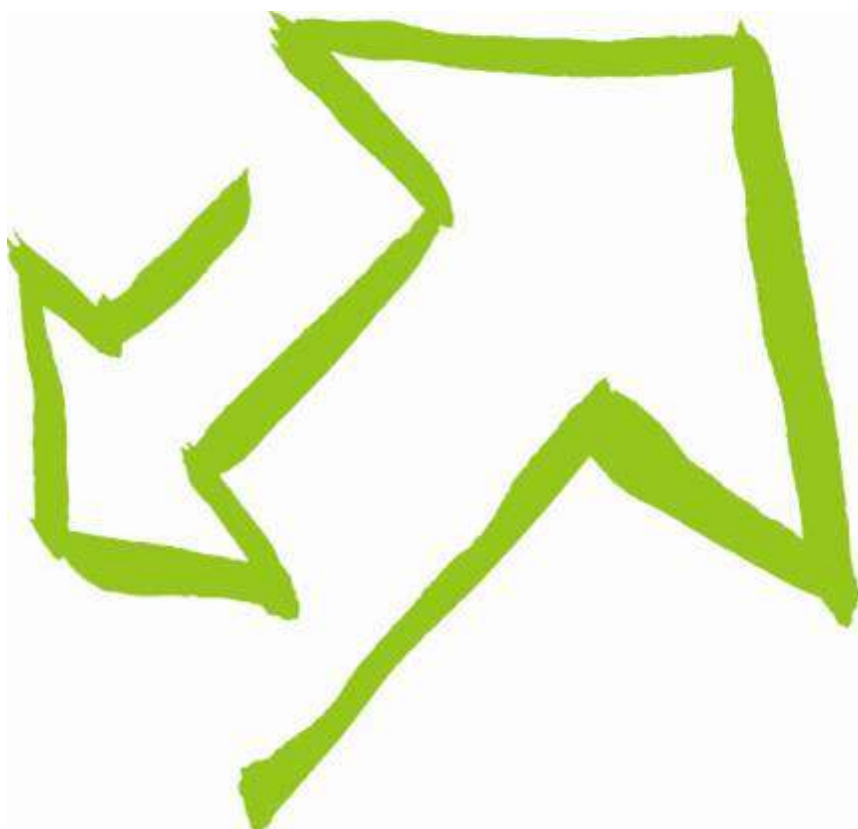


# Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Cornwall Fire And Rescue Authority

January 2009



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## Status of our Reports

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to non-executive directors/members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
  - any third party.
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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.
- 3 What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?
  - Ambition
  - Prioritisation
- 4 What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
  - Capacity
  - Performance management
- 5 What has been achieved?
  - Achievement and Improvement

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# Executive summary

- 6 The Audit Commission carried out the first comprehensive performance assessments (CPA) in Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) in 2005. At that time the Commission assessed Cornwall County Council FRA as 'fair'. The Commission has now undertaken a further corporate assessment of Cornwall FRA after a direction of travel follow-up assessment highlighted concerns about the variable quality of service delivery and slow progress in important areas such as community safety. This reports sets out the findings and conclusions of this corporate assessment.
- 7 The performance of Cornwall FRA has deteriorated from 'fair' to 'poor' since the 2005 Corporate Assessment. It is not keeping pace with other fire and rescue authorities.
- 8 The FRA does not have clear and challenging ambitions that address the needs of its communities. It has adopted 'Making Cornwall the Safest Place in which to Live, Work and Visit' as its vision. However, this vision is not underpinned by clear ambition, priorities or based on a comprehensive risk assessment. Risk assessment is still at an early stage and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is not focused on meeting the needs of Cornish people. Strategic leadership for delivery of the IRMP is weak. The FRA has still to effectively align strategic planning and local service delivery. Sustainability is not integral to the IRMP and the work of the FRA. The FRA is not contributing effectively to the county aim of 'Enhancing the living environment'.
- 9 Work with partners in local communities is only now helping the FRA to develop its understanding of local needs and the context within which it carries out community safety activities. Most operational staff show commitment to delivering improved services and quality of life for local communities and some are contributing to better outcomes for groups at greater risk of disadvantage. However, strategic level engagement with partners is not consistently effective. Key partners are not aware of what the Fire Authority is trying to achieve and they do not have a clear understanding of the value of the IRMP priorities and strategic aims.
- 10 The FRA needs to do much more to develop the capacity needed to deliver the Fire and Rescue National Framework and meet local needs. Managers are not providing consistent direction to staff. Responsibilities and accountabilities are not always clear. Councillors are not providing clear leadership and challenge. The scrutiny function is not robust. While, there is commitment to improving equality and diversity the FRA has a long way to go to achieve a representative workforce. It does not have a consistent and effective approach to engaging with communities and so is not making good connections with potentially excluded groups.
- 11 Financial management arrangements are sound. The FRA is achieving adequate value for money broadly in line with similar authorities. Procurement arrangements contribute to achieving value for money. Costs and expenditure are relatively low. However, the FRA is not using these to best advantage as the allocation of resources is not linked to a strategic risk assessment.

## Executive summary

- 12 Workforce planning is helping the FRA to build capacity for service delivery. The FRA has revised its whole-time duty system and has proposals to update its retained duty system. However, staff training and development is not consistent and the Integrated Personal Development system (IPDS) is only partially implemented. This means that the FRA cannot ensure it has the skills required to deliver its objectives.
- 13 People management policies are improving. The FRA has recently revised key policies to bring them in line with national requirements. While sickness absence is still high it is reducing. These policies are strengthening the FRA's ability to address workforce issues in a consistent and fair way.
- 14 The FRA has adequate systems to monitor performance. There is a culture of aiming for targets and the FRA is performing well in some areas. However, target setting is not challenging and there is little evidence that the FRA uses performance information routinely to address weaker areas of performance or target improvements in community outcomes. The FRA does not effectively share information on its performance with the public and stakeholders. Lack of robust evaluation of community safety projects means that the FRA does not have a good understanding of the impact its efforts are having and what works, where and why.
- 15 The FRA is achieving progress in some areas, but not always in the areas it has stated are its priority. For example, this year the total number of incidents reduced from 8,373 to 7,535 and of these, the number of primary fires reduced from 1,266 to 1,009 and secondary fires from 892 to 782. The FRA is also making progress in other areas through county-wide community projects such as the Phoenix and Flashpoint Projects which focus on young people. However, other projects are locally driven by station staff and uncoordinated across the county. The FRA has an agreement with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust to deliver a co-responder scheme covering the Lizard Peninsula. Other areas in which performance is improving include reduction in false alarms from automatic fire equipment. The FRA is working effectively with owners of properties to reduce call outs.
- 16 The FRA's performance is not consistent. For 2007/08, 60 per cent of its performance indicators are in the top 25 per cent for similar authorities but a significant number of performance indicators are in the lowest 25 per cent. The rate of improvement in performance is comparatively slow with the FRA behind the pace nationally. This includes areas of operational response. Performance in carrying out Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) and reducing accidental fires is below average. The culture of focusing on targets rather than on outcomes can be a problem. For example in order to report high numbers of HFSCs the FRA allows staff to record delivery of a leaflet to a home as a safety check. This has resulted in the FRA reporting a sharp increase in completed safety checks but over fifty per cent of the residents called upon received a leaflet not a home safety check. These 'checks' are not necessarily making people safer and Cornwall's HFSC figures are not comparable with elsewhere.

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# Areas for improvement

- 17 In order to sustain improved outcomes for the community and ensure a strategically focused organisation the FRA (which will become the 'One Cornwall' authority in April 2009) should tackle the following areas for improvement. These are identified as being of most benefit to the Authority's continuous improvement.
- 18 The FRA needs to develop clear and challenging ambitions, in consultation with the public and other stakeholders and underpin these ambitions with clear priorities. These ambitions need to be focused on the long-term with clarity about sustainability both in terms of community outcomes and the environment. They need to be underpinned by effective assessment of community risk.
- 19 The FRA needs to develop its strategic engagement with partners focussing particularly on its strategic role in the new 'One Cornwall' local strategic partnership (LSP), the local area agreement (LAA) and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP).
- 20 The FRA needs to urgently address its capacity problems. Leadership needs to be strengthened so that it focuses the work of the FRA more effectively and achieves better outcomes. Lines of responsibility and accountability need to be clear and councillors need to take a stronger role in leading and challenging performance.
- 21 The FRA should review its target setting and reporting to ensure it is challenging and outcome focused in particular in relation to Home Fire Safety Checks. Aims for equality and diversity also lack challenging and outcome based targets. More strategic direction for priority targeting, measuring outcomes and evaluation of schemes would allow for a clearer focus on priorities by staff and partners.

# Summary of assessment scores

**Table 1**

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the Council, together with its partners trying to achieve?	Ambition	1
	Prioritisation	1
What is the capacity of the Council, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	1
	Performance Management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement	2
<b>Overall Corporate Assessment Score **</b>		<b>Poor</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 Comprehensive Performance Assessment category

**Table 2**

Scores on five themes	Overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment category
No scores of 2 or 1. At least two scores of 4.	Excellent
No scores of 1. At least four scores of 3 or more.	Good
No scores of 1.	Fair
No more than two scores of 1. At least three scores of 2 or more.	Weak
Any other combination of scores.	Poor

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# Context

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## The locality

- 22 Cornwall is the most south westerly county in England and only borders one other county. The Devon border area to the north and east contains some of the most sparsely populated areas of the country. This, along with the peninsular nature of Cornwall with its 697 kilometres of coastline, means the Fire Authority has to be operationally self-sufficient to a greater extent than most other fire authorities.
- 23 Cornwall has a static population of approximately 520,000, rising to over 750,000 during the busiest holiday periods. Only 32 per cent of the population live in towns with over 10,000 inhabitants compared to a national figure of 80 per cent. There are nine towns with a population of over 10,000 people. Seven of these are located in the centre or west of the county. Twenty per cent of the population live in settlements of less than 1,000 inhabitants, with a further 20 per cent living in small settlements of between 1,000 and 2,000 inhabitants. Cornwall's ethnic profile differs from the national picture with an exceptionally low black and minority ethnic (BME) population. The 2001 Census shows that 97 per cent of the population in Cornwall identify themselves as being white British. Of the remaining 3 per cent the largest group was non-British or Irish White at 1.49 per cent. The Council also estimates there are about 3,500 migrant workers in Cornwall and it is accepted that this number is rising. In addition to the ethnic groupings identified in the 2001 Census the Cornwall Quality of Life Survey conducted in 2004 showed that approximately 35 per cent of the population identify themselves as Cornish.
- 24 The gross domestic product, though improving, is less than 65 per cent of the national average. As a result Cornwall was one of only four areas of the UK to receive Objective One funding from the European Union (EU) and EU Convergence Funds for the period 2007/14. In contrast, prices, including house prices, are close to the national average causing a severe mismatch between prices and earnings. This mismatch, when coupled with a narrow economic base and a predominance of employment in low paying sectors such as agriculture and tourism, means that many under-19s leave the county for education or other opportunities.
- 25 The changing nature of employment opportunities with the resident workforce migrating to centres of population and a large transitory workforce, especially in the agricultural and flower picking industries, presents a number of risks such as unsafe houses in multiple occupation and unsafe accommodation on farms. It also poses problems in recruiting retained (part time) firefighters in the most rural fire stations.
- 26 The county is acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful areas of the UK with many people retiring to live in the region. Consequently, Cornwall has a high proportion of elderly people compared to other regions, putting additional pressures on all services, including the fire service.



### The Fire and Rescue Authority

- 27 Cornwall County Council discharges its statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 through Cornwall County Fire Brigade. The County Council has 82 elected members and operates the cabinet system ('the Executive') of policy making with nine executive portfolio holders. The Public Protection Executive Member is responsible for fire and rescue and emergency planning.
- 28 The majority political group is Liberal Democrat with 48 councillors. The other groups are the Independents with 19 councillors, Conservative with nine councillors and Labour with five councillors and there is one Liberal councillor.
- 29 There are five scrutiny committees. The Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee examines fire service matters. A standing single issue panel of this committee, the Integrated Risk Management and Service Improvement Planning Single Issue Panel, reviewed the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) in April 2008. The IRMP is also the Authority's service plan. This Panel also recently reviewed the whole-time duty system and the decision to pilot an alternative to the existing retained duty system.
- 30 Local government in Cornwall is currently being re-organised. The creation of a 'One Cornwall' local authority through the merger of six district councils and the County Council. A successful reorganisation is Cornwall County Council's principal priority for 2008/09. As the bidding authority the county is accountable for ensuring the 'One Cornwall Transformation Programme' is successful. The Council Plan acknowledges the authorities in Cornwall need to minimise any 'negative impact on service delivery' due to the creation of one authority. The impact of this is the Council is focused on organisational matters for the 16 months to April 2009. The Council acknowledges it will need to focus on a new Sustainable Community Strategy, a new LAA, partnership working and customer service once the new authority comes into being in April 2009.
- 31 The Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) employs 747 staff. The fire and emergency response is provided by 425 fire fighters working the retained duty system; 206 whole-time fire fighters, 16 full time equivalent (FTE) fire control centre staff and 87 support staff. The FRA also employs eight emergency planning staff. The service operates out of 31 fire stations, which are managed by three divisional headquarters located in the east, centre and west of the county. Two stations are crewed by whole-time personnel; five on a day-crew rota and the rest are staffed by retained firefighters.
- 32 The FRA has 43 frontline emergency fire appliances and a range of specialist rescue and operational support vehicles. It uses a pool of cars and vans to support operational response and day-to-day business.
- 33 In 2007/08 the service attended 1,244 special service calls, 1,009 primary fires, and 782 secondary fires. In August 2007 the fire service dealt with a major hotel fire, the largest incident of its kind for 30 years. This attracted a significant amount of local and national interest. The service developed an improvement action plan following the incident which addressed public concerns.

- 34 Band D Council Tax across the county is approximately £1,350 (it varies between and within the districts in the county). The Fire and Rescue Service operational revenue budget for 2008/09 is £18.12 million (excluding pensions). The capital expenditure budget for 2008/09 is £1.65 million. This expenditure relates to predominantly to vehicles and equipment as buildings are refurbished and maintained through a 25-year private finance initiative (PFI) started in 2003.

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

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## Ambition

- 35 Performance in this area is inadequate - below minimum standards. The County Council has not set the strategic direction for its fire service. The fire service in turn does not have clear and challenging ambitions that address the needs of its communities. The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is based on the County Council aims and Portfolio Priorities but these are not developed into meaningful ambitions for local communities. Partners and residents have not been sufficiently consulted or engaged in setting the aims and there is a lack of understanding of the purpose and range of services that the FRA delivers. The FRA has been very slow in developing its understanding of local needs, but is contributing to improvements in quality of life for some migrant workers. It is also developing its understanding of risk across the county, but this is at an early stage.
- 36 The Council Plan does not set out a clear vision for the role of the FRS within the county. This lack of direction results in the fire service lacking strategic ambitions for fire safety in Cornwall. The County Council Aims and the Portfolio Priorities in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) are not aligned and lack ambition. Examples of this lack of FRA ambition and strategic alignment include the County Council Aims of *'Being a strategic, ambitious, accountable and well managed council'* which is intended to align with the FRA's *'Maintain the availability of fire engines with a crew of at least five trained firefighters on each fire engine'* and the county's *'Promoting Cornwall to the world'* which is aligned with *'Maintain and improve public protection in [the] light of constantly changing government legislation'*. This lack of clearly stated ambitions results in an FRA focused on delivering the existing service and compliance with the Fire and Rescue National Framework and regulation rather than contributing to a wider agenda that meets the needs of Cornwall's communities.
- 37 The ambitions for the FRS are not clear and robust. The IRMP sets out three priorities for the Public Protection Portfolio as follows.

**'Improve service delivery by developing collaborative partnership working and local targets, in addition to statutory targets, based on community needs and aspirations**

**Maintain the availability of Fire engines with a crew of at least five trained firefighters on each fire engine.**

**Maintain and improve public protection in [the] light of constantly changing government legislation'.**

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

- 38 These Portfolio Priorities are the closest the FRA comes to specifying its detailed ambitions but they are not sufficiently developed or challenging to communicate to the public, staff and partners as ambitions for its communities. Tactical considerations are interpreted as strategic ambition. The Portfolio Priorities are underpinned with 26 strategic aims largely drawn from the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services with limited modification to meet the needs and risks experienced in Cornwall. The FRA aims do not adequately meet the needs of local communities.
- 39 Staff do not clearly understand what the FRA is trying to achieve in the community and how they can contribute to delivering the FRA's vision. The FRA has defined its organisational values but has not tested how effectively they have been communicated and understood. Not all staff feel valued by management. As a result the FRA is not benefiting by the contribution of all staff towards the delivery of improved community outcomes.
- 40 The FRA is weak on long-term strategic planning and sustainability as ambitions focus on the short and medium- term. Sustainability is not integral to the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the work of the FRA. The fourth county aim 'Enhancing the living environment' is not underpinned by a Portfolio Priority though the IRMP does comment that it is 'inherent in our service delivery'. The FRA recognises the need to strengthen its approach to sustainability.
- 41 Strategic leadership is weak. Senior councillors and officers, in the fire service and County Council, are not providing consistently clear and decisive strategic leadership to the FRA. The IRMP which has been approved by senior councillors and officers is a weak document which lacks clear ambitions and direction. The FRA lacks a strategic risk management approach to station and duty cover. Weak performance areas such as HFSC and sickness absence are not effectively challenged by councillors or officers. This lack of strategic leadership is hindering the Authority's ability to improve its reputation and is hampering the rate of progress in the development of services. Positively, some senior councillors are aware of these weaknesses and the need to address them. The FRA cannot look to the future confidently without strong political and managerial strategic leadership and effective councillor challenge of the service's performance.
- 42 The FRA's limited ambitions are not based on an understanding of local needs and the risks faced by different communities. The FRA is still developing a full understanding of risk. A draft Risk Management Assessment (RMA) report dated September 2008 had still to be fully considered by councillors at the time of the inspection. The FRA's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) does not clearly state the nature and levels of risk in Cornwall. For example, the rationale for arson reduction work is based purely on generic statements rather than reference to actual data. It commenced a pilot scheme to target Home Fire Safety Checks in 2005 using information from the national Fire Service Emergency Cover tool, five years after it was first made available. The pilot identified 4,349 homes highlighted potentially as high risk. The FRA's ambitions are not based on a reliable understanding of the risks faced by different communities in Cornwall.

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

- 43 The FRA does not consistently target its efforts and resources towards the highest risk groups. For example the Risk Management Assessment identifies lone pensioners as the demographic group at greatest risk of fire. However, up until now there has been a greater focus on youth work. The targeting of Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSCs) is informed by 'those premises that are deemed most at risk' rather than people most at risk even where the groups of people at risk are identified. The FRA's approach to risk analysis is not developed enough to make best use of community knowledge and focus its limited resources effectively to reach those at most risk.
- 44 The FRA does not provide clear and visible community leadership. Partners and the wider community have not been engaged in setting FRA strategic aims. The FRA has not used effective consultation with the public, partners and available data to develop its Portfolio Priorities and Strategic Aims. Consultation with stakeholders on the IRMP revealed that there is a lack of understanding of the purpose and range of services that the FRA delivers. The FRA does not understand local needs and is not able to demonstrate how it has taken account of local needs in designing services or that it is addressing community expectations. Partner organisations are not clear about the FRA's strategic position and this limits support they can give to service delivery and meeting shared aims such as improved community safety.
- 45 Partnership working is not driven by a strategic assessment of how the FRA can deliver its ambitions. The FRA participates in statutory partnerships that are government funded such as the crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP) but they are not clear how they deliver FRA's ambitions and aims. The FRA has had limited influence on the local strategic partnerships (LSPs) in the county and the local area agreement (LAA). Aware of this weakness it has begun to use the opportunity presented by the 'One Cornwall' reorganisation to improve its profile. It is a member of the new county-wide LSP and CDRP and from April 2009 the chief fire officer will be the county's lead officer on community safety. This offers an opportunity for the FRA to gain a more strategic role in regional developments but it is still not clear how the Authority intends to develop the fire and rescue service to meet local needs.
- 46 The FRA is contributing to effective partnership working at a local level. It is helping to bring about improved outcomes for groups at greater risk of disadvantage through the Phoenix and Supporting Community Values (SCV) Projects. Both projects are designed to support excluded young people from deprived areas and help them achieve their full potential. Staff make a positive contribution towards identifying and understanding the needs of people with disabilities.
- 47 The FRA is contributing to improvements in quality of life for migrant workers. The Council estimates that there are around 3,500 migrant workers in the county. The FRA working in partnership with local district councils identified the need to address housing, community safety, education, health and employment issues affecting migrant workers. It is a stakeholder in the Migrant Worker Action Group (MIGWAG) and through this group it has undertaken a number of fire safety audits of premises to ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform Order. This means the FRA is aware of the needs of migrant workers in the county.

### Prioritisation

- 48 Performance in this area is inadequate - below minimum requirements. The lack of challenging ambitions means that FRA priorities are not clearly defined. The relationship between the priorities and risk in the IRMP and other documents is not clear to the public, councillors and partners. Engagement with partners is not consistently effective. Key partners are not aware of what the Fire Authority is trying to achieve and they do not have a clear understanding of the IRMP priorities and strategic aims. Engagement by the FRA in partnerships is delivering wider outcomes such as crime reduction and better health.
- 49 The FRA vision, *'Making Cornwall the Safest Place in Which to Live, Work and Visit'*, has not been translated into clear priorities. The IRMP is a weak document and the relationship between the strategic aims and risk is not made clear in the IRMP and other documents. The strategic aims contained in the IRMP have not been translated into realistic delivery plans. This makes it difficult for the FRA to demonstrate what it is trying to achieve and to measure progress. An effective risk assessment process is necessary to align priorities to resources
- 50 The FRA is not setting itself clear and challenging targets. The current recording of HFSCs is misleading in that the distribution of a leaflet (a 'code 1') is reported as a completed HFSC. The 2008/09 target reduction of two per cent for accidental dwelling fires does not have a rationale behind it. This two per cent reduction is not challenging compared to the fifteen per cent reduction achieved in the three years since 2003/04. The lack of challenging targets means the Authority is not working effectively to deliver its vision of making Cornwall a safer place.
- 51 Effective communications strategies are not in place. Communications are not being driven corporately limiting the FRA's ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with the broad range of stakeholders necessary for the effective delivery of services across the county. Communications with staff and partners are inconsistent. The FRA has informed staff of its priorities through the production of a monthly newsletter and weekly email, press notices in local papers and distributing plans to councillors, stakeholders and staff. However, it has not tested the effectiveness of its communication. Key issues, such as the Fire Authority's objectives, the IRMP, and IPDS have not been cascaded effectively across the service. Some managers provide briefing sessions for their staff but this approach is not applied consistently across the service and at all levels. There is limited opportunity for upward feedback from staff. This inconsistent approach to communications is preventing effective dialogue between managers and staff.
- 52 There is limited evidence that consultation with the community, councillors and staff has influenced service plans such as the IRMP. A consultation exercise on the proposed service objectives for 2008/09 took place between December 2007 and March 2008. This consultation focused on four service objectives rather than the wider ambitions for the FRA. The four objectives were:
- undertaking a full assessment of risk in the county;
  - the prioritisation of an action plan once the review of the Penhallow Hotel fire is completed;



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

- the implementation of the trial/pilot of a new retained duty system; and
  - the progression towards the implementation of the Regional Control Centre.
- 53** A full list of 26 proposed objectives, was also made available for those that wished to comment upon them. The FRA received 163 responses to the consultation questionnaire with the majority of respondents regarding the list of services delivered as important and not seeing any need for improvement. There was little scope for stakeholders to comment on the IRMP's Portfolio Priorities, though 74 per cent of respondents said the objectives were easy to understand. It is not clear what changed as a result of this statutory consultation. The FRA held an Open Day for councillors and the public and both groups engaged with fire service personnel during the event. However, there is no evidence that the public's views on the service were gathered and used to improve the service.
- 54** There is a lack of effective challenge by councillors. The FRA has not been seen as a priority within the County Council and councillor scrutiny of its activities is weak. Without councillor involvement and challenge improvement in service delivery and working practices is difficult to achieve. The FRA recognises the opportunity to gain a more strategic role with the imminent merger in April 2009 of the six district councils with the County Council and the creation of a 'One Cornwall' authority. Effective councillor involvement and challenge supports improvement in service delivery and working practices.
- 55** There are some examples of effective local partnership working but the evaluation of projects is inconsistent. The Blue Card scheme was developed in partnership with the Council's Adult Social Care Department to target vulnerable adults. No fire related fatalities or injuries have been reported among this targeted group since the scheme started. Partnership working with MIGWAG, the migrant workers action group, is addressing key fire and safety risks in houses in multiple occupation. Cross-partnership working is beginning to identify and address the needs of the travelling community in some parts of the county. Staff use local demographic information to target initiatives aimed at fire prevention; some activities have cross-cutting impact and staff have a good awareness of how they can use the reputation of the fire service to break down barriers within deprived communities and subsequently involve other agencies to contribute in local projects. These initiatives are locally driven, rather than strategically, and are not part of an overarching strategic approach.
- 56** There is limited evidence that the FRA shifts resources from non-priority areas or that it has taken difficult decisions. The lack of a Risk Management Assessment has prevented a strategic assessment of how fire cover is provided in the county and the resource and deployment decisions that should flow from that assessment. The FRA cited the pilot for a revised retained duty system as a difficult decision. The Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee recommended to the Executive that the Pilot Scheme be a priority budget pressure for the 2008/09 three year budget process. The cost of the pilot scheme at three fire stations was estimated to be in the region of £350,000 for one year. Resources are not directed to the areas of greatest risk.

# 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

- 57 Performance in this area is inadequate - below minimum requirements. Strategic leadership is weak and councillors are not providing clear leadership and challenge. Together these significantly constrain the Fire Authority's capacity. The FRA has still to effectively align strategic planning and local service delivery. Managers are not providing clear and consistent direction to staff. The scrutiny function is not robust. While, there is commitment to improving equality and diversity the FRA has a long way to go to achieve a workforce that is representative of Cornwall's communities. Partnership working is inconsistent and not effectively evaluated. Managers are not providing consistent direction and support to operational activities. Nevertheless there is some good localised partnership working. Many staff are making a difference to the community at a local level despite the lack of a clear strategic approach. Most operational staff show commitment to delivering improved services and a better quality of life in their local communities. The performance management and other ICT systems are good but could be used more effectively within a more focused strategic framework. Financial management arrangements are sound. Procurement arrangements are contributing to achieving value for money. A good governance framework is in place.
- 58 The governance framework complies with established codes of practice. It clearly defines roles, responsibilities, accountabilities and protocols for councillors and officers. There is an established committee structure and scrutiny function. The framework offers the potential for the FRA to develop robust governance arrangements, which can focus on addressing wider community safety issues effectively. However, councillors and officers have not effectively used it to provide strategic direction through the IRMP. For example, while the FRA has reviewed its whole-time duty system it has still to agree and implement a strategic approach to crew and fire station cover in the county. Governance arrangements, while adequate, are not increasing capacity or improving the service.



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

- 59 The scrutiny function is developing but is not fully effective. It monitors the decision making process but does not provide challenge. Scrutiny councillors find the quarterly performance information provided by the service complex and as a result do not use it to carry out their role effectively. The Integrated Risk Management and Service Improvement Planning Single Issue Panel has not helped the FRA set realistic ambitions in the IRMP to address the business risks it faces or to deliver better community outcomes. A recent example of the scrutiny function being carried out more effectively is the review of the pilot for a new retained duty system. Such an approach needs to be applied consistently and rigorously. Councillors risk undermining the FRA's potential to improve performance if they do not lead and challenge effectively. Councillors are not effectively contributing to improving the fire service.
- 60 Councillor development is weak. Councillors have not received regular training and development to support them in carrying out their FRA duties. At the last election in 2005 almost 50 per cent of council members were newly elected. Such a significant change in the composition of the Council requires a concerted effort to ensure that councillors have the requisite skills and capacity to carry out their roles effectively. The FRA identified that member development needs strengthening and set up a work stream to address this issue. However, it has deferred taking further action pending the creation of the 'One Cornwall' County Council in April 2009 and the election of the new Council in autumn 2009. Many councillors lack the necessary skills to effectively contribute to improving the fire service.
- 61 Responsibilities and accountabilities are not always clear. Managers are not providing clear and consistent direction to staff. Some staff are confused about who reports to who and which officer is responsible for which function. Line management responsibility in a number of cases is not clear, nor are the protocols regarding the management of non-uniformed staff by uniformed staff. Not all staff are clear about what the FRA is trying to achieve. There are local level initiatives that attempt to reflect local need but no consistent, clear corporate direction. Some managers maintain consistent levels of communication and guidance but this is not universal. Decision making audit trails and clear accountability are always not present. A lack of management capacity adversely affects the organisation's ability to deliver effective services.
- 62 The FRA's operational risk management is still developing. Risk management assessments in the IRMP and other service documents are difficult to interpret. A Risk Management Assessment was completed in September 2008 but this has still to inform service delivery. The FRA works within the requirements of the County Council risk management strategy and the county's corporate risk management arrangements are adequate. The county's Corporate Management Board (CMB) supports executive decision-making and includes councillors and senior officers. There is regular monitoring by the strategic risk management group (SRMG), and risk reporting to the risk management board (RMB), which is linked to the Audit Committee's quarterly meeting cycle. Although risks are monitored they are not managed effectively through accurate analyses, audit and review.

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

- 63** Workforce planning is good and it is supporting the development of service capacity. The FRA has revised its whole-time duty system and it has proposals to update its retained duty system. A new whole-time duty system introduced in April 2008 increased staff flexibility and reduced costs. The additional time availability gained through the new system is equivalent to 14 firefighters or investment of an additional £500,000. The new system aligned training to the financial year which ensures training activities are adequately resourced. The service is trialling a new retained duty system (RDS) which it hopes will address current problems with retained firefighter recruitment and retention. These are positive moves for the FRA to increase its capacity but it will be some time before it can show that the changes have delivered the expected improvements.
- 64** The FRA is achieving adequate value for money (VFM) broadly in line with similar authorities. Costs and expenditure are relatively low. The FRA is able to produce and collate information that enables comparative assessments of the Authority's ability to achieve value for money. While its performance is broadly in line with that of 45 other English Fire and Rescue Authorities, there are areas in which the Authority's performance is below average such as fire fighting expenditure per head in relation to the number of deaths and injuries. This means that the FRA is not always effective at targeting resources to areas of poor performance in a strategic way. The FRA is working to address the budgetary constraints it faces such as changes to the national grant settlement, but these constraints have affected the pace of change.
- 65** Asset management is adequate. The County Council Asset Management Plan (AMP) 2005-2008 identifies £578,000 of capital expenditure for the public protection portfolio but it is not clear how much of this is allocated to the fire and rescue service. The PFI contractor is responsible for most maintenance costs but unanticipated maintenance costs due for instance to vehicle damage is covered by the FRA.
- 66** The FRA is using regional and joint procurement to support the delivery of efficiency savings. The FRA working with its regional partners has developed and led the introduction of a Government procurement card, which has delivered significant financial benefit with an average saving of £24 per transaction. The FRA uses the tool for an average of 350 transactions per month. The FRA is using the national 'Firebuy' joint procurement initiative judiciously. It is finalising the joint procurement of aerial ladder platforms which it envisages will deliver additional 1.25 per cent cost savings on the overall price. These efficiencies can effectively support the redirection of savings to other areas across the organisation.
- 67** People management policies are good and implementation is improving. The FRA has recently revised key policies to bring them in line with national requirements. For example in August 2008 the FRA implemented a revised sickness and absence monitoring policy for uniformed staff. This takes a more rigorous approach to the reduction of sickness absence levels and has led to a reduction in lost days, excluding retained staff, from over 13.6 days to 9.25 days, a 32 per cent reduction for each firefighter. However, this level of sickness absence is still very high. People management policies strengthen the FRA's ability to address workforce issues in an effective and fair way.

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

- 68 Staff training and development is not consistent. The FRA is implementing the IPDS. It is currently in place for all whole-time firefighters and is being rolled out for all retained firefighters. Appraisals are carried out annually though some staff do not have one. Training needs are identified through these appraisals. Until the IPDS is embedded, the FRA cannot ensure it has the skills required to deliver its objectives and services to local people.
- 69 There is some effective strategic level partnership working. The FRA has worked successfully with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust to deliver a co-responder scheme to the residents of Helston, Mullion and St Keverne. This scheme has been running for ten years and the ambulance service speaks highly of the dedication of staff working within the scheme. The Maritime Incident Response Group enables the fire service to provide an effective twenty four hour response service to incidents at sea. The FRA is working with the police delivering safety initiatives targeted at young people such as the Road Accident and Awareness Programme and Young Driver Education Programme which address alcohol and dangerous driving issues. Two initiatives, the Council funded 'Phoenix Project' and the 'Wheels of Fire' project deal with youth social exclusion and inclusion issues.
- 70 Partnership working is not evaluated consistently for its effectiveness. There are formal arrangements for management of partnerships to ensure they are sustainable and deliver tangible outcomes. The partnership evaluation monitoring team ensures partnership arrangements meet and adhere to standard criteria and maintains the partnership register. Despite these arrangements there is no consistent system to evaluate partnership working for the impact on communities locally and regionally. Consequently, the FRA is not able to show the benefits of its joint work or to assess whether resources are being targeted effectively.
- 71 The FRA is committed to securing improvements in partnership with the regional management board (RMB). It is the RMB lead on procurement and equality and diversity, but its own approach to equality and diversity has been slow to show progress. While the FRA is well placed to ensure that regional working supports delivery of its objectives it has yet to make any significant impact on the composition of its workforce.
- 72 The FRA has made slow progress in improving its approach to equality and diversity. It signalled its intent to improve diversity issues across the county in 2004 and has achieved some successes, such as more open dialogue with the travelling community, migrant workers and a training programme for councillors and operational personnel. Additional staff have been recruited to deliver equality and diversity awareness and service improvements. Seventy nine of the 82 councillors in office during 2007 received equality and diversity training. However, despite four years of activity there is much work needed to ensure the workforce reflects and understands the community it serves as the FRA has made poor progress in recruitment. Just 1.5 per cent of firefighters are female and 0.54 per cent are from black and minority ethnic communities (the BME population is approximately 3 per cent including non-British or Irish White at 1.49 per cent). The FRA has self-assessed as level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard and is working towards a self-assessed level 3 with a target date of March 2010. The FRA has been slow to reflect and understand the needs of the communities it serves.

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

- 73 The 2006 Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) highlighted a number of issues concerning the FRA's ability to provide effective management of emergency response for retained firefighters. The service has recently introduced a Retained Duty System (RDS) availability system (Rappel) to confirm the number and competence of firefighters available which is yet to be fully implemented. Once implemented this system is capable of providing important dynamic management information regarding RDS operational response capability.

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### Performance management

- 74 The FRA is performing adequately in this area. There are effective systems for performance monitoring that could be used to greater effect. Internally, senior managers regularly review performance to ensure operational effectiveness. While there is a track record of meeting targets and the FRA is performing well in a number of areas, there is limited evidence to show that it uses performance information in a strategic way to improve community outcomes. However, councillors have a limited role in target setting and many targets are not sufficiently challenging. The FRA does not share performance information effectively with the public and stakeholders.
- 75 There is a consistent and systematic approach to performance monitoring across the FRA but few examples of how this information informs decision-making and drives improvement. The FRA has a focus on achieving targets and 60 per cent of its performance indicators are upper quartile. However, this culture of focusing on targets rather than on outcomes can be a problem. An example of this is the approach to its HFSC performance where the FRA includes delivery of a leaflet to a home as a reported safety check ('Code 1 - Not at home, Home Fire Safety Check card and leaflet left'). This has resulted in the FRA being able to report a sharp increase in the numbers of completed safety checks but Cornwall's checks are not robust, the HFSC figures are not comparable with elsewhere and the FRA cannot assess if they are delivering VFM in this area.
- 76 Target setting is inconsistent, not challenging and not clearly linked to improving community outcomes. Examples, where the fire authority has attached the highest possible risk rating, are in responding to the Penhallow Fire Investigation a target date of 'long-term 2011' is set, and its target '*...to undertake a full assessment of the risks within the county*' a target date of 'long-term 2009' (all targets taken from Brigade Objectives for 2008/09). Additionally, the outcome for the latter project is only to '*have made recommendations*'. A further example is the Divisional Action Plans which identify road traffic collision (RTC) reduction as a high priority but fail to set targets. The absence of a baseline means that the FRA does not know how well it is performing and if it is contributing to reduced casualties. Target setting is not challenging and aimed at meeting a numerical target rather than being used as a tool to drive improved community outcomes.

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

- 77 The FRA budget setting and business planning are not yet fully integrated. Recently the FRA identified this as a strategic issue and work is now underway to strengthen the links between business planning and budget setting. The FRA first introduced a medium term financial plan (MTFP) in 2007. The budget setting process now incorporates scrutiny and there is a focused attempt to link service planning and delivery to the corporate objectives. The business planning system across the Authority is co-ordinated and consistent, but it is not clearly aligned with performance management. The FRA business plan is reflected in divisional and station level plans. Plans are prepared on an annual cycle and financial planning is an integral element. The FRA planning cycle is aligned with that of the County Council but performance management reporting does not direct resources to areas of underperformance. The Fire Authority has some way to go before it can demonstrate fully effective and integrated strategic planning.
- 78 Information technology makes performance information readily available within the Council, but it is not always easily understood. A well established IT system, 'Performance Monitor', is accessible to staff and councillors. The three divisional areas within Cornwall are compared against each other and a traffic light indicator system provides high level information about progress. This means that officers can clearly identify where support or other management action is required. However, while FRA performance information is accessible to councillors they do not find it easy to understand. The FRA does not use key performance indicators as a method for presenting information in manner that is easy to interpret. Performance information is not easily accessible to external partners and stakeholders to interpret how well the FRA is performing or evaluate the effectiveness of joint initiatives. The Fire Authority is not using its ICT systems to effectively improve the service.
- 79 The FRA makes adequate use of benchmarking information. Comparative performance information is reported through the FRA Report on Indicator Trends which contains a comprehensive set of best value and local indicators that capture how well the FRA has performed since 2003/04 against national and family group averages. However, it is not clear how the FRA has set targets and how it ensures they are robust. A new proposal for target setting does not incorporate input from partners or councillors or the use of feedback data from staff and service users. An insular approach to performance target setting will not reflect wider community objectives or enable comparative assessments that are meaningful to local communities or stakeholders.



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# What has been achieved?

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## Achievement and Improvement

- 80** Performance in this area is adequate. Many operational staff are doing good work in local projects such as the Wheels of Fire, Phoenix, Flashpoint and other smaller local initiatives. However, the FRA leadership does not effectively evaluate smaller projects and link them to strategic aims. Performance is not consistent. The FRA is performing well in some areas but a significant number of performance indicators are in the lowest quartile. Also the rate of improvement does not compare well with similar fire authorities particularly in the areas of operational response and its internal management arrangements. The achievement of the FRA on HFSCs, reducing accidental fires and costs in relation to deaths and injuries are all below average.
- 81** The FRA has made progress in delivering planned outcomes and improving the quality of life for local people but this must be set against some unchallenging expectations. It has made adequate progress in delivering against performance indicators. The 2007/08 data places 60 per cent of indicators in the best quartile nationally with 65 per cent of indicators improving. Improvements have been made since 2004/05 and the total number of incidents has reduced from 8,373 to 7,535; of these, the number of primary fires has reduced from 1,266 to 1,009 and secondary fires from 892 to 782. Primary fires have been reduced by 35 per cent from 2002/03 to 2007/08. Hoax calls have reduced by 25 per cent since 2005/06. The Public Protection Portfolio Report documented good progress against its 21 2007/08 objectives. Seven have been completed, a further eight are long-term and ongoing and have made reasonable progress. Four that were due for completion at the end of the quarter will be carried forward to next year and the remaining two are no longer being progressed. These relate to revenue support and member engagement. Another area in which performance is improving is the work to reduce multiple false alarms from automatic fire equipment. The FRA is working effectively with owners of properties to reduce call outs. This work is starting to have a measurable and positive impact.
- 82** The emergency response provided by the FRA is steady but improvement is marginal. The FRA's 'interim' targets for responding to emergencies are:
- attend 95 per cent of all Incidents within 20 minutes;
  - attend 80 per cent of Fire Data Report 1 (FDR1) Incidents within 12 minutes; and
  - attend 85 per cent of RTC (Crash Rescue Used Incidents) within 15 minutes.

## What has been achieved?

- 83** These targets are not stretching and are not benchmarked against comparable FRAs. Control staff use 'Vision' - a system to identify the fire appliance likely to arrive soonest at an incident. While this means that a station may not necessarily attend all incidents within their administrative area, the community benefits by the service responding as quickly as possible. The draft RMA recommends new emergency response attendance standards for each area. For example, for primary fires with a life risk it proposes a 12 minute attendance time on 75 per cent of occasions. However, service users are not yet in a position to understand the level of service they can expect.
- 84** The FRA is making some good progress in achieving its ambitions for prevention of fire and other emergencies through community projects. In the last three years incidents of arson are down by 20 per cent and hoax calls are down by 26 per cent. The county-wide Phoenix scheme allows selected school children to take part in fire brigade-based courses where they are trained in the use of firefighting equipment. Feedback collected and evaluated by the FRA suggests that young people felt more confident to deal with fire and other emergency situations after the training. The Flashpoint Project in Bodmin is another example of good prevention work. Young people are encouraged to make risk assessments in simulated situations, such as escaping from a building filled with smoke. Beach and railway line emergencies are also simulated. These activities teach children how to respond sensibly in an emergency. Station-led initiatives have been developed by firefighters who can demonstrate a connection with young people. For example, a firefighter at Penzance is a skateboarder and works with local young skateboarders teaching them about fire safety through the 'Wheels on Fire' scheme. However, such initiatives are locally driven, and while good, are not coordinated or evaluated by the Fire Authority.
- 85** The FRA evaluates some community safety projects for effectiveness. For example the community fire safety (CFS) advisors, the Phoenix and Supporting Community Values (a scheme identifies and engages with a section of the Community which is 'on the edge of social exclusion') projects are evaluated to test their effectiveness. In some cases external groups are brought in to assist in the evaluation. However, the FRA does not routinely evaluate its prevention activities apart from larger, often externally funded projects. This means that the FRA does not have a good understanding of the impact its efforts are having and what works, where and why.
- 86** The approach to home fire safety is not based on risk. The HFSC strategy is primarily based on numbers of households across specified areas rather than targeted at those at highest risk. The FRA's own definition of a HFSC means that it can simply be a leaflet pushed through a door - this is inadequate advice. Divisional reports show that the majority of HFSCs recorded were of this type - the 27,000 HFSC target for 2008/09 includes a 50 per cent leaflet drop and the remaining 50 per cent includes 'advice given on the doorstep'. This approach means that home fire safety education is not delivered effectively.
- 87** The Blue Card Scheme is an example of effective partnership work by the FRA with another council department. The FRA developed the scheme in partnership with the Council's Adult Social Care Department and it is targeted at vulnerable adults. The scheme has trained 222 social care workers to carry out HFSCs. Over eight months these trained workers have completed 167 HFSCs in the homes of vulnerable people. Since its introduction there have been no fire related incidents in this group of people.

- 88 The FRA is working with partners to improve coastal safety. Senior officers of the FRA have made a positive contribution towards achieving improved outcomes through partnership working with other agencies. The FRA plans, trains and works closely with the Coastguard and Royal Navy on maritime risks. The FRA is one of 15 coastal authorities who lead on and provide Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) support around the coast. The FRA has also agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding with Cornwall Search and Rescue Team (CSRT) which provides for partnership working on the provision of a specialist rope rescue capability and support for joint training using fire station premises. Effective co-operation between partner organisations improves efficiency and effectiveness.
- 89 The co-responder scheme with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust has been successfully embedded in the service. The scheme is supported by a service level agreement and joint funding. This partnership means that some people in Helston, Mullion and St Keverne have experienced a speedier and consequently a more effective response to a medical emergency.
- 90 The FRA has worked successfully with MIGWAG to promote fire safety among migrant workers. For example these workers sometimes bring electrical appliances with two-pin plugs with them. Some of these appliance plugs have been forced into standard three-pin sockets and fires have occurred. To solve this problem the FRA, working in partnership with other agencies, have provided the migrant workers with adaptor plugs.
- 91 The FRA does not currently have a clear picture of the community's perception of its work. This is reflected in the outcomes identified for the Equality and Diversity Working Practices Project and in comments from consultants employed by the FRA. Some service documents also conclude that equality and diversity are areas that need more attention. This means that the FRA may not be delivering the quality of services that the community expect.
- 92 The FRA has a detailed customer care policy. This policy provides staff with guidance on how to interact with councillors and the public in person, by phone, fax, email and letter and it covers complaints, comments and compliments. The implementation of the policy should help staff interact well with customers and should increase customer satisfaction levels.



# Appendix 1 – Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 The assessment for Cornwall County Council Fire and Rescue Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 15 to 19 September 2008.

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# The Audit Commission

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