member engagement in strategic planning.
- 51 The FA is taking appropriate action to improve its strategic capacity. In the last five years the organisation has moved significantly from being response based to having a prevention focus. Industrial relations are constructive with a sound approach to engagement. Middle managers and some staff feel valued and empowered to make decisions. However, some operational staff feel their views are not respected and taken into account with change sometimes imposed. There is a tendency for SMT to focus on day-to-day operational matters, limiting their focus on the strategic direction and management of the service. The FA is currently reviewing its management team to enhance the effectiveness of its strategic leadership.

**18 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the FA to deliver what it is trying to achieve?**

- 52** Through delivering aspects of its IRMP strategies, the FA is progressing National Framework requirements. The FA has released capacity by changing ways of working in some areas. An equipment and staffing review in 2005 resulted in 56 operational posts moving into dedicated youth engagement, community safety and arson teams and expanded the use of volunteers. These new structures are helping to focus efforts effectively on prevention and safety work. Implementing the recommendations of a review of shift systems enabled the FA to achieve some efficiency savings. But it has yet to implement mixed crewing and review the use of whole time retained contracts. The draft IRMP for 2008-2011 sets out options to achieve further efficiency savings through implementing more changes to working practices. Work has now started to review staffing arrangements at less busy stations. This means the FA is working to ensure it has the capacity to implement and sustain change and improvement.
- 53** Staff capacity is developing. The people management strategy links well with corporate objectives. Workforce planning is providing a Framework for creating a workforce matched to assessment of community risk. In 2006/07 sickness levels were above average at nine days. Guidance to manage sickness absence effectively has recently been reviewed. Monthly sickness meetings and occupational health support have resulted in some improvement as shown by recent unaudited data. Generally the workforce is well placed to respond effectively and deliver high quality outcomes for local people.
- 54** Training and development is effective. The integrated personal development system (IPDS) is fully embedded across the organisation. All staff have a personal role profile and development plan, and regular personal reviews are carried out. A wide range of training and development opportunities are available for all staff, including for retained firefighters. Volunteers and staff working in community safety are supported and subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks by the Safer in Tees Valley partnership. This ensures the FA continues to have access to the right skills to deliver its ambitions.
- 55** Partnership working is delivering improved outcomes and enhancing capacity. The FA works with effective partnerships, such as the Safe in Tees Valley partnership and the 'Whatever it Takes' campaign in Middlesbrough to provide good outcomes on youth engagement, crime and anti-social behaviour. Partnerships with health and local authorities continue to develop through the LAAs and there is more work to do to develop its partnerships with the private sector. Some more formal memoranda of understanding or protocols are in place but these are not routine. In order to improve partnership working the FA is starting to evaluate partnerships in a robust and methodical way. Overall the FA is making a valuable contribution to community safety and wider social issues through working with others.

- 56 Risk is managed effectively. A continually updated corporate risk register supports a strategic approach to risk management linked with effective business continuity arrangements. Risk assessment is part of strategic and service planning and linked to performance management. It is a standing agenda item on all management meetings. A strong commitment to reducing risk exists at all levels within the organisation and this is supported by the flexibility local managers have in allocating service wide resources for risk reduction activities. As a result the FA understands its risks well and proactively manages them.
- 57 Financial management is sound. Zero-based budgeting, medium-term financial planning and capital planning are established. The changes made this year to the national grant settlements for fire authorities is challenging the FA's financial capacity, but it is in a strong position to respond. Reserve levels are high and efficiency savings continue to be delivered. Further cashable savings have been identified including through implementing proposals from its appliance review. Effective corporate procurement supports a stable financial position to ensure resources are used effectively. Asset management is sound with a risk based prioritised approach to managing building maintenance backlog. A strategic review of the FA's asset and ICT requirements is planned in the draft IRMP to achieve its long-term requirements. Overall the FA manages its resources effectively.
- 58 The FA has a sound method for evaluating the success of projects, but this is not always applied. This sets out clearly the importance of evaluation both in project and performance management. However, projects are not all managed the same way and the full context is not always fully understood before decisions are made. This means the FA is not always able to capture learning and evaluate outcomes from project work.
- 59 There is strategic commitment to diversity. There is a member champion for equalities and senior managers champion aspects of diversity, such as race and religion. The FA has achieved Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard with outline plans to achieve Level 5 by March 2009. Members and staff access good training on equality and diversity and demonstrate a reasonable level of awareness. Dedicated diversity officers support the implementation of a strategic approach. An Equality and Diversity Action Group and a Disability Working Group are in place to engage all staff in progressing diversity objectives and responding to changes in legislation. Progress is reported to a scrutiny committee regularly. As a result the FA has raised awareness of equalities and diversity in the organisation with a focus on delivering services to meet the needs of local communities.

- 60 The FA has had some success in increasing the diversity of its workforce. It is successful in ensuring it is representative of the local BME community. The current proportion of BME staff throughout the organisation is approximately 2 per cent which matches that of the local community. Following targeted campaigns there are now 18 women firefighters. Although this is a significant increase from 5 in 2005, it only represents 2 per cent of the total number of firefighters. Female recruits in 2007 comprised 10 per cent and 18 per cent of total whole time and retained new recruits. The FA has more to do, for example to provide an appropriate environment and facilities for a diverse workforce, in support of its corporate objective of providing excellent community safety services delivered by a competent and diverse workforce.

## Performance management

- 61 The Authority is performing well in this area. The FA has a well established performance management culture. Good systems ensure effective operational preparedness and deliver improved community safety outcomes for local people. Good quality performance information is shared widely. There is not yet a consistent approach to monitoring partnership performance to ensure this is robust and of benefit to all partners.
- 62 There is a clear and embedded approach to performance management across the FA. A strong performance management culture keeps a sustained focus throughout the organisation on performance against local risks and challenges. This is reducing fires and improving safety in the home. The performance management framework links the vision and corporate objectives with an operational review of performance against targets. In this way the FA is well placed to effectively manage its performance and allocated resources.
- 63 Links between financial and performance management are improving. In 2007/08 the FA introduced a comprehensive approach to activity based costing. This means that stations now record activities carried out during a day and not what was planned to be carried out. This has resulted in the identification of some unintentional high costs in the overtime budget for retained firefighters. Corrective action is planned to ensure more productive use of allocated resources. In this way joint reporting of costs and performance supports decision making.

- 64 Performance information is reliable, easily accessible and shared widely. Detailed quarterly reports to Scrutiny committees, such as on the implementation of the *Safety Improvement Plan 2006/07*, are easy to understand and provide essential information for members to hold officers to account. Levels of sickness absence have been challenged with further reports requested on action to improve performance. But examples of where their challenge and scrutiny has been effective are limited. Senior managers monitor performance regularly. This includes detailed reports to Senior Management Team on numbers of home fire safety visits completed. The FA analyses its performance against national and local indicators and tracks performance over time. Information is analysed at station and watch level. It is updated and cascaded daily allowing targeting of resources to where most needed. The FA has a good approach to sharing performance information with stakeholders and communities. The Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2006/08 states intentions to engage stakeholders on performance and collect feedback from users to drive improvement. These approaches ensure performance is reported in an open and accessible way to all stakeholders and supports effective service delivery.
- 65 Effective action is taken to focus on areas of underperformance and greatest need. The FA shares good quality data analysis with LAA partners, for example, on arson and deliberate fires at ward level and on a weekly basis. This allows partners to track progress against targets at a strategic level and to allocate resources at an operational level. For example the FA contributes to the performance data for CDRP Performance sub groups. At these meetings performance data including trends are reviewed with recommendations made to the CDRP for funding allocations. The FA's Intelligence Unit draws up a clear and helpful monthly analysis briefing for each district. Revised risk response categories have been introduced and are based on local life risk profiling and analysis of Super Output Areas (SOA) with demographic lifestyle software. Data is used well to channel resources to where they are most needed.
- 66 Learning from others and its own performance is used to drive improvement. The FA is a member of Fire Improvement Group with Merseyside and Staffordshire FAs to share effective practice and leads on the Chief Fire Officers Association sponsored Performance Improvement Network. It learns from incidents and health and safety feedback from training and uses this learning to improve performance. The Arson Reduction Strategy has been reworked following stakeholders' views to increase its focus on multi agency working. Views and feedback from advocates and volunteers are used to inform service planning but not in a systematic or consistent way.

## 22 Corporate Assessment | What is the capacity of the FA to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 67 Performance management with partners is not fully effective in areas of joint responsibility. There are targets relating to fire service activity in each of the four LAAs and the FA understands its contribution to shared priority targets. However, currently data collection and systems for monitoring partnership performance are not always focused on measuring outcomes and impacts. This is because there is no formal joint performance management in place to monitor success against community focused partnership objectives. As a result the FA cannot be confident that it is targeting its efforts through working in partnership to where they will have maximum benefit in terms of improving the safety and quality of life for local people.
- 68 The FA is taking steps to review the effectiveness of individual partnerships. It is keen to ensure its engagement in partnerships supports LAA frameworks, national requirements and its own performance management framework. The North East Centre of Excellence provided with FA with a software package to evaluate the Safe in Tees Valley partnership. This package has not been rolled out to assess other partnerships as the toolkit has not met their requirements. Evaluating partnership working arrangements show how the FA is beginning to adopt a more cohesive approach to the performance management of its partnership working.
- 69 Benchmarking is used to drive improvement. The FA compares its performance in some areas with other FAs generally, although it does not yet consistently compare its performance on costs and outcomes together, with others. It does this using a wide range of data on performance against fire related BVPIs and on activity levels in projects and initiatives. The FA has a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of its own activity against the outcomes achieved. It has used this to assess the cost of its home fire safety visits. This helps the FA understand the extent to which it is achieving value for money and making effective use of its resources.

## What has been achieved?

### Achievement and Improvement

- 70** The FA is performing strongly in this area and achieving well against its own objectives and targets. It has focused well on where it was previously under performing and uses its strong local knowledge to direct its efforts to where the risks to the community have been greatest. Investment in areas identified in the IRMP as high risk is improving performance, having a positive impact for local people and significantly reducing risk. Since 2003/04, 79 per cent of 17 comparable performance indicators have improved. In 2006/07, 35 per cent of performance indicators were performing in the top 25 per cent. Performance in reducing fires, a key focus, shows sustained improvement over the last four years. An extensive programme of home fire safety visits and targeted work with communities most at risk has successfully reduced local risks and tackled national priorities. Between 2003/04 and 2006/07 primary fires, accidental dwelling fires, deaths and injuries resulting from fires have all reduced significantly.
- 71** Considerable investment in community safety is having an impact with a downward trend in the number of incidents the service attends. Extensive operational partnership working, prevention activity and community safety education is reducing levels of risk to the community and firefighters. Intensive targeted interventions in areas of high risk with significant levels of incidents have been successful. There has been a 35 per cent reduction in primary fires since 2003/04, placing the FA among the best performing FAs nationally. There has been a 52 per cent reduction in accidental dwelling fires since 2003/04. Crews respond to significantly fewer hoax calls and unwanted automatic fire alarms (AFAs). Hoax calls have reduced by 15 per cent in the last year and AFAs are down 41 per cent since 2000/01. Use of intelligence and analysis allows the FA to predict potential arson and deliberate fire setting locations. This has contributed to a reduction in anti-social behaviour fires of 10 per cent. This investment tackles well the FA's corporate objective of reducing risks to the community.

- 72 Some significant outcomes are achieved in relation to arson reduction through a multi agency approach. The FA's dedicated Arson Task Force provides specialist support for arson reduction initiatives and advice to local councils on solving problems. Operational staff are trained to carry out arson audits and one to one sessions with people involved with malicious firesetting. Regular good quality information on nuisance fire setting is supplied to local councils enabling them to target use of street wardens and waste collection services. Targeted intelligence led programmes in areas of social deprivation and high risk have led to a 66 per cent reduction in deliberate fires in the last three years. This is a major achievement given the scale of the problem the FA faces. The FA is still one of the worst performing nationally but its rate of improvement in reducing deliberate fires is faster than other FAs. The FA recognises it still has more to do to tackle deliberate secondary fires and small fires. While deliberate secondary fires in vehicles are reducing, deliberate secondary fires excluding vehicles continue to be amongst the highest in the country. Tackling this has been a focus during 2007 and latest unaudited data is showing improvement. As a result the FA is contributing well to reducing the cost of arson and its negative impact on local communities.
- 73 The FA is significantly reducing fire related deaths and injuries. Over the past three years the number of fire related deaths due to accidental dwelling fires has fallen and during 2006/07 there were no accidental fire deaths. Since then there has been one death due to a gas explosion. The rate of injuries arising from accidental dwelling fires is among the lowest in the country and improving. Currently the FA exceeds the 2010 national target reduction levels in relation to fire deaths. This indicates that targeted prevention work with the most vulnerable communities is having a major impact.
- 74 The FA effectively targets its prevention activity to areas of highest risk. Its programme of home fire safety visits is extensive and the main focus of its approach to improved safety in the home. Since 2003 over 88,000 home fire safety visits have been carried out with over 123,000 smoke detectors fitted. This is targeted to areas of greatest need and highest risk in areas of deprivation with most visits generated through referrals from other agencies, such as social services. As a result there has been a fall in the total number of emergency calls received, accidental dwelling fires and injuries resulting from accidental dwelling fires.

- 75 Partnership working is delivering some improved community outcomes through specific initiatives. The 'Whatever it Takes' campaign was launched in October 2006 to target some of the highest life risk wards in Middlesbrough. This delivers a joined up approach to securing quality of life improvements for local people through tackling some underlying causes of community risk. The FA has worked with a wide range of partners to deliver environmental, health and well-being and safety improvements. Fire related and anti social behaviour incidents have decreased, such as fewer road traffic collisions. The take up of home fire safety visits within the designated area has significantly increased from 32 per cent to 67 per cent. More young people from BME communities in the area are participating in youth programmes and road safety initiatives. But employment programmes have not yet fully progressed. The extent of the campaign's success is unclear as the partnership has yet to identify outcome focused measures of success. It is currently evaluating the campaign using a partnership evaluation toolkit. Targeted partnership working is securing quality of life and safety improvements.
- 76 The FA works extensively with partners to tackle many social and health related problems. With the Ambulance Service the service has attended almost 800 co-responder incidents. Over 2,000 people have received Heartstart training and fire resistant bedding packs have been issued to over 360 people identified as at risk. Work with health partners on smoking cessation programmes has reduced smoking related fires by 27 per cent. The 'Ban the Pan Forever' healthy eating initiative has contributed to a reduction of 54 per cent in cooking related fires. This focus on improving health is making a valuable contribution to tackling health inequalities in Cleveland.
- 77 Effective programmes targeted at engaging young people are delivering positive outcomes. The FA works well with schools, youth agencies and other agencies to provide good community safety education and interventions. Projects aim to reduce fire, arson and road traffic collisions (RTCs). The 'Learn and Live' road safety initiative and the Taking Without Consent (TWOC) programme are aimed at 18 to 23 year olds. Over 20,000 young people have participated in the 'Learn and Live' initiative. Evaluation of projects with partners and feedback from young people demonstrates they are high quality, reach high numbers of young people and delivering benefits. Road traffic deaths and injuries involving this higher risk group have reduced by 30 per cent since the programmes started.

- 78 Extensive targeted work with more vulnerable young people is designed to develop self esteem and improve life chances. The Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) programme is targeted to schools in highest risk wards. It seeks to bring young people at risk of exclusion and who have offended back into education and training. Over 300 young people have participated since 2004. Courses focus on developing new skills, such as teamwork, first aid, awareness of anti social behaviour and fire safety awareness. Feedback from partners, schools, parents and carers is positive and over 90 per cent of participants consider the course has given them new skills. Outcomes for the young people participating in the programme include changed attitudes and behaviour, improved attendance at school, reduced re-offending and take up of further education opportunities. Programmes such as 'Play with football not fire' and 'Hooked on fishing' provide diversionary activities for young people in areas where incidences of setting small deliberate fires are high. Working with the probation service, young offenders have attended a Fire Team course. This new venture has secured employment and further education for several participants. Such initiatives demonstrate the FA's commitment to improving quality of life and present firefighters as positive role models.
- 79 The FA exceeds most of its operational response standards and incident response times are good. Prior to its equipment and staffing review in 2005 the FA was achieving the standard of the first fire appliance arriving at high risk incidents within five minutes. When the review was carried out, the FA decided in advance that this standard would be maintained, but without clearly assessing the impact on life risk if the response time was increased. As a result the FA cannot be confident that it has robustly assessed its use of resources to ensure efficiency without an adverse impact on risk to life.
- 80 Greater flexibility in the use and location of resources has demonstrated significant improvement in the areas of high risk. For example, a large number of fire engines and community safety staff are brought together to provide high visibility and impact at local hotspots This has been possible following the implementation of some of the findings of the equipment and staffing review in 2005. A more flexible approach is used allowing equipment and vehicles to be located in areas where attendance times are hard to achieve. Although the FA recognises it has more work to do to review its standards of fire cover, this work has so far released resources further to reduce risk.
- 81 There is a clear focus on targeting the least accessible communities within the area. Working with community volunteers and advocates has increased the FA's capacity to target fire prevention work with local communities at most risk, including migrant communities and asylum seekers. Eight advocates work with older people, young people, people with hearing impairment, BME communities and those at risk from drug and alcohol misuse, and raise awareness internally of issues around diversity. The Fire Support Network provides over 30 volunteers from different communities. As a result, the risk of fires and related injuries has reduced for vulnerable communities through improved engagement.

- 82 Local communities, partners and other stakeholders recognise the FA's achievements. There are high levels of satisfaction from users of the service and public satisfaction generally is above average at 62 per cent. Partners consider the FA as a highly valued partner. Service quality from the local communities' perspective is recognised by external accreditations. The FA has secured national recognition for its work to reduce the risk to asylum seekers from fire. Its approach to supporting safer and sustainable communities has received a National Association of Local Authority Risk Manager (ALARM) award. Recently the FA has secured a Safer Communities award from the LGC and HSJ Sustainable Communities Awards for 2008. Positive recognitions help key stakeholders and the FA assess the quality of its service activity.

## Appendix 1 - Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The FA's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
  - key documentation, including the FA's improvement plan;
  - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
  - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Cleveland Fire Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 21 to 25 January 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the FA, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the FA.