

CPA Report

July 2005



Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority

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Introduction

- 1 In the Fire and Rescue National Framework for 2005/06¹, published in December 2004, the Government outlines how performance management in the fire and rescue service will be assessed by the Audit Commission. This report arises from a CPA ('Comprehensive Performance Assessment') review carried out as outlined in chapter 8 of the National Framework. It gives the results from our review of the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority. We used the CPA methodology published by the Audit Commission.
- 2 Our on-site work took place in early 2005. We received a self-assessment from the Fire Authority and a set of judgements from the external auditor. Both were taken fully into account in the course of our work. A summary of the auditor's judgement is given as Appendix 1 to this report. The judgements we have made are based on the evidence we saw before and during our visit, and on any further information supplied to us by the Fire Authority during our discussions with them in the course of preparing this report.
- 3 CPA is an assessment, at the corporate level, of how well the Authority is being run. It does not give an opinion on how well the fire service responds to emergency incidents. The official version of this report is also available on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire.
- 4 Under section 1(2)(a) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, a non-metropolitan county council is the fire and rescue authority for that county. Warwickshire County Council is one of 15 county councils in England that is covered by this section. This means that the Warwickshire County Council will also be the Warwickshire Fire Authority for that county.
- 5 The focus of this CPA review is specifically on how Warwickshire County Council discharges its functions as a Fire and Rescue Authority, as opposed to its other functions as a County Council. It is for this reason that references in this report to 'Authority' mean the County Council insofar as it is a Fire and Rescue Authority. References to the 'County Council' mean Warwickshire County Council generally, including all its other functions.

¹ The Government is responsible for setting clear priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire and Rescue National Framework does this by making clear the Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service; what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and what support Government will provide.

Executive summary

- 6 Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority is rated by this assessment as **good**. CPA is an assessment, at the corporate level, of how well the Authority is being run. It does not give an opinion on how well the fire service responds to emergency incidents.
- 7 Strong leadership exists within Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority (the 'Fire Authority') through the effectiveness of senior managers and members. It is an ambitious service which is self-aware and has a clear understanding of its future direction. Its vision is clear and owned by members and senior officers. There is a sense of ownership amongst staff for driving forward service improvements and a strong sense of pride within the organisation with staff clearly demonstrating a 'can do' approach. These positives are attributable to a leadership style which supports innovation and appropriate levels of delegation, with resultant successes.
- 8 The Fire Authority understands the skills and people it needs to achieve its vision. It has been through a recent organisational restructure, including the appointment of area risk managers, a number of new senior officers and the establishment of new posts including the business development manager and youth development manager. Such changes have impacted positively on aligning the organisation to achieve key objectives and most importantly a significant improvement in a large number of key incident response performance indicators. This follows targeted and locally-focused projects and increased partnership working.
- 9 The Fire Authority has achieved success in a number of operational performance indicators and youth community safety initiatives. Performance improvement is commendable in respect of reducing malicious calls and accidental dwelling fires as it is already performing within the upper quartile. Capacity has increased through extensive partnership working and such arrangements are well-managed with some formal arrangements in place to monitor the success and achievements of partnership working.
- 10 The Fire Authority has a comprehensive framework of plans to support a balanced approach to service delivery. Delivering community safety is a strength together with its contribution to the wider social agenda. Systematic engagement with key stakeholders in defining future service delivery is however, not evident. The Fire Authority also relies heavily on goodwill from a number of staff, in particular the retained, in delivering community safety work. Without fully assessing the risk of sustaining this level of goodwill it may not be able to maintain the current levels of community safety activity.
- 11 The Fire Authority's performance management framework is effective. A framework is in place which incorporates effective review and monitoring arrangements, and the impact of this framework and the link to delivering improvements is established.
- 12 The Fire Authority has strong corporate governance and financial management arrangements. However, the lack of a medium-term financial plan, integration of financial and service planning cycles and fully costed action plans and strategies is a weakness. The Fire Authority is at risk of not delivering key objectives without properly identifying any financial funding gap, future efficiency gains and reinvestment opportunities.

Summary of assessment scores

A – What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

| Theme | Score |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Leadership and priorities | 3 |
| A balanced strategy | 3 |

B – How has the Fire Authority set about delivering its priorities?

| Theme | Score |
|---|-------|
| Capacity: Governance and management | 4 |
| Capacity: Resources and value for money | 2 |
| Capacity: People | 3 |
| Performance management | 3 |

C – What has the Fire Authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

| Theme | Score |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Achievement of objectives | 3 |
| Achievement of Improvement | 3 |
| Future plans | 3 |
| Overall CPA score | Good |

Scoring key

- 4 Well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 3 Consistently above minimum requirements, performing well.
- 2 At only minimum requirements, adequate performance.
- 1 Below minimum requirements, inadequate performance.

In coming to an overall CPA score, we applied the rules table set out below.

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Excellent | No scores of 2 or 1. At least four scores of 4. |
| Good | No scores of 1. At least seven scores of 3 or more. |
| Fair | No more than two scores of 1. At least five scores of 3 or more. |
| Weak | No more than three scores of 1. At least six scores of 2 or more. |
| Poor | Any other combination of scores. |

Report

Context

The locality

- 13 The Fire Authority serves a population in Warwickshire of approximately 505,860 in an area covering 197,753 hectares. As a major tourist area, the County experiences a considerable population inflow at peak periods of the year. The County has seen a higher rate of population growth, between 1971 and 2001, of 10.5 per cent, compared to a national average of 6 per cent.
- 14 Demographically the population is changing with an increase in the proportion of residents aged 50 and over, a decrease in the proportion of young people and a rise in recent years in the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) residents. The largest ethnic minority group in Warwickshire is the Indian community, accounting for 2.4 per cent of the population, with a higher concentration in Warwick, Nuneaton and Bedworth and Rugby.
- 15 A significant number of major transport links run through the County, including over 274 kilometres of motorway, a mainline railway network and the County is under the flight paths of both Coventry and Birmingham airports, both of which are set to expand over the coming years.
- 16 Warwickshire is a fairly affluent county with an unemployment level below the national average (approximately 2 per cent compared to the national average of 3.7 per cent). Over the years, average income levels have increased in all districts of Warwickshire, although there are pockets of deprivation within some districts.

The Fire Authority

- 17 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) operates as the Fire Authority, with Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service being one of its service departments. The vision of the County Council is '*To make Warwickshire the best place to live and work*'. The Fire Authority's mission is to '*make Warwickshire the safest place to live and work*'. The service has recently re-structured and is now organised into five risk areas, which conform to the District/Borough Council boundaries of North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Rugby, Warwick and Stratford on Avon.
- 18 WCC is composed of 62 elected members with a minority labour administration operating. The current political representation is 27 Labour, 20 Conservative, 13 Liberal Democrats. The Fire Authority set a revenue budget of £21.10 million for 2004/05 (2003/04: £19.71 million) and a capital budget of £0.10 million for 2004/05 (2003/04: £0.118 million).
- 19 Led by the County fire officer (CFO), the fire service consists of 295 whole-time uniformed personnel, 189 uniformed personnel on the retained duty system and 88 non-uniformed support staff. Frontline services are delivered through 19 fire stations (4 whole-time stations, 3 day-crewing stations, 12 retained stations) and the fire service has 26 fire appliances, 1 hydraulic platform and a number of other specialist appliances.
- 20 In the year 2003/04, the Fire Authority attended a total of 10,454 incidents; 1,605 primary fires, 2,408 secondary fires, 2,706 special service calls, 74 chimney fires and 3,661 false alarms.

What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

Leadership and priorities

- 21 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above minimum requirements, performing well.
- 22 The Fire Authority has a clear vision. It shares WCC's corporate vision for the future being *'the safest place to live and work'*. The vision is translated into seven strategic goals, which link to WCC's strategic plan and the Fire Authority's service plan. The strategic goals are in line with national objectives relating to incident and casualty reduction, protection of the environment and effective use of resources. The message is conspicuous in the Fire Authority's buildings, including headquarters and fire stations.
- 23 The Fire Authority is an ambitious service that demonstrates effective organisational and political leadership. The community role of the service is taken seriously at a local level in stations with extensive examples of 'good will' community educational safety work. There is a strong sense of ownership and belonging to the organisation by all members of staff with a 'can do' approach.
- 24 Members and senior officers have constructive working relationships and are clearly 'signed up' to the vision and strategic goals. Members are actively involved in scrutiny through the crime and safety overview and scrutiny committee (CSOSC) and policy issues, which focus on key service areas. Members were consulted in determining the vision and resulting service plan objectives, however, staff engagement in this regard was limited. This has resulted in awareness of the Fire Authority's overall aims at all levels of the organisation but a risk of limited ownership amongst staff.
- 25 Internal communications have improved recently. Following recent management changes two-way communications have improved and although not formally structured are generally effective. There is a clear commitment to effective communication, the Fire Authority is investor in people (IIP) accredited, has conducted staff surveys to gauge staff opinion on a range of issues and communicates through a variety of medium, including electronic weekly information orders and manager run team briefings. The Fire Authority recognises that communications can be developed further and is putting in place arrangements to implement the WCC's corporate communications strategy.
- 26 Main stakeholders were consulted when developing the Fire Authority's strategic goals and integrated risk management plan (IRMP). Facilitated focus groups, area committees and crime and disorder reduction partners (CDRPs) were consulted. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) were also consulted on the main policy areas, such as the IRMP.
- 27 The Authority does not effectively and systematically engage with all key stakeholders. When developing its objectives, the Fire Authority has not effectively engaged with all key stakeholders, including hard-to-reach groups. For example, limited numbers were involved in the focus groups and two-way feedback was limited. The Fire Authority is at risk of not capturing the needs and expectations of all partners and communities in shaping their priorities and objectives without robust and effective two-way consultation methods.

- 28 The Fire Authority's objectives are not clearly linked to local needs and community strategies. There are links between Warwickshire's 2005/08 strategic plan and the Fire Authority's objectives in respect of reducing the number of small fires, vehicle fires and fires within homes of the elderly and the Fire Authority is actively engaged in local CDRPs. However, the status and effectiveness of the local strategic partnerships (LSPs) within Warwickshire is developing and linkages of objectives and targets between key plans and strategies is unclear. WCC has commissioned a review to improve the effectiveness of LSPs, the recommendations from which will be implemented in 2005/06. This should allow the Fire Authority to benefit from fuller engagement and improve the links into strategies formed from wider community contacts at service delivery level.

A balanced strategy

- 29 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 30 There is a comprehensive framework of plans to support a balanced approach to service delivery. The IRMP was developed in line with national guidance and the year 2 action plan is clearly integrated with the Fire Authority's key strategies, such as the service plan and WCC's corporate community safety strategy. There are clear and challenging targets set in the service plan to drive improvements in both prevention and response, which are in line with national targets. As a result, the key strategies of the Fire Authority have clear goals to drive improvements to prevention, protection and response. However, not all action plans to deliver key priorities are set out in a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) format. The absence of fully costed plans with stated measurable targets and timescales puts the Fire Authority at risk of not achieving its objectives.
- 31 The Fire Authority has a strong and sustained emphasis on community safety. This is reflected in key strategies, such as the service plan, WCC's corporate objectives and the community safety policy statement. There is a clear and firm commitment at all levels in the organisation, including members. Whole-time, retained and non-uniformed staff are involved in a range of community safety activities. These include home fire safety checks, smoke alarm fitting and a comprehensive schools education programme. Some of this is undertaken on a goodwill basis, which demonstrates a high level of commitment. The Fire Authority however, has yet to gain full capacity from its resources by revising working arrangements and paying the retained to undertake community safety (CS) work, currently only a relatively low number are involved. Without a risk assessment of the sustainability of goodwill the Fire Authority is at risk of not delivering CS work.
- 32 There are resources available for CS. These are reflected in current budgets for example there is £400,000 for IRMP, much of which is used to support risk reduction strategies including CFS. The Fire Authority also uses external funding and resources through partnership working to support CFS activities. This is being reinforced by the appointment of a business manager, part of whose role is to proactively seek sponsorship.
- 33 The Fire Authority is effectively contributing to the wider social agenda. The Warwickshire Young Firefighters' Association is an excellent example of how the service is addressing wider social issues. This is extensive and involves over 250 young people across the County. The Fire Authority is also involved with road safety initiatives and other schemes, such as 'Fire Break' which tackles anti-social behaviour. As a result, the Fire Authority is working closely with young children to promote awareness of fire and road safety.

- 34 The Fire Authority has effective policies and practices to support environmental protection. It is an active member of WCC's environmental management group and using that experience and knowledge to make service improvements. For example, it has set up an in-house team to deliver a local improvement programme based on the County Council policies. The 'Car Clear' is a practical example of a proactive partnership approach to the problem of abandoned vehicles which was initiated by the Fire Authority. The Fire Authority has reported a reduction in the deliberate vehicle fires following the introduction of this scheme.
- 35 The Fire Authority is developing an understanding of the needs of its wider community. Although it has strategies in place to engage with the wider community and care agencies, such as social services and Age Concern, are being used effectively to access these groups, engagement and the impact of effective engagement is not fully evolved. IRMP mapping systems and demographic data are being used effectively to target community safety work at the 'at risk' groups and the hard-to-reach. Extra resources are being committed to home safety checks and smoke alarm fitting in areas which are deprived and also in remoter rural areas. This has resulted in an increase in smoke alarm ownership and a reduction in accidental fires in some targeted areas.
- 36 There is a framework of policies and guidance to support staff in delivering a service to a diverse community; however, this guidance has yet to be reinforced with an effective training programme. The fire service has an effective working relationship with WCC's education department, with cross-cutting projects and associated targets being included in educations' key strategies. The Fire Authority supplies key documents in Braille and on tape and facilities exist to translate documents into other languages, although there have been limited requests. The Fire Authority, therefore, ensures the publication of key documents in other languages is available to deliver CFS messages to its diverse community.
- 37 The Fire Authority generally responds proactively to new challenges. For example, it is addressing all the key imperatives related to the objectives in the national framework and has carried out a formal mapping exercise. Some of the objectives and targets are reflected in current plans and the full range of objectives is being included in plans currently being drafted. An impact assessment has been undertaken for the regulatory reform order and the cost of extra training has been factored into budgets. It is also responding well to new dimensions and is planning and preparing for the commissioning of new equipment.

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

Capacity: governance and management

- 38 This theme is scored by this assessment as '4' – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 39 Management arrangements are effective. Senior management and middle management demonstrate effective decision-making management attributes through appropriate delegation, empowerment and commitment. Formalised processes exist to review the success of management in achieving their objectives through the Performance Review Group (PRG). This group, chaired by the CFO, meets regularly to monitor achievement of key performance indicators, service plan objectives and area risk manager targets. As a result, management are held accountable for achieving objectives and remedial action will be instigated when appropriate.
- 40 The Fire Authority has a management structure which supports the delivery of its service objectives and good governance. Its management structure has recently changed, introducing area risk managers to enhance district and partnership working and deliver CS initiatives. A new DCFO has been appointed and all senior staff have up-to-date job descriptions, providing clarity as to their areas of responsibility and the structure clearly sets out reporting accountabilities. No formal arrangements are in place for succession planning, although the fire service has followed its' temporary promotions policy enabling staff to act up and as a result, retain relevant information and knowledge within the Fire Authority.
- 41 Decision-making arrangements are effective. Formalised arrangements exist through the policy board, which includes all senior officers and decisions are formally minuted. There is clarity between the purpose of policy board, being strategic decision-making and the PRG for reviewing operational performance.
- 42 Member involvement is strong. Effective arrangements exist through the operation of the CSOSC which has resulted in effective challenge and scrutiny by members on operational issues. Members are involved in defining policies, such as the IRMP and the CSOSC receives reports on the Fire Authority's operational performance, financial position and service plan priorities. As a result, decision-making is transparent, appropriately recorded and members have ownership of decisions to defining the future direction of the fire service.
- 43 The Fire Authority has good and clearly defined corporate governance arrangements. These comply with the CIPFA/SOLACE code of corporate governance, with the County Council's constitution clearly defining officer and member codes of conduct, role descriptions for members and the decision-making framework for the Fire Authority. Member and officer roles and responsibilities are clear. Recent corporate governance training has been provided to senior officers within the Fire Authority to raise their awareness. Such arrangements support leadership, providing clarity to staff and members on conduct issues and decision-making processes.
- 44 Processes are well-established to monitor compliance with corporate governance. The standards committee performs an active role including monitoring registers of interest, internal and external audit reports and approving standard financial instruments. The fire service clearly gains from the County's defined and established corporate governance and monitoring arrangements as all these arrangements are corporately-led.

- 45 Corporate and service support arrangements are effective. All key services provided corporately, including treasurers, legal and information and communications technology (ICT) are managed through service level agreements (SLAs). Such arrangements support effective two-way communication to discuss support requirements, provide clarity of services available and monitor client satisfaction. A fire specific ICT strategy guides future service provision as it details future projects and their estimated cost. As a result, service support is proactively supporting frontline service delivery.
- 46 Regional management board (RMB) engagement is extensive. The Fire Authority is actively engaged in all strategic project areas within the RMB structure and leads on a number of projects and the chair of the CSOSC has recently been appointed chair of the RMB. RMB issues are discussed at policy board and CSOSC providing links between regional and local decision-making.

Capacity: resources and value for money

- 47 This theme is scored by this assessment as '2' – performing at only minimum requirements, adequate performance.
- 48 Medium-term financial planning is underdeveloped. The Fire Authority does not have a medium-term financial strategy and budgets span only one year. Although limited medium-term financial planning is performed through the Council's corporate arrangements, including medium-term financial projections for fire pension liabilities and a three-year guaranteed budget for the fire service this information is not utilised extensively within the Fire Authority. There are examples of efficiency savings, but there is a limited strategic approach to identifying efficiency savings. The Fire Authority does realise efficiency savings during its budget setting process, however, a clear and systematic approach to identifying and quantifying efficiency savings across a broad range of functions does not exist. It is at risk of not giving due consideration to medium-term financial issues, including efficiency gains and reinvestment opportunities without clearly defined medium-term financial planning arrangements.
- 49 Financial and service planning cycles are not aligned. Budgets are set and agreed before service planning is finalised. A number of plans, including the departmental area plans and IRMP, are not fully costed. The Fire Authority is at risk of not quantifying any funding gap between budget and financial resources required to deliver service objectives and as a result, there is a risk of non-delivery of the IRMP.
- 50 A structured and systematic approach to achieving value for money is developing. The Fire Authority carries out periodic best value reviews and there is evidence to confirm recommendations have been implemented to seek efficiencies. Benchmarking is undertaken, for example, through the family group but there are few clear policies or processes for systematically considering value for money in all areas. The Fire Authority has not proactively sought alternative approaches for delivering internal services, although some aspects of corporate services have been subject to best value reviews and service level agreements are in place. As a service of the County Council, the Fire Authority has less scope to outsource services but may be missing opportunities to secure greater efficiencies in working practices.

- 51 Good financial management arrangements are in place. The Fire Authority's budget setting arrangements are adequate, with senior officers and members involved, and processes ensure growth bids are prioritised and link to service objectives. Budget monitoring arrangements are effective and structured. The financial services manager produces regular reports for CSOSC and policy board with evidence that both members and senior officers challenge and monitor the financial position. The Fire Authority's asset portfolio is managed well. Formalised processes exist, for example through the production of asset management plans, to direct the amount and location of maintenance budgets to property and fleet assets.
- 52 A strategic approach to income generation and external funding exists. The Fire Authority has developed a business development and income generation strategy. The new business development officer is implementing this strategy, which sets out a number of income generation and external funding streams to be explored. The Fire Authority has clearly established ways to increase financial capacity.
- 53 The Fire Authority demonstrates effective operational procurement practices, but strategically procurement is not defined. Two council-wide procurement groups exist to consider strategic and operational procurement issues, both with fire service representation, there are up-to-date contract standing orders and a fire service order on procurement defining good practice principles. The Fire Authority has changed procurement practices to reap efficiencies, for example training and protective clothing contracts, however, the extent of efficiency gains could not be quantified. A corporate procurement strategy exists, however, this does not provide clarity on the strategic direction of fire procurement. Integration with the National Framework, regional procurement initiatives and targeted efficiency gains are omitted. As a result, consideration and evaluation of future procurement practices is not formally managed or evaluated.
- 54 Partnership working is extensive. The Fire Authority has delivered a significant number of youth and community safety projects through partnership arrangements. The area risk managers, who work within district boundaries, further strengthen partnership arrangements. The Fire Authority is developing a strategic approach to partnership working. The business development officer is in the process of defining a register of partnerships and identifying partners the Fire Authority could engage with. This review was at its early stages during our visit, however, the outcome should support a strategic approach and confirm all partnership working aligns to the achievement of its objectives.
- 55 Partnership working is managed well for some partnerships. Formal arrangements are in place through protocols or agreements which define key objectives, areas of accountability and review arrangements. Formal arrangements are in place to monitor the achievement of a number of partnerships, such as periodic reports evaluating achievements and shortfalls. However, such formalised arrangements are not in place for all partnership working. Without processes to evaluate benefits secured from all partnership working the Fire Authority will be unable to make informed decisions as to their future viability.

Capacity: people

- 56 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 57 The Fire Authority understands the skills and people it needs to achieve its vision. The management team has created a structure of skilled and experienced staff. There have been a number of new appointments, including a business development manager, a youth development worker and five area risk managers. These appointments link to the delivery of the IRMP, as their respective job descriptions include developing strategic partnership working and sustaining improvements within CS partnerships and youth projects. Job descriptions for new posts also contain a definition of skills and capabilities required to perform the role. As a result, experienced and qualified staff are in post to progress change and deliver service objectives.
- 58 IPDS is being effectively implemented. Whole-time firefighters below crew manager are working to National Occupational Standards, undertaking workplace assessments and recording these on a computer-based system. Retained staff record their competencies and there are clear plans for non-operational staff to be introduced to the system, in accordance with the Fire Authority's IPDS implementation plan. Staff feel valued through the Fire Authority's commitment to career development which is key to the achievement of both personal and service objectives.
- 59 Training is a strength of the Fire Authority. The Fire Authority's training department proactively supports the delivery of training for all staff. A suite of training packages have been developed to allow the retained workforce to undertake a more flexible approach to training, for example, CD's that can be viewed at the station or taken home. Training courses where both retained and whole-time staff train together are also delivered and alternative approaches to the Fire Service College courses are evaluated by the training department. Member training is effective, with specific training provided on scrutiny and diversity. Fire service specific training is however, limited for members, although members are briefed through the CSOSC on relevant issues, including IRMP and the National Framework. Officers and members are effectively supported in acquiring skills to better perform their respective roles.
- 60 The Fire Authority demonstrates effective human resource (HR) practices. There is a successful flexible working policy in operation and evidence that staff, both operational and non-operational, are using the policy to address their needs. The Fire Authority has a clearly documented policy for the management of sickness absence. The sickness absence performance indicator for both operational and non-operational staff is in the lower quartile as a result of the implementation of this policy. Between 2002/03 and 2003/04, the proportion of working days/shifts lost to sickness absence by whole-time uniformed staff reduced by 25 per cent.
- 61 Human resources (HR) development is supported by policies and strategies. There are specific service policies and procedures in place, including sickness absence and dignity at work policies which are readily available to all staff and are operating effectively. Formal procedures are in place to consider future recruitment needs through the Fire Authority's recruitment, establishment and grading committee. The Fire Authority is actively involved with regional working on HR issues and is in the process of developing common policies and procedures. Although a WCC HR strategy exists, there is no fire service HR strategy which links the corporate strategy, IPDS implementation plan and regional policies. The lack of a service specific HR strategy may result in duplication or conflicting procedures.

- 62 The Fire Authority demonstrates a strong focus on diversity and equality. A diversity and equality officer leads in this area and has contributed to the success of achieving a number of key targets. The Fire Authority is the fourth highest employer of BME personnel when compared to all fire authorities (4.6 per cent against a local community of 4.4 per cent) with the trend increasing over the last four years. It has the highest proportion of top female earners when compared to all fire authorities in 2003/04. The Fire Authority has not reached their target for women firefighters; the present level is 5 per cent against a challenging target of 15 percent. Incentive schemes, such as childcare vouchers, are being evaluated and considered to proactively improve statistics. Diversity training has been provided to senior and middle managers; however, there is a lack of awareness amongst some operational staff of diversity issues. Failure to fully address the training of all staff, may lead to inequality and unfairness in the workplace.
- 63 The Fire Authority has not made any significant changes to work patterns or shifts. A review of working patterns is part of the IRMP action plan for 2005/06 and minimal work has begun in this area, including reviewing service orders, work routine documents and a study evaluating the benefits adopting the Cheshire 5 Watch system, which is planned to be completed by the summer of 2005. Until this work is progressed and evaluated full capacity and efficiencies will not be realised and the Fire Authority is at risk of not making best use of flexibilities in working arrangements.

Performance management

- 64 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 65 The Fire Authority has a sound performance management framework. Its service plan links to key WCC objectives and clearly sets out the mission statement and strategic goals and objectives of the Fire Authority. Departmental plans and the IRMP flow from the service plan with BVPIs and local indicators being used to measure performance.
- 66 Effective processes exist for performance monitoring. Performance is monitored by the performance review group (PRG) made up of senior managers and chaired by the CFO. The PRG meets six-weekly to monitor performance of PI's and key action plans including the service plan and the IRMP. The group examines all key indicators using a traffic light system and action is taken on any poorly performing areas. The group also includes a member of the WCC management team to act as a critical friend. There were clear examples of actions taken in response to weaknesses identified through this monitoring, such as improved sickness absence levels and reduced vehicle arson. Monitoring at this level ensures that any issues that develop will be addressed promptly.
- 67 Staff are held accountable for achieving performance targets. The Fire Authority's performance information department produces monthly graphs and charts to record and analyse performance. Area risk managers use the information to demonstrate at station level where performance is improving and progress against targets set. Area risk managers could demonstrate how activity was redirected when performance had deteriorated and they meet regularly as a group to discuss ideas and compare performance. Regular staff briefings are held to discuss performance and staff are encouraged to contribute to priorities and target setting. As a result, the Fire Authority understands how it is performing against key targets and staff have ownership for achieving targets.

- 68 Member involvement in performance monitoring is robust. Members are briefed periodically, including a six-monthly detailed performance report presented to CSOSC. Member challenge has led to some changes in policy, such as fitting sprinklers to all new schools and those affected by fire. Member scrutiny is essential to ensure that performance is challenged at every opportunity from all available sources.
- 69 Building blocks are in place to deliver effective risk management and a risk management culture is developing. The fire service uses WCC methodology, policies and practices, and has developed its own risk register. Responsibility for business risk has been allocated to the policy and planning officer who represents the fire service on the WCC corporate risk management group. The existing fire service risk management group, previously focusing on health and safety risk, will be re-launched during 2005/06 to recognise all risk areas and to formulate a risk management strategy. Although risk is identified during service planning and risk assessment in service plans is monitored by WCC, the departmental and area plans do not identify risk in a consistent and routine manner. As a result, risk management procedures and policies are in place but are not consistently applied across the service; therefore all business risks may not be identified and addressed.
- 70 The staff appraisal system is not yet fully effective. IIP status and clear systems and guidance in place, but staff appraisals do not clearly link to key aims and objectives and annual appraisals are not always undertaken. Staff demonstrated a general awareness of how their work contributed to departmental plans but they had no clear idea of how they contributed to corporate aims and objectives. This may result in an inappropriate focus on areas that are not key to the Authority and result in inefficiencies.

What has the Fire Authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

Achievement of objectives

- 71 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 72 The Fire Authority is achieving a top quartile level of performance in some key incident response indicators. Statistics show performance within the upper quartile, for 2003/04 when compared to other fire authorities and its family group, for half of the key incident indicators (accidental dwelling fires, injuries and malicious calls). The Fire Authority also demonstrates above average performance in relation to the number of calls to fire and number of primary fires. However, it is performing poorly in respect of the number of false alarms caused by fire detection apparatus per 1,000 non-domestic properties.
- 73 Consideration of the Fire Authority's achievements is presented against its seven strategic goals.

To reduce emergency calls, preventable deaths, casualties and property losses

- 74 As summarised above, the Fire Authority demonstrates above average performance in five out of the six key incident response indicators reported on within this review.

To provide and maintain an efficient and effective risk-based response to emergency incidents, which meets statutory duties and the needs of the communities of Warwickshire

- 75 The reorganisation of the service delivery structure has resulted in effective partnership working. The Fire Authority has recently reorganised its service delivery structure to area-based risk teams coterminous with local authority boundaries. As a result, capacity has increased and allowed a local focus for staff and service users.
- 76 The implementation of a risk-based response to emergency incidents is developing. The Fire Authority has made the decision to utilise existing (amended) indicators as revised local standards of fire cover until the outcome of its FSEC work, which is proceeding to schedule. It has used its IRMP process, combining incident and demographic data, to determine levels of risk within the Authority area.

To provide a fire and rescue service that is committed to providing value for money and the principles of continuous improvement

- 77 The Fire Authority formally takes stock of their achievements during the year. An annual report is published summarising the achievement of objectives. The report for 2004/05 (containing unaudited BVPI figures), highlighted that of the 22 performance indicators, which the Fire Authority reports on regularly, it forecasts achieving or exceeding their target in 16 (73 per cent), forecast to miss target by 10 per cent or less in 2 (9 per cent) and forecast to miss target by more than 10 per cent in 4 (18 per cent).
- 78 The Fire Authority has sought to deliver value for money (VFM). For example, reducing training costs through alternative providers and access to a neighbouring service's hydrocarbon detector dog at no cost. However, the achievement of value for money is not demonstrated systematically. The Authority cannot easily or transparently demonstrate efficiency gains or comparator data on which decisions are based.

To secure and promote the highest level of health, safety and welfare for all Service personnel

79 The Fire Authority has achieved good achievement in respect of sickness absence management. It reports the ninth lowest statistic (for 2003/04) for all fire authorities (and second lowest when compared to its family group) for the proportion of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence for whole-time uniformed staff (BV12 (i): 8.30). It demonstrates good performance in terms of a reduction in accidents; supported by the appointment of safety professionals, a robust accident investigation regime and the provision of additional targeted training (NEBOSH) for key staff within the service.

To develop and encourage our staff to reach their full potential

80 The Fire Authority supports staff in their career development. The 'Capacity: people' section of the report confirms the Fire Authority's commitment to staff training and the implementation of IPDS. Key staff are working to National Occupational Standards, undertaking workplace assessments and keep a record of their competencies. The Fire Authority has also gained re-accreditation under the IIP scheme.

To ensure that the Service embraces diversity and operates within a culture of equality

81 The Fire Authority is committed to achieving their diversity targets. The Capacity: people section of the report confirms the Fire Authority's commitment to diversity issues, demonstrating high performance for the number of BME staff employed and presently 5 per cent of operational staff representing women firefighters.

82 An equality and diversity action plan contained within the Fire Authority's 2004/05 service plan sets out three specific diversity objectives, all of which have been achieved. These include performing impact assessments, commencing a self-assessment for achieving race equality standard three and a feasibility study of carrying out an equal opportunities survey on a regional basis.

83 To protect the environment from the adverse impact of pollution, arising from the activities of the Service in both emergency operations and normal business

84 The Fire Authority has contributed positively to the wider social agenda, environmental protection and new dimensions. The balanced strategy section of the report confirms its key successes, such as raising the awareness of fire and road safety for young children and the Car Clear scheme has reduced the number of abandoned vehicles and deliberate vehicle fires.

Achievement of improvement

85 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.

86 The Fire Authority has achieved improved performance in half of its key incident response performance indicators. In respect of the six indicators commented on within this review the Fire Authority has seen improvement for the following three indicators, over the two-year period between 2002/03 and 2003/04; number of primary fires (8 per cent reduction), calls to accidental dwelling fires (8 per cent reduction) and number of malicious calls (58 per cent reduction). This is particularly strong performance given for two of these indicators (malicious calls and accidental dwelling fires) the Fire Authority is already performing within the upper quartile.

- 87 Trend data for the same period confirms deterioration in two performance indicators; total number of calls to fires and injuries from accidental dwelling fires, both deteriorating by more than 10 per cent. The number of calls to automated fire alarms (AFAs) has remained constant.
- 88 The Fire Authority understands what is not improving. It continues to utilise the EFQM Excellence Model as a means of providing a checklist and benchmark against which certain aspects of its performance can be shown to be improving. Targeting AFAs is clearly an area for improvement. This is being addressed in a number of ways. The Fire Authority has drafted an AFA mobilising policy that is due to be implemented shortly, implemented call challenge procedures and are instigating further data analysis to drive improvements.
- 89 The Fire Authority has reduced the incidence of arson. The appointment of an arson reduction officer and implementation of Car Clear has resulted in positive improvements. A regular progress report is produced for the scheme and statistics report a reduction of approximately 14 per cent of the number of deliberative vehicle fires per month, since the introduction of the scheme.
- 90 The new area-based structure and introduction of area risk managers has demonstrated (unaudited) performance gains across the entire range of incident response indicators. Problematic areas within the County have been targeted to drive improvement. When comparing nine-month data (April to December) for 2003/04 all six key incident response PIs have improved. The most significant being a reduction in the total number of calls to fire (30 per cent) and injuries from accidental fires (38 per cent). Other targeted projects have been evaluated to assess the benefits, such as a fire alarm installation campaign at Camphill resulted in a 30 per cent reduction in accidental fires in the area in 2003/04.
- 91 The Fire Authority makes good use of its position within the WCC structure to provide a cohesive and sustainable approach to the widest possible community safety agenda. This continues to demonstrate successful outcomes, such as expansions to youth engagement work. This now includes a comprehensive schools programme – at Key Stage 1, 2 and 3, the Firebreak scheme, the Safety Awareness Fire Education (SAFE) scheme and Young Firefighters Association. All schemes demonstrate a commitment to improving the safety and life chances for the people in Warwickshire. There are clear benefits to the community in respect of communicating the wider role of the fire service.
- 92 The range of public consultation within the Authority is a strength. A variety of media is used, including surveys, panels and a mystery shopper scheme. This has provided both members and officers with an appreciation of the service users perception of the Fire Authority which, being below 60 per cent, does not meet the service's own expectations. There is evidence that the Fire Authority has adapted its plans to improve its public satisfaction rating, principally through the adoption of a new marketing strategy.

Future plans

- 93 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 94 The Fire Authority has a robust framework of future plans and strategies. These include the service plan, the IRMP and the CFS strategy. The service plan is the main driver for improvement in the short-term. It contains clear targets related to prevention, protection and response and local performance indicators are included to gauge success in all elements of the service. It is consistent with the IRMP, for example it includes the current objectives of the action plan. It also is clearly linked to and supports the Council's corporate aims related to community safety and to its community safety policy. This framework drives continuing improvement in the services that it provides to the community.
- 95 The Fire Authority is effectively addressing underachievement and is organising its capacity to match its future ambitions. For example, it has moved to area-based service delivery and the service plan reflects the need to better understand and engage with community groups. The PRG is an effective mechanism to link the impact of effective performance monitoring with resultant improved performance. The Fire Authority has also appointed a business development officer to meet the need to take a more strategic view of partnerships, to develop them and to gain further resources for community safety. These objectives are included in future plans.
- 96 Short and medium-term planning is firmly established but longer-term planning is a weakness. Key plans such as the service plan, CFS strategy and IRMP range from one to three years, but planning for the achievement of the Fire Authority's vision beyond this timescale is limited.
- 97 There are adequate mechanisms in place to ensure that future plans are underpinned by effective research. These are extensive and include IRMP consultation and reference to socio-economic data, involvement with the development of the community strategy, local contact with communities via the area managers and their involvement with key local partnerships and engagement with the RMB.
- 98 There are some effective systems to ensure that the Fire Authority keeps its future plans up-to-date and relevant. There are review periods built into all the key strategies and the PRG is a mechanism to help ensure that emerging issues and pressures and areas of weakness are included in future plans.
- 99 The Fire Authority is clearly a learning organisation. It has a developing awareness of organisational strengths and weaknesses, and uses a diverse range of mechanisms to gain this understanding, for example it regularly uses the 'mystery shopper' approach. It also learns through success and failure. It has extended the successful youth firefighting scheme and plans to use technicians to fit smoke alarms in less accessible areas, where it has failed to meet its objectives.
- 100 The Fire Authority is open to internal and external challenge. Outcomes of such challenge are used to highlight strengths and weaknesses and make improvements. There are a wide range of examples, including the use of the EFQM Business Excellence Model and the pursuit of external accreditation for best practice such as IIP and Charter Mark. It has used best value to drive improvement, for example, in transport services rigorous cost comparisons were used to ensure services represented VFM. There are also mechanisms to promote the sharing of learning across the organisation, for example, the area risk teams.

- 101 The Fire Authority has adopted a proactive approach to innovation and best practice to achieve improvement in services. There are mechanisms to systematically pursue innovation, for example, a staff suggestion scheme and a youth development officer whose brief is to research new opportunities. There are also specific resources to support innovation such as the fund to implement staff ideas for projects that link to IRMP. There are many examples of the use of innovation to make improvements, such as the IPDS recording system and targeted recruitment to meet diversity objectives. The Fire Authority has also released three officers to undertake CPA peer reviews. This is an effective way to compare organisational arrangements and gain best practice.
- 102 The Fire Authority is very aware of its areas for improvement. A significant number of areas for development identified within this review are addressed within service plan priorities, for example the implementation of medium-term financial planning and a review of shift patterns. However, a number of issues are excluded or it is less clear how the Fire Authority plans to address these. Such as the lack of a systematic approach to value for money and the strategic direction of procurement. Integration of CPA improvement planning with the Fire Authority's performance management framework is key to this alignment.

Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses

A – What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

| Theme | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|---|
| Leadership and priorities Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear vision. • Constructive working relationships between members and senior officers. • An ambitious service that demonstrates effective organisational and political leadership. • Consultation with main stakeholders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic engagement and consultation with all key stakeholders. • Objectives are not clearly linked to local needs and community strategies. |
| A balanced strategy Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive framework of plans to support a balanced approach to service delivery. • Strong and sustained emphasis on community safety. • Effective contribution to the wider social agenda. • Effective policies and practices to support environmental protection. • Responds proactively to new challenges. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More capacity at stations to be gained for CS work. • Diversity training for service delivery. • Risk assessment of sustainability of goodwill for CS delivery. |

B – How has the Fire Authority set about delivering its priorities?

| Theme | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|---|
| Capacity: Governance and management Score 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective management and decision-making arrangements. • A management structure which supports the delivery of its service objectives and good governance. • Strong member involvement. • Good and clearly defined corporate governance arrangements. • Extensive RMB engagement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalised succession planning arrangements. |
| Capacity: Resources and value for money Score 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good financial management arrangements. • A strategic approach to income generation and external funding. • Delivery of effective procurement practices. • Partnership working is extensive and well-managed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Medium-term financial plan. • Financial and service planning cycles are not aligned. • Limited structured or systematic approach to achieving value for money – but examples. • No defined strategic direction for procurement. |

| Theme | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Capacity: People Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the skills and people needed to achieve vision. IPDS effectively implemented. Effective Human Resources (HR) practices. Strong focus to diversity and equality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No fire service HR strategy. No significant changes to work patterns or shifts. |
| Performance management Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance management framework in place. Performance monitoring is effective and driving improvement. Staff accountability for performance targets. Member involvement in performance monitoring. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistent application of effective risk management processes – but policies and processes in place. Staff appraisal system is not fully effective. |

C – What has the Fire Authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?

| Theme | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|--|--|
| Achievement of objectives Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Above average performance in five out of the six key incident response indicators reported on within this review. Area risk teams delivering local focus. Formally assesses achievements and areas for improvement. Good sickness absence management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performing poorly in respect of the number of false alarms caused by fire detection apparatus. |
| Achievement of improvement Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved performance in half of its key incident response performance indicators. Improved performance for two PIs already in the upper quartile. Introduction of area risk managers has demonstrated (unaudited) performance gains. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deterioration in performance for total number of calls to fires and injuries from accidental dwelling fires. |
| Future plans Score 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robust framework of future plans. Organising capacity to match future challenges. Open to challenge – IIP Charter Mark. Learning organisation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer-term planning. |

Scoring key

- 4 Well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 3 Consistently above minimum requirements, performing well.
- 2 At only minimum requirements, adequate performance.
- 1 Below minimum requirements, inadequate performance.

Appendix 1 – Appointed auditor assessment

103 Appointed auditors are asked to score five areas, which relate to the statutory code of audit practice. When scoring each area a range of issues are taken into account. These issues and the score that has been given in each area are set out in the table below.

| Area for auditor judgement | Grade | Issues included in this area |
|---|-------|--|
| Performance management | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and cascading objectives, standards and targets. • Action plans. • Resource allocation linked to targets and plans. • Performance monitoring. |
| Financial standing | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting a balanced budget. • Setting a capital programme. • Financial monitoring and reporting. • Meeting financial targets. • Financial reserves. |
| Systems of internal financial control | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of financial systems. • An adequate internal audit function is maintained. • Risk identification and management. |
| Standards of financial conduct and the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical framework. • Governance arrangements. • Treasury management. • Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. |
| Financial statements | 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness. • Quality. • Supporting records. |
| Legality of significant financial transactions | 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities. • Consideration of legality of significant financial transactions. • New legislation. |

Scoring and calibration

- 4 Good.
- 3 Adequate.
- 2 Adequate overall, but some weaknesses that need to be addressed.
- 1 Inadequate.

Appendix 2 – Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 104 This Comprehensive Performance Assessment was carried out under the Local Government Act 1999 and the Fire and Rescue Act 2004. The Fire and rescue Act 2004 extends the Commissions powers under sections 10 to 13 of the Local Government Act to inspection of a fire and rescue authority's compliance with its duty to 'have regard to' the Fire and Rescue National Framework prepared by the Secretary of State.
- 105 The main elements of the assessment were:
- ◆ a self-assessment completed by the Authority;
 - ◆ accredited peer challenge to inform the Authority's self-assessment;
 - ◆ a corporate assessment of the Authority's overall effectiveness in supporting services to deliver improvements; assessed with the aid of the following diagnostic tools:
 - ◆ Community Fire Safety (CFS);
 - ◆ Equality and Diversity (E&D);
 - ◆ Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS);
 - ◆ Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP);
 - ◆ partnership working;
 - ◆ appointed auditor assessments of performance on each of the main elements of the code of audit practice; and
 - ◆ audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments.
- 106 The assessment for Warwickshire Fire Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 18 April 2005 to 29 April 2005.
- 107 This report has been discussed with the Authority, 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 Authority.