

# Corporate Assessment

Lincolnshire Fire Authority

December 2008



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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 FRA engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of FRA activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.

What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- Ambition
- Prioritisation

What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- Capacity
- Performance management

What has been achieved?

- Achievement and Improvement

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# Executive summary

- 3 Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) is improving and is making significant progress since its last corporate assessment in 2005 when it was judged as 'Poor'. The FRA is now judged as good. The FRA has made progress since 2005 and now has solid foundations to deliver future improvement. This process of change has been balanced and well managed. The FRA is aware of the areas for improvement. It is already working on the key ones and has plans to address others.
- 4 There is strong leadership from the Chief Fire Officer and corporate management team. The portfolio holder has a clear vision of where the service needs to be in the medium term, which is realistic yet challenging. This understanding and self-awareness supports the FRA in moving forward.
- 5 The FRA has worked hard to recover from its 'Poor' rating in 2005 and has now put in place many of the foundations for sustaining improvement, but recognises that it is on a long-term journey of improvement. It has established effective leadership at a senior level which is devolving decision making and autonomy through the organisation. It has a good understanding of where it needs to improve but a number of the resulting changes are recent and have yet to have significant impact. Service performance is improving, such as reducing the number of deaths and injuries from accidental dwelling fires. Priorities are being delivered and corporate health indicators show good performance with half of them matching the best 25 per cent nationally.
- 6 The FRA has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and ambitions take into account local and national priorities. Ambitions are supported by a range of strategies and plans that are SMART, integrated with each other, and cover both the medium and longer term. The three-year corporate strategy 2007 to 2010, which includes the Integrated Risk Management Plan, is coherent and outcome-focused. It clearly sets out three service and three improvement priorities. This developing approach to strategic planning is providing consistency and is ensuring a strong base for continued improvement.
- 7 There is a good balance between prevention and intervention, which is supported by a good understanding of community needs and risk. Work with partners is developing well. The FRA is well regarded by partners for the contribution it makes to improving wider social outcomes, such as reducing anti-social behaviour, improving health, road safety, supporting vulnerable older people and supporting members of community to live independently.
- 8 A culture of performance management and improvement is developing and good processes for managing improvement are evident. The FRA is able to take action to address underperformance. However, as yet it does not routinely report financial and performance information together. Member engagement is limited and the scrutiny function is not fully effective, with little routine challenge of performance and decision-making.

## Executive summary

- 9 There is a clear commitment to diversity and equalities with demonstrable success in some areas, such as recruitment of female firefighters and engagement with hard to reach groups. The FRA has attained level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard and is quickly working towards level 3 attainment.
- 10 However, overall comparative performance is below average. For example, the FRA is ranked 39 out of 46 Fire Authorities for percentage of performance indicators improved in the last year and 55 per cent of performance indicators improved compared with a national average of 69 per cent.

# Areas for improvement

- 11** The FRA needs to ensure that benefits are realised from a wide range of efficiency projects, such as Project Refine, so that the FRA can develop the shape of the workforce and minimise the level of change being delivered. There is a need to ensure that changes are embedded across the organisation and that perceived benefits are realised in a timely manner. In addition, it needs to use fully any efficiency gains through these changes to continue the pace of improvement.
- 12** Members need to be fully equipped to carry out their role, for example through effective scrutiny and engagement. There is a need to improve the format of Member training days and explore mechanisms, such as delivering them on a locality basis, to improve the active involvement of all Members. Members need to drive scrutiny agendas and ensure that scrutiny interventions target improved services to the community. The FRA can learn from other FRAs and public service authorities in this area.
- 13** Increased financial pressure will require the FRA to explore new and imaginative ways to identify efficiency gains, such as through staff productivity, which will allow for further investment to ensure continued improvement across the organisation.
- 14** The FRA needs to ensure that participation across the Local Area Agreement (LAA), where appropriate, is fully recognised and that it is seen as a key strategic partner in areas where it adds value and makes an impact.
- 15** The FRA needs to improve engagement with some elements of the retained workforce to ensure momentum and enthusiasm for change does not slow.

# Summary of assessment scores

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	3
What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance Management	3
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3
<b>* CPA category</b>	<b>Good</b>	
<b>* Key to scores</b>		
1 – Below minimum requirements – <b>inadequate performance.</b> 2 – At only minimum requirements – <b>adequate performance.</b> 3 – Consistently above minimum requirements – <b>performing well.</b> 4 – Well above minimum requirements – <b>performing strongly.</b>		

## \*\* Rules for determining the overall Corporate Assessment score

Excellent	No scores of 2 or 1. At least two scores of 4
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

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# Context

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## The locality

- 16** Lincolnshire is the largest County in the East Midlands region and the fourth largest County in England, covering 5,921 square kilometres from Caistor in the north of the County to Stamford in the south, Gainsborough in the west to Skegness and Long Sutton on the Wash in the east. The County is mostly rural and is bordered by counties in the north, south and west. The FRA serves a population of 686,200, which is projected to rise to 777,100 by 2019. The population increase since 1995 has been due to inward migration as the number of deaths in County outweighs the number of births. Ninety-seven per cent of the population is white British. There has been a significant increase in the number of people from other European countries.
- 17** Lincolnshire has 5,468 miles of roads, with the A1 running along its western border. The main east coast rail line runs through the County. There are four active airfields within the County. There is also a commercial dockyard in operation at Boston.
- 18** Lincolnshire has an ageing population. Since 1991, there have been significant increases in the proportions of people in the 40 to 59 and 75 plus age groups and a noticeable fall in the proportion of 25 to 39 year olds. Twenty-one per cent of the population is over pension age compared with the national average of eighteen per cent. This is having an impact on the economy and presents specific risks to the FRA.
- 19** Average wage levels are below the national average. The economy is dependent on agriculture, engineering and manufacturing, with low levels of representation in economic sectors experiencing national growth. Unemployment is generally low in the County but economic activity rates are also lower than regional and national averages. This is partly because of the older population and the high proportion of people of working age who are retired.
- 20** The single most significant cause of preventable accidental deaths within Lincolnshire is road traffic collisions. There are a significantly greater number of deaths and serious injuries from road traffic collisions than fires.
- 21** In common with all fire authorities, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authority faces a considerable change agenda, which it is addressing in an environment of increasing financial pressures and a continuous need to deliver more for less. Additionally, it has a set of issues specific to Lincolnshire, which it must address. For example, there is a risk of major flooding, which has caused significant disruption to the County in recent years.



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### The FRA

- 22** The Fire Authority comprises all 77 elected members of the County Council and bears all the statutory and common-law duties of the County Council. At the time of the assessment, Lincolnshire County Council comprises 77 members, 45 of whom were Conservative, 20 Labour, 8 Liberal Democrats, and four Independent. From June 2002, the County Council adopted a leader and cabinet model of decision-making. Nine members form the executive that makes decisions that deliver the budget and policy framework. The Deputy Leader of the County Council is also the portfolio holder for the FRA.
- 23** The Fire Authority's net expenditure in 2006/07 was £22 million increasing to £23 million in 2007/08. The current Annual Audit and Inspection letter states, 'good value for money is being achieved. The service is achieving higher than average levels of performance but operating at lower than average costs.' The FRA provides an emergency response to operational incidents through 49 fire appliances and a range of specialist appliances for incidents such as water rescue, biological, radiation, nuclear and collapsed structures. It operates from 38 fire stations across the County with its headquarters based in Lincoln. The FRA employs 895 staff of whom 228 are wholetime firefighters and control staff, 587 are retained firefighters, and 80 are support staff. The FRA is predominantly staffed by a retained service, who are volunteers who respond to calls from work or home both day and night. They attend the same type of calls as full-time staff.
- 24** The 2005 Corporate Assessment reported a number of significant and fundamental issues that needed to be addressed. The report also found that poor leadership was having a negative effect on the strategic direction of the FRA. It also highlighted that a key strength of the organisation was its staff, a number of whom were committed to delivering services within a modernisation agenda. The FRA was assessed as poor in 2005.

# What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

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## Ambition

- 25** Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) is performing well in this area. It has a good understanding of the local community and the risks that it faces, which are reflected in the vision and objectives for the local area. The FRA's objectives link well with the overall vision of Lincolnshire County Council. Member and officer leadership continues to develop, with good commitment to addressing wider social issues within the community.
- 26** There is strong leadership from the Chief Fire Officer, portfolio holder and corporate management team. The portfolio holder has a clear vision of where he wants the service to be in the medium term. Through its leadership, the FRA demonstrates a clear understanding of the external challenges it faces. This in turn assists it in developing its strategic direction and identifying opportunities. This understanding and self-awareness supports the FRA in moving forward.
- 27** The FRA has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve for its communities, and how this supports Lincolnshire County Council's long-term strategic aims to:
- deliver excellent council services;
  - demonstrate value for money; and
  - improve prosperity.
- 28** The Integrated Risk Management Plan sets out the main focus for the FRA, '*which is to enhance community safety*' by:
- reducing the number of fires and other emergency calls;
  - reducing loss of life in fires and accidents;
  - reducing the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergency incidents;
  - reducing the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents;
  - safeguarding the environment and heritage; and,
  - providing communities with value for money.

## What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 29** The FRA has a clear set of goals and objectives. These goals highlight the intent to deliver community protection and risk management, a competent and diverse workforce and provide best value. These goals are underpinned by fifteen service objectives, which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART), and allow the FRA to measure progress against its plan. These objectives meet the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2006, the national efficiency agenda and contribute to wider community outcomes.
- 30** The FRA has a good understanding of local needs and the risks faced by different communities. This understanding is based on a sound analysis of data. For example, the FRA uses a range of data provided by the Lincolnshire Research Observatory, through the Community Safety Partnerships and through stakeholder and public consultation. This knowledge is used well to identify risk and wider community needs, which is helping the FRA to contribute to wider social outcomes.
- 31** Consultation is used appropriately to inform the direction of the authority. The FRA has undertaken robust consultation with the community and stakeholders as part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process. A variety of mechanisms were used to undertake the IRMP consultation, such as distribution of hard copies to key stakeholders, electronic copies to the business community, postal questionnaires to a sample of residents, and a number of briefings at libraries and shopping malls. As a result of consultation the introduction of a common response standard for both urban and rural areas was introduced, which was supported by the investment of £600,000 to recruit additional firefighters so the new standard could be adopted. Through effective communication and consultation, the FRA is able to ensure support for its ambitions and joint ownership moving forward.
- 32** Community leadership continues to develop well. Partners acknowledge the contribution made by the Chief Fire Officer and principal officers in championing the needs of the community and raising the FRA's role in joint working. This is making a significant contribution to reducing arson and anti social behaviour, and delivering co-responder and safe driving initiatives. Overall, partners recognise the FRA as being an active participant and in providing effective community leadership, and have recognised a significant improvement since 2005.
- 33** Internal communication with staff is effective and improving. A clear improvement has been made since the appointment of a dedicated knowledge and information manager. Communications have been further strengthened through closer links with the County Council which also provides support to the communications area. The FRA communicates effectively with staff and partners, ensuring that a wide audience understands their plans and objectives.
- 34** Elements of the retained workforce are not fully engaged with the process of change, which is starting to have a negative impact on the overall culture of the organisation. Without a committed and engaged workforce, the FRA will need to overcome a number of barriers to embed the proposed changes and realisation of identified benefits.

## What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

**35** The Local Area Agreement (LAA) does not fully recognise the FRA as a key strategic partner in key areas. Whilst the FRA has been able to establish overt recognition as a key strategic partner in some areas, it is not fully recognised within the LAA for its contribution to other areas, such as the children and young people agenda. The County Council is developing a new vision and sustainability strategy through extensive consultation within the community and key stakeholders. This work has been used to inform the LAA, which is now the key delivery plan for the community. Without recognition of its contribution to wider aspects of the LAA the FRA is in danger of losing focus on key areas within the LAA that are not fire service specific, and may miss opportunities to influence wider areas.

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### Prioritisation

**36** The FRA is performing well in this area. There is a clear understanding of what is a priority and resources are allocated appropriately. There are clear links between the vision, priorities and service plans. Targets set at each level are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART). The FRA has made significant improvements since 2005. For example, the service improvement plan, established as a consequence of the Corporate Assessment process, has now been implemented, with most action points now completed and signed-off by the CLG monitoring board. Through a well managed process the FRA is able to identify what needs to be done, set out how it proposes to deliver change, and realise the benefits and move forward.

**37** The IRMP is effective. It has a good balance between prevention, protection and response, which is supported by robust risk analysis and identification. The IRMP and service delivery plan are integrated, meeting the needs of the National Framework whilst maintaining a focus on local risk. Through clear plans the FRA is able to maintain focus on what is important, ensuring delivery of objectives.

**38** The FRA has developed three operational and three improvement-based priorities. These are to:

- reduce the number of deaths and injuries;
- reduce arson within the community;
- reduce the number of killed and seriously injured in road traffic collisions;
- further develop its risk-based planning;
- ensure a well trained, developed and structured workforce; and
- embed joint working.

## What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 39** The priorities reflect both local and national requirements and the vision and objectives of the FRA and the wider County Council's vision for the future. They are clear and well understood by staff throughout the organisation, which ensures that everyone knows where and what their contribution is to the overall priorities. Through clear and well thought-out priorities the FRA is able to maintain focus and clarity of purpose, ensuring that resources are delivered in a way that has an impact on wider community outcomes that improve the quality of life of those living, working and visiting Lincolnshire.
- 40** Stakeholder feedback is positive and has been used to shape overall service priorities. The FRA is further enhancing the mechanisms for feedback by establishing a Community Engagement Panel and Community Residents Panel, which will provide greater understanding of community needs and how best to engage in these areas. The appointment of multi-lingual advocates, who engage directly with a migrant community, is helping the FRA to develop a greater understanding of hard to reach groups. Through these activities the FRA is ensuring that stakeholders' views are represented in its priorities and that focus is maintained on what is important locally.
- 41** Risk analysis and awareness effectively underpins and informs strategic direction. The FRA uses a range of data to identify and address risk in the community. It has made good use of Fire Support Emergency Cover (FSEC), Census, deprivation and demographic data to identify areas within the County that have the highest incidence of risk groups. Through this analysis and understanding, the FRA is targeting community and prevention work in areas most at risk and where it can have the most impact.
- 42** The FRA has developed a robust approach to emergency planning, which has been tested in recent years through a number of major flooding incidents. For example, the FRA worked well with other agencies to provide a response to the two recent successive incidents of flooding across the County. Partnership working with the British Red Cross provided practical advice and assistance to those affected by flooding at 49 separate incidents in a three day period. Over 600 jointly produced 'Flood Information Packs' were also distributed. Direct involvement at a strategic level during the recovery process enabled a multi-agency address list to be drawn up, which highlighted internally flooded properties so that support could be provided to those in greatest need. Through identification of those with greatest need the FRA is able to direct resources at those areas that have greatest impact.
- 43** The FRA is maintaining focus on priority areas and implementing plans to improve capacity to support training. It is increasing the availability of firefighters across the County through a capacity building project called '*Project Refine*.' Whilst the FRA has been through extensive consultation with the workforce and representatives, the full benefits of this work are yet to be realised. The FRA needs to realise the benefits from efficiency improvements such as this to ensure it has capacity to continue to invest in priority areas and to deliver value for money.

## What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 44** The FRA is actively shifting resources to prevention and is working well with partners to deliver shared priorities. For example, increased resources have been invested in the Arson Task Force and Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership. Both of these have seen tangible outcomes and are improving outcomes across the community. The Arson Task Force, which was established in 2001, has achieved success in delivering shared priorities and the total number of deliberate primary fires per 10,000 population has reduced consistently. The Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership has achieved Beacon status and has proactively shared its experiences with a number of Fire and Rescue Authorities. This proactive partnership has achieved a reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured by 44 per cent in the last five years. The FRA, working with partner organisations, is able to improve the quality of life for citizens and deliver shared priorities.

# What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

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## Capacity

- 45** The FRA is performing adequately in this area, and at the senior level of leadership and decision-making it is performing well. Political leadership from the portfolio holder is effective. It has recognised the need to improve key building blocks, such as workforce planning, risk management, project management and financial management. It is using its capacity to deliver against its corporate ambitions and clear leadership is rebuilding strong relations with partners. The FRA has the structures in place to continue to deliver against its priority areas.
- 46** The FRA is improving financial capacity and has had significant growth in budgets since 2005, and has an approved revenue budget for 2008/09 of £23.4 million. This increased investment and realisation of a number of efficiency gains is allowing the FRA to focus on priorities and invest in key priority areas that have improved. However, as financial pressures increase and efficiency gains become harder to realise, the FRA may find it increasingly difficult to deliver improvements at the current rate.
- 47** Member scrutiny is not fully effective and is not supporting decision-making. There has been one in-depth review on the Retained Duty Systems, which has had a positive impact on policy. However, the scrutiny function does not routinely challenge performance of the service and decision-making sufficiently. This is compounded by limited attendance at arranged member engagement days delivered by the FRA throughout the year. Without fully engaged members the FRA is at risk of not receiving adequate scrutiny and challenge.
- 48** Over 80 per cent of the FRA's workforce is retained and they are not fully engaged with the programme of change being undertaken. Whilst the FRA is making improvements in terms of communication, training and development, elements of the retained service are not yet fully engaged with the process of change being undertaken. In 2007 the FRA undertook a review of the retained service. As a result it created two retained liaison officer posts and is establishing a retained liaison forum. Without a fully engaged and committed retained workforce the FRA will be unable to realise all the benefits from proposed changes.



## What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 49** The FRA is steadily developing its approach to financial management. It has invested in people and training and is developing a culture of prudent budget management. The FRA does not have a fully costed plan of service delivery, nor has it a well-developed approach to zero based budgeting. Without a good understanding of service and financial planning the FRA is unable to realistically plan beyond the short term.
- 50** Member and officers' roles and responsibilities are clear. Leadership within the service promotes a climate of openness, support and respect, which is a significant improvement since 2005. Recent work on implementing and reinforcing a set of organisational values has had a significant impact on the culture within the organisation. A new senior management team was appointed in August 2006, which has been instrumental in delivering change to the organisational culture. Investment and a new management structure have resulted in a clear and accountable regime for performance management. Staff are clear about what is expected and are held to account for performance in an open and transparent way.
- 51** The FRA has made improvements in increasing corporate capacity. It has recruited and invested in corporate support functions and introduced a new management structure. This includes the creation of Service Support Group manager function, which was part funded through the East Midlands Improvement Partnership, and the inclusion of Area Managers into the service management board, which has improved the communication and transparency of strategic decision-making within the organisation.
- 52** There is a strategic commitment to diversity. There is clear leadership from senior managers and the portfolio holder to deliver change in this area. The FRA has achieved improvements in the recruitment of female fire fighters and percentage of top five per cent of earners who are female, with top quartile performance in both areas. The FRA has achieved Level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard, with clear plans to achieve Level 3. The FRA demonstrates a good understanding of diversity issues within the community and this is being supplemented by the recruitment of two Russian and Polish speakers as community fire safety advocates. Overall the FRA is improving access to people living in circumstances that make them vulnerable.
- 53** The FRA provides value for money, which was recognised by partners. It has made significant cashable and non-cashable savings whilst facing financial pressures due to energy cost inflation and other unplanned expenditure such as incidents of major flooding within the County. It has made a number of changes to contracts, such as fleet provision, support services, uniform and protective clothing, which have all led to savings and improved delivery. The FRA undertook a fundamental service review in 2007, which identified that use of resources and service delivery was notably economical. Through a well managed approach the FRA is able to deliver an improving service whilst embedding a strong culture of value for money.



## What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 54** The FRA is proactive in ensuring wider access within its recruitment processes. It has tailored the recruitment process to address changes in local demography. It has recently recruited a Polish retained firefighter, and a Polish and a Russian speaking Community Fire Protection Officer. In 2007 seven per cent of retained firefighter recruits and 25 per cent of wholetime recruits were women. The FRA has set a stretch target that 18 per cent of recruits be female by 2013, which is higher than the National Framework target of 15 per cent. To support this process the FRA has invested in an innovative '*Recruitment Pod*', which is being used across the county at a number of network events to raise the profile of female recruitment and also undertake initial point of entry selection tests. Through innovative and improved recruitment processes, the FRA is better able to represent the community.
- 55** Partnership working is effective. The FRA has undertaken a review of all partnerships to identify those that add value and a decision has been made to withdraw from those that do not. The FRA is delivering results for the wider community through a number of partnerships, such as working with East Midlands Ambulance Service to improve access arrangements for bariatric (obese) individuals, a lead role in Lincolnshire County Council's Telecare project and delivery of a co-responder scheme, which all improve the safety of individuals and improve quality of life. Through effective management of partnerships the FRA is able to ensure it participates in those to which it adds value and that make a significant contribution to wider community outcomes.
- 56** The FRA continues to develop a broad approach to effective management and contribution to partnerships. A recent partners day brought together existing and potential partners from within the public, private and third sectors. Through this activity, the FRA has been able to identify opportunities for partnerships supporting work within the community. Through effective engagement and management of partnerships, the FRA is able to ensure the best use of resources to make the greatest impact on the wider community outcomes.
- 57** Lincolnshire FRA is improving its capability to deal with more complex emergencies. It has invested in an Urban Search and Rescue training facility within the County Council. This facility was built in partnership with a local engineering college and is used by partners such as the police for training purposes. The facility is now providing innovative and cost effective training for the FRA and is gaining national recognition and demand for utilisation by other Authorities. Through an innovative approach the FRA was able to work in partnership to reduce the cost of development, which has improved the level of training received by staff, reduced the amount of time individuals spend away from the County for training and delivered value for money.
- 58** The FRA is improving its approach to managing staff. Good workforce planning is allowing the FRA to plan and deliver recruitment activities in a more timely fashion. Improvements in managing sickness absence have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of days lost due to sickness. Improved training and development for staff is well recognised throughout the workforce. Through a well managed process the FRA is investing in its workforce, ensuring it has the right people in the right place for the future.

## What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 59 The FRA has effective working arrangements across the County Council, and has a number of successful secondments in operation. Through these the FRA is able to fully utilise capacity within the County Council and also support delivery of wider objectives.

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### Performance management

- 60 The FRA is performing well in this area. The FRA has an established performance management culture. Robust systems ensure effective operational preparedness and deliver improved community safety outcomes. Good quality performance information is shared with partners and is having an impact on areas such as arson and road safety. The FRA works within the performance management framework, which is established across the County Council, and is an active participant within the Council-wide Strategic Performance Group. Through an improving regime of performance management, the FRA is able to identify underperformance and take action when required in order to improve outcomes.
- 61 The FRA works within the County Council performance management framework and as a member of the Strategic Performance Group. Performance management is integrated but is not yet fully embedded throughout the organisation. Performance against the service plan is monitored at quarterly performance management boards and, by exception, at the monthly senior management board. Performance management at individual level is developing but not yet embedded. Through a clear and accountable management regime, focus is maintained on priority areas, ensuring appropriate use of resources and that underperformance is addressed.
- 62 Lincolnshire FRA is actively improving performance management arrangements. It is currently piloting a reporting mechanism that links directly to the Community Fire Safety action plan, which is a well developed action plan. This monthly reporting mechanism identifies objectives and the accountable officers. Through this process, the FRA is able to maintain focus on outcomes and intervene early where targets are not being achieved. In doing so, it maintains focus on what is important.
- 63 The FRA places great emphasis on the quality and robustness of information. A rigorous, yet manageable process of quality assurance is embedded within the organisation, which allows the FRA to make clear decisions based on robust, accurate data. The FRA has invested significantly in this area, both in terms of resources and training. This work is supporting managers at all levels of the organisation to understand what works and what does not. Through this regime, the FRA is able to focus resources on areas that have real impact and deliver value for money.
- 64 Lincolnshire FRA is able to take action in response to underperformance. The monitoring processes are open and transparent, which encourages discussion about performance. This is supported by a culture that encourages people to be open about performance. This is evident in the approach taken to health and safety, such as the reporting of near misses and accidents. Individuals are encouraged to report near misses and accidents through a 'Safe Card' process, which is considered blame free. This results in investigation and action to address issues and prevent injuries and accidents. This has resulted in a comparatively very low rate (second lowest nationally) of all injuries sustained by wholetime and retained firefighters per 1,000 fire and special service incidents attended between 2002 and 2007.

## What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 65** The FRA is active in learning from others, is a participant in a number of benchmarking clubs and is Chair of the Regional Performance Improvement Group. The organisation undertakes a bi-annual audit programme where notable practice, strengths and weaknesses are identified and then shared throughout the organisation. The FRA is effective at sharing notable practice within the County Council. It has established mechanisms to facilitate the flow of information in both ways. A number of successful secondments are in operation between the County Council and FRA. Through its ability to collect and disseminate notable practice the FRA is able to ensure that processes are fit for purpose.
- 66** The FRA has had limited recognition of its contribution to shared priorities and wider community outcomes outlined within the Local Area Agreement (LAA). There are targets relating to fire service activity within the LAA. However, there is little recognition of the wider contribution made by the FRA. The FRA is not formally represented at a strategic level in a number of LAA priority areas, such as the children and young people agenda. Whilst it is acknowledged and recognised across the County Council as making a significant contribution, it is yet to have representation at a strategic level.
- 67** Performance management of partnerships is effective. A robust audit of partnerships has been undertaken and difficult decisions have been taken in terms of which ones to remain in. The FRA chairs the West Lincolnshire Community Safety Partnership and is an active member of the other three Community Safety Partnerships in Lincolnshire, and chairs a number of subordinate Joint Action Groups. For example, it has decided not to have direct involvement at District Local Strategic Partnerships, as the FRA considers it more effective to have influence through the Community Safety Partnerships. The FRA takes a robust approach to performance management within partnerships and is focused on what needs to be achieved whilst ensuring value for money. For example, through the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership the FRA has contributed to a reduction of 44 per cent in people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions over five years.
- 68** The FRA is learning from major emergencies and demonstrates a robust approach to dealing with major incidents. In June/July 2007 the FRA received a significant volume of calls relating to major flooding across the County. Whilst the FRA's operational plans were tested, the response proved effective. However, a number of issues were highlighted and the FRA has taken steps address these. The multi-agency approach was identified as a success. The County Council's emergency plan has now been revised to incorporate actions from the lessons learnt.

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# What has been achieved?

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## Achievement and Improvement

- 69** The FRA is performing well in this area. Operational performance is good and the FRA has improved in a number of key priority and service areas. It has significantly delivered its Service Improvement Plan, which has now been signed off by the government's (CLGs) monitoring board. Remaining action points are absorbed into the service plan. The FRA is continuing to make progress and has put in place many of the foundations for continuous improvement, but recognises that it is on a long-term journey of improvement. It maintains focus on priority areas and is continuing to deliver what is important to the community.
- 70** The FRA is improving its performance since the Corporate Assessment in 2005, when it was scored as 'Poor'. It has established a cohesive senior management team, which communicates a long-term vision for the organisation that is understood by staff. The FRA is establishing an open culture that is embracing change. It is now realising the benefits from this work. Through continual cultural change the FRA is able to implement plans and actions that are improving the service to the wider community and remain focused on delivering value for money.
- 71** Overall performance improvement and achievement is good. Most Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that relate to operational performance are above average and half of corporate health BVPIs sit in the best 25 per cent. Performance relating to equality and diversity is significantly improving.
- 72** The FRA has made improvements in priority areas such as:
- the number of primary fires per 10,000 population, which is ranked above average nationally;
  - the number of deaths and injuries from accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population, which is ranked above average nationally;
  - the number and severity of injuries occurring in fires and other emergency incidents; and
  - the overall use of resources and value for money scores.
- 73** The FRA is ranked 39 out of 46 Fire Authorities for percentage of performance indicators that have improved in the last twelve months. The FRA has 15 per cent of performance indicators in the best 25 per cent, compared with an average of 34 per cent for other Authorities.

## What has been achieved?

**74** The FRA is not improving performance in some areas such as:

- the total number of deliberate primary fires (excluding vehicles) per 10,000 population;
- the total number of deliberate secondary fires per 10,000 population;
- the total number of malicious false alarms per 1,000 population; and
- the number of fires in non-domestic properties per 1,000 non-domestic properties.

**75** The FRA is delivering performance against targets for a range of local performance indicators, such as:

- average attendance time to dwelling fires;
- average attendance time to road traffic collisions;
- reduction of those killed and seriously injured in road traffic collisions; and
- co-responder calls attended within eight minutes.

**76** The FRA is delivering a range of objectives that demonstrate compliance with the requirements set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework. For example, the FRA's commitment to contributing to the East Midlands Regional Management Board is strong. The FRA is delivering against key targets for a range of projects, such as command and control, workforce development and procurement. Through a regional approach the FRA is able to ensure best use of resources and utilise capacity across the region.

**77** The FRA is working with partners across a range of initiatives that are improving the quality of life for the community. It has improved its involvement and management of partnerships. Recognition by partners of the contribution made is strong. The arson task force is a specific example of this. An increase in haystack fires in a local area was addressed through a successful multi-agency approach that has resulted in three arrests, raised the profile of rural arson, and improved engagement with the farming community.

**78** Through effective partnership working the FRA is making a good impact on wider social issues. The FRA working in partnership with East Midlands Ambulance service and Lincolnshire Integrated Voluntary Emergency services to provide a co-responder scheme is making a significant impact within the community. During 2007/08 the FRA attended 2,219 co-responder incidents helping to improve survival rates following cardiac arrest by 35 per cent.

- 79** The FRA has implemented a number of projects to ensure a well trained and developed workforce through its '*Change for the Better*' programme. This is helping meet a strategic priority to 'ensure a well trained, developed and structured workforce'. Project Refine aims to improve capacity and enhance station and training support. The FRA has created a strategic reserve which aims to support retained staff through the employment of additional wholetime firefighters. The FRA is also introducing a modernisation programme for the retained duty system which aims to improve retained service productivity. Through these projects the FRA is investing in its workforce and improving the support and training that is available. However, whilst these projects are well managed, a number of key elements are behind schedule. The FRA needs to ensure that the benefits from a wide range of projects are realised, especially within the current climate of financial pressures.
- 80** The FRA is developing a better approach to health and safety, and has seen some improvements in sickness absence. In 2007/08 the FRA reported nine injuries that lasted more than three days and no major injuries. This performance ranks among the best 25 per cent in England. Health and safety is taken seriously and actions are taken when required. The management of sickness absence is improving, resulting in a reduction from 13.7 days per person in 2005/06 to 8.4 days per person in 2006/07. Through effective management of attendance and sickness the FRA is able to improve capacity within the workforce. User satisfaction levels are high. For example, after incident surveys demonstrate 98 per cent satisfaction and Regulatory Reform Act audits demonstrate 98 per cent overall satisfaction. However public satisfaction is low and ranked at only 34 out of 46 FRAs in 2006/07.

# 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 FRA's self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
  - key documentation, including the FRA's improvement plan;
  - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
  - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Lincolnshire Fire Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period of September 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the FRA, 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 FRA.



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# The Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.

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