

CPA Report

July 2005



Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment

**West Midlands 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 West Midlands 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.

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

- 4 West Midlands 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.
- 5 West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (the 'Fire Authority') has embraced the challenge of the modernisation agenda and innovation in developing its organisational structure and service delivery. The revised organisational structure, based around local authority areas, has been identified by the Fire Authority as being important to develop better internal communication, performance management and partnership working. Through strong and effective leadership, the Fire Authority has the capacity to address this amongst the challenges it has set for the forthcoming year, and continue to take the service forward.
- 6 The Fire Authority has a clear and concise vision '*Making West Midlands safer*' and is clearly committed to achieving this through a balanced strategy of '*preventing, protecting and responding*'. Through use of data from a range of sources, partners' information, the Fire Authority proposed and introduced an innovative strategic reserve of fifteen appliances, a flexible resource available for use for community safety work and training, and emergency response should it be required.
- 7 The Fire Authority delivers services to predominantly urban areas, within which there are relatively high levels of deprivation, and the challenges that are associated with this. Through working closely with local communities, which is supported by the station commanders being responsible for developing local partnerships to address local risks, innovative preventative initiatives are being delivered, which are making a noticeable difference to those communities. The Fire Authority supports these activities through authority-wide initiatives and allocation of resources. Despite the demographic profile of its communities, the Fire Authority is, and continues to perform well in its service delivery, and has sustained improvement in a number of key indicators over the past three years.
- 8 The Fire Authority has made slow progress in implementing some parts of the equality and diversity agenda. Within the population of the West Midlands, and also Fire Authority staff, there are diverse groups, and the Fire Authority is not yet working effectively and consistently all the time with these groups. The Fire Authority recognises this can be developed, and has sought assistance from experts to assist them in training staff to deliver their services to all groups within local communities, and with its own staff, and has allocated additional resources to address this agenda, for example, additional dedicated staff to deliver training.
- 9 Partnership working is embraced throughout the Fire Authority, and there are excellent examples of where this approach has been beneficial for residents in the West Midlands. The Fire Authority is not yet co-ordinating its partnership working through a consistent strategy, which is reducing potential for identifying and replicating where good practice is clearly evident. The Fire Authority is linking its work on partnerships as a key aspect of developing its overall performance management framework to drive further improvement in all aspects of service delivery.

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	3
Capacity: People	2
Performance management	2

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	4
Future plans	4
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

- 10 The Fire Authority covers over 92,000 hectares, comprising predominantly urban areas, but with semi-rural and rural locations. The main city is Birmingham with a population of 1 million people, but also includes major cities of Coventry and Wolverhampton. The Fire Authority delivers services to a population over 2.5 million people.
- 11 Of the population, 80 per cent are classed as white British, 13 per cent are Asian, with the remainder being Black, Chinese, or other. The largest minority ethnic groups are Indian, Pakistani and Black Caribbean.
- 12 Within the Fire Authority area, there are four universities, increasing the population of the city by approximately 58,000 during parts of the year.
- 13 The indices of multiple deprivation (2000) reflect concentrations of areas of high deprivation, especially within the urban centres, including parts of Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Coventry, which has a consequential impact upon service delivery.
- 14 The overall unemployment rate is 6.6 per cent which is higher than the national average of 4.4 per cent, reflecting a higher proportion of at risk groups within the service area. There remains a range of manufacturing industries, with appropriate support services, although on a reduced scale than historically. There is an increasing range of high technology, commercial and financial institutions within the area.
- 15 The Fire Authority area includes a busy major road network, including the M6, M6 Toll, M5 and M42. The Fire Authority area covers Birmingham International Airport, and Coventry Airport is on the border with Warwickshire.

The Fire Authority

- 16 West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority is a metropolitan authority formed in 1974. The service area covers 7 constituent local authorities, being the metropolitan borough councils (MBCs) of Sandwell, the designated lead authority, Solihull, Walsall and Dudley, and city councils (CCs) of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. Birmingham CC is the largest local authority in the United Kingdom, in terms of its budget and the number of people it employs. The Fire Authority comprises of 27 elected members, of which the current political profile is 12 Labour, 13 Conservative and 2 Liberal Democrats. The chair of the Fire Authority is not a member of the majority group.
- 17 The Fire Authority's revenue budget in 2004/05 is £107 million (2003/04: £101 million), with a supporting capital budget of £4.2 million (2003/04: £3.9 million).
- 18 The Fire Authority employs 1,932 operational firefighters. Of these, 12 are retained firefighters. There are 65 members of staff employed in the control room, and 417 full-time equivalent members of support staff, based throughout the Fire Authority area. There are 67 uniformed senior officers.
- 19 There are 41 stations located in the area. Of these, 40 are whole-time stations, with a single retained station. There is a fleet of 72 appliances, including an urban search and rescue (USAR) unit, 3 incident response units, and a range of specialist appliances deployed using demountable units.

- 20 The current management structure of the Fire Authority, established in 2001, consists of 40 station commander allocated to each of the whole-time stations, with one having additional responsibility for the single retained station. This structure is very flat and was implemented to shorten and improve lines of communication within the Fire Authority. This structure has been reviewed, and in September 2005, a borough-based structure will be implemented. This structure will align groups of stations to local authority geographical areas, and borough commanders will be accountable and responsible for these groups of stations.
- 21 The Fire Authority is part of the West Midlands regional management board (RMB). It works with Warwickshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, Shropshire and Wrekin, and Hereford and Worcester fire authorities. The RMB has implemented a system of equal representation rather than proportional representation through a joint committee.
- 22 The Fire Authority responded to nearly 66,000 incidents in 2003/04. It attended nearly 33,000 fires. Of these, there were nearly 22,000 primary fires and over 11,000 secondary fires. Over 8,000 other emergency incidents were attended, including those trapped in equipment and flooding incidents. Road traffic accidents account for an increasing proportion of incidents that the Fire Authority responds to, with attendance at 2,570 incidents in 2003/04.
- 23 The Fire Authority received nearly 25,000 false alarm calls in 2003/04, of which 12,000 were due to automatic fire alarm systems, 4,000 due to malicious intent and 9,000 through good intent.

What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

Leadership and priorities

- 24 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 25 The Fire Authority's vision '*Making the West Midlands Safer*', supported by the mission statement of '*We will provide a quality service to reduce risk by preventing, protecting and responding*' is clear, consistent and well-understood by members, staff and partners. The vision and mission are consistently referred to in strategic documents, including the best value performance plan (BVPP) and business plan, reflecting commitment to the vision. Through having a clear and consistent vision, the Fire Authority can deliver its services to effectively contribute to, and achieve, this vision.
- 26 Strategic planning is well-established in the Fire Authority, and supported by effective and clear prioritisation of objectives. By undertaking an annual ten-year environmental scan, the Fire Authority identifies short, medium and long-term objectives. Fifteen high-level corporate aims have been identified, and are supported by specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) project plans which are well-managed. Through this approach, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to successfully achieve its objectives and contribute to the long-term vision, and achievement of National Framework targets.
- 27 In developing its vision and plans, the Fire Authority is engaging extensively with its partners. In developing its key strategic plans, the Fire Authority consulted with a wide range of local stakeholders, including businesses, local authorities and other emergency services. Through this process, amendments to key strategies were made, for example, pre-determined attendance to automatic fire alarms in hospitals. The Fire Authority, through engaging with its partners, is enabling other agencies an opportunity to influence their strategic agenda.
- 28 The Fire Authority is influencing the strategic agenda of partners through visible commitment of directors and members to not only attend but positively contribute to developing the agenda, and raising the profile of the Fire Authority's vision with those partners. For example, partners are contributing to the Fire Authority's vision through shared targets in Birmingham City Council's local public sector agreement (LPSA). The Director of Human Resources chairs the Environment Group for Coventry City Council's local strategic partnership (LSP). Through taking into account, and contributing to the agenda of partners, the Fire Authority is well-placed to successfully achieve its own vision.
- 29 Communication with staff is not working effectively all of the time. The Fire Authority recognises the importance of communicating with its staff, and has addressed it through developing and introducing flexible ways of communicating, bound within its communications policy and supported by its communications officer. The intranet is comprehensive, available to all staff, and is supported by focus groups, personal letters and quarterly publication of 'Firepower'. However, the Fire Authority's commitment to sharing extensive information with staff has resulted in some information 'overload', with some staff feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information given. More fundamentally, the Fire Authority is addressing these issues around communication through its proposed management restructure, which will introduce district commanders responsible for groups of stations, in line with local authority boundaries. Through recognising that internal communication is not working effectively, the Fire Authority is well-placed to develop alternative and more effective ways of communicating with staff.

- 30 The current management structure does not promote effective two-way dialogue within the Fire Authority. There are direct lines of communication between station commanders and directors, enabling information to be disseminated from directors to staff easily, for example, staff clearly recognised the overall vision of the Fire Authority. However, due to the flat nature of this structure, sharing information in the other direction is less effective. This is also reflected in sharing information between different parts of the Fire Authority, which can hinder sharing good practice. The Fire Authority has recognised the importance of sharing information within the Fire Authority, and is addressing them through introducing borough commanders.
- 31 The Fire Authority is not communicating effectively with its all of its staff representative bodies. The Fire Authority meets with groups regularly, and also on an ad-hoc basis, although the joint consultative panel is not working effectively, and some staff perceive consultation as being ineffective. Effective communication with representative bodies is critical for the Fire Authority to be able to successfully deliver its ambitious programme of changes in the future.

A balanced strategy

- 32 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 33 The Fire Authority has a longstanding commitment to community safety and preventative activities. There is clear demonstration of this commitment through its community prevention strategy, which has a strong focus on provision of services to all groups in its communities. The vision of the Fire Authority was evident when it built Handsworth Community Fire Station, the first of its type in Europe. Through strategic commitment to delivering preventative activities, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to successfully deliver its vision.
- 34 The Fire Authority supports its prevention activities through clear allocation of resources. A dedicated community protection department has been established, with specialist functions, including education and youth work. In addition to director and staff time, 10 per cent of financial resources are directly allocated to community safety activities. The Fire Authority has been evolutionary in establishing its strategic reserve of 15 appliances, which has enabled resources to be used more flexibly, and increased the capacity to undertake community safety work. The Fire Authority is well-placed to deliver and develop even further its scope of community safety work.
- 35 The Fire Authority has been successful in obtaining additional funds to deliver community safety initiatives. Through securing over £250,000 from the arson control forum (ACF), a fire officer has been seconded with a police officer into the arson task force (ATF). This funding has been supported by successful bids to Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) and insurance companies to develop the range of initiatives which are being delivered, and secure long-term sustainability of delivery. The Fire Authority is in a strong position to sustain delivery of such initiatives and continue the progress already made.

- 36 The Fire Authority is delivering a broad range of authority-wide initiatives, aimed at the wider social agenda, and clearly focused upon high-risk groups within communities. The education programme covers all Key Stage 2 classes in its 1,600 schools annually and involves comprehensive messages around fire safety, arson and road safety. Additional resources are targeted for Key Stages 1 and 3 in identified high-risk areas, and classes for children with special educational needs. The Fire Authority also delivers a well-established annual schools quiz, using local football clubs and personalities to raise its profile. The community education facilities at Handsworth Community Fire Station include the *Red Hot Education Station*, including a fire gallery to view the actual effects of fire and arson related incidents. Young Firefighters Associations are established at over 25 per cent of stations, with further programmes being set up in 2005. A programme of home risk assessments (HFRAs) is being delivered by all stations throughout the Fire Authority area. Through delivering these initiatives, the Fire Authority is demonstrating commitment to working with communities across the Fire Authority area.
- 37 Delivery of some authority-wide programmes is not consistently focused. The programme of HFRAs was introduced in June 2004, and is being delivered by staff throughout the Fire Authority. This programme is a key part of the Fire Authority's preventative activities, and is aimed at targeting vulnerable groups within communities. Clear targets have not been included in station plans to support delivery of this programme, and therefore, delivery by stations is inconsistent, and there has been some focus upon targeting easier and more low-risk properties in the first stages, which has frustrated some firefighters. Though in early stages of delivery, the Fire Authority has not demonstrated it is well-placed to sustain and develop this programme in the future.
- 38 The Fire Authority is using data effectively in focusing delivery of its community safety initiatives. Through close working with local authorities and other emergency services, the Fire Authority has access to a wide range of demographic data, which it is using effectively to supplement the extensive data which is produced internally. Through using data effectively, the Fire Authority is able to deliver services using its resources effectively to achieve beneficial outcomes for local communities.
- 39 The Fire Authority contributes positively to the environmental agenda. Effective authority-wide initiatives have been delivered, for example, its Local Agenda 21 strategy, and *Operation Cubit*, focusing on removal of abandoned vehicles, which has been supported by protocols for vehicle removal with six local authorities. The Fire Authority also positively contributes to specific areas, for example, through the environmental action plan for Sutton. The Fire Authority's approach reflects its commitment to contributing to improving, and making safer, communities for its residents.
- 40 There is an inconsistent and unstructured approach to communicating with diverse groups within its communities. There are some excellent examples of successfully working with minority groups, for example, a partnership with *Asiana*, assisting Asian women to deliver HFRAs in houses where access can be difficult, and working with the Sikh community to deliver fire safety material. However, such good practice is not effectively shared across the Fire Authority, resulting in variations in service delivery. The Fire Authority recognises the benefits of sharing good practice, and a perceived benefit of the organisational restructure is creating more effective fora for sharing good practice across the Fire Authority.

- 41 The Fire Authority is raising awareness of cultural education, but this is in the early stages. There is uncertainty amongst staff about access to language support. A language register, outlining sources of assistance should alternative languages be required, is maintained by the Fire Authority but is outdated. The Fire Authority has not appointed bi-lingual advisers to assist service delivery to diverse groups within communities. All staff have received training around child and vulnerable adult policies, but awareness amongst some staff of these issues remains underdeveloped. The Fire Authority is not well-placed to deliver consistent services to all groups within its communities.
- 42 The Fire Authority has set, and achieved, challenging proposals through its integrated risk management plan (IRMP). Proposals for establishing a strategic reserve of 15 appliances for use for community safety work, and revised attendance standards were outlined, and all proposals have been implemented. The Fire Authority's commitment to challenging its activities and being flexible in how determining resources are deployed, to address the modernisation agenda, places it in a strong position to achieve its vision.

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

Capacity: governance and management

- 43 This theme is scored by this assessment as '4' – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 44 The Fire Authority has well-established and transparent corporate governance arrangements which exceed good practice. The Fire Authority has been open to reviewing and amending its governance structures, for example, it has established an executive committee to support the full Fire Authority. Members are committed to making the Fire Authority a non-political decision-making forum, as demonstrated through the chair not being a member of the majority party. A standards committee is well-established, and is chaired by an independent member. As a result members are in a good position to be able to contribute effectively to decision-making processes.
- 45 The Fire Authority is committed to involving members in policy and decision-making processes, and developing effective working relations between members and directors. The policy planning forum allows members to contribute to policy formulation, enabling effective engagement between members and directors. Roles of directors and terms of reference for members are reviewed and affirmed annually, including those of lead members, for example, performance management. Through clear governance arrangements, and effective relations between members and directors, the Fire Authority is well-placed to develop robustly debated policies and decisions.
- 46 There is commitment by senior management to developing and improving service delivery. Directors bring considerable experience to their roles, including expertise from environments beyond the fire service. Directors are involved in regional and national projects, including developing IPDS and IRMP. Through utilising and building this experience, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to continue to improve its service delivery in the future.
- 47 The Fire Authority is proactively contributing to its regional management board (RMB). A joint committee has been established with equal representation reflecting the Fire Authority's commitment that decisions should be reached through consensus rather than the natural majority that would have been present under a proportional representation model. The Fire Authority is project managing or acting as the senior responsible owner of over 50 per cent of regional projects. The clerk and treasurer to the Fire Authority also act in these roles for the RMB. Through clear commitment to working with its RMB, the Fire Authority is well-placed to continue to contribute to the regional agenda, in addition to its own vision.
- 48 Management structures are reviewed regularly and revised to address the vision and mission of the Fire Authority. Through reviewing the current structure, the Fire Authority has identified where it could be further developed, for example, establishing a role for borough managers to further develop the performance management framework, and also promote effective channels of communication within the Fire Authority. The openness to learn from the current structure has informed the revised structure, which will be implemented in September 2005.

- 49 There are well-established support services within the Fire Authority. Service level agreements (SLA) for internal audit, risk management, insurance and legal advice through the lead authority, Sandwell, are reviewed annually, and have built in performance measures. Other SLAs are reviewed regularly, and finance and estates services have been brought in-house after a best value review (BVR). The Fire Authority also procures specialist external advice, for example, around employment conditions when finance staff became employees of the Fire Authority after the service was brought in-house.
- 50 The Fire Authority has invested in provision of information and communication technology (ICT). Systems to support allocation of resources, for example, the *Training Readiness and Community Safety* (TRACS) system to allow staff to schedule resources for community safety and training activities. There is an extensive intranet site containing reference material and current news and updates. There are improving facilities available on stations, and extensive CD-based training packages which staff can use throughout the Fire Authority. Facilities are also available for the public, including online application for recruitment and also a free number to arrange an HFRA. Through investment, the Fire Authority is well-placed to support service delivery through its ICT facilities.

Capacity: resources and value for money

- 51 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 52 Financial management is well-established and operating effectively. There is a medium-term financial strategy (MTFS), which is supported by the annual ten-year environmental scanning process, and by detailed short-term financial plans for departments and functions. There is considerable expertise and experience amongst staff within the finance department supporting these arrangements. Members are involved in budget setting and monitoring through district council leaders' meetings and regular reports through the Fire Authority and the policy planning forum. Through adopting a well-managed approach to its financial resources, the Fire Authority is well-placed to be able to support delivery of its core services.
- 53 The Fire Authority is managing its financial resources for the future effectively. It has built up a general reserve of over 3 per cent of net expenditure, and has prudent earmarked reserves for specific budgetary pressures, including pensions and insurance. Through identifying potential long-term pressures on service delivery, and addressing these, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to address future service delivery.
- 54 The Fire Authority has proactively devolved budgets to its managers. Station commanders are responsible and accountable for significant parts of station budgets. They have been supported by appropriate training to manage these budgets, through the devolved budget steering group, and each has a named finance liaison officer for support. Station commanders receive detailed monthly reports, and summary reports are prepared for corporate board and members. Through devolving budgets, the Fire Authority is empowering its managers to take decisions around service delivery to address identified local risks.
- 55 The Fire Authority has not yet fully aligned financial and service planning cycles. There are unclear links between the corporate risk register and associated financial implications. The Fire Authority recognises there are further links to be made between planning processes, and is looking to merge its MTFS and IRMP with its best value performance plan and business plan. Through acknowledging that further progress can be implemented, the Fire Authority is well-placed to align processes, and contribute positively to all aspects of service delivery.

- 56 The Fire Authority actively seeks and secures additional external funding. Bids are submitted with partners, for example, through the arson task force, 'Dying to Drive' booklets with the ambulance service. The Fire Authority is proactive in seeking funding and sponsorship for specific one-off projects, for example, sponsorship for the fire investigation dog. Through being proactive in seeking additional funding, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to sustain its delivery of services.
- 57 The Fire Authority has adopted a proactive and innovative approach to procurement. Through managed contracts, whereby purchases can be made when required, for PPE and the *Fire Service Appliance Consortia*, the Fire Authority is demonstrating a flexible approach to obtaining goods and services. It is reviewing life costs of assets in addition to initial purchase cost in determining whether value for money can be achieved, and using e-procurement systems to procure goods and services. Through this approach, the fire service is demonstrating its commitment to achieving value for money through procurement.
- 58 The Fire Authority is still developing its approach to measuring and reporting efficiency savings. Quarterly reports are submitted to the corporate board, but these identify cashable savings, rather than all efficiency savings, as further national guidance is awaited. The Fire Authority is not yet well-placed to measure and identify both cashable and non-cashable efficiency savings, reducing its ability to demonstrate value for money.
- 59 The Fire Authority is proactively contributing to partnership working, and increasing its capacity to deliver its vision through these partnerships. Partners are enthusiastic about the contribution that the Fire Authority makes to partnerships. Involvement is evident at strategic level, for example, LSPs and community safety partnerships (CSPs), and also service delivery levels, including, training housing maintenance officers (HMOs) to deliver HFRAs and through district-based local delivery groups (LDGs). Delivery is supported by partnership officers, local authority liaison officers (LALOs) and station commanders. The Fire Authority continues to work in partnerships to effectively contribute to achieving its vision.
- 60 The overall approach to managing partnership working is underdeveloped. The Fire Authority is developing a corporate strategy, which will reflect corporate governance, clear links to performance management, evaluation and exit strategies, but is in the early stages of implementation. A partnership register is being prepared but has not yet been completed. Overall, there is a lack of central co-ordination of partnerships, which frustrates sharing good practice across the Fire Authority. There were examples where a number of staff had approached the same partner to develop initiatives, but in an un-coordinated manner with colleagues. Without a corporate and consistent partnership strategy, the Fire Authority is not well-placed to take full advantage of its partnership working.

Capacity: people

- 61 This theme is scored by this assessment as '2' – performing at only minimum requirements, adequate performance.
- 62 The Fire Authority has a human resource (HR) strategy and supporting plans, but resource planning is underdeveloped. Whilst considerable work has been undertaken on the IRMP, there is not a clear resource plan in place for future years, which inhibits proactive management of resources in light of modernisation and future retirements. The Fire Authority has not formalised its approach to assessing the skills and people it requires to fulfil its vision.

- 63 The Fire Authority is unclear about the skills and knowledge that exist within its workforce, as well as any limitations that may require support. A gap analysis of training needs is completed annually but the process is informal and not clearly linked to the new PDR and workplace assessment processes. Training is therefore not currently directly linked to need.
- 64 Progress with the integrated personal development system (IPDS) has been limited with key elements not yet in place such as a consistently applied personal development review (PDR) process and recording system. The Fire Authority is working towards a new regional personal development process, which is to be rolled out during 2005. The delayed implementation of rank to role has also hindered the effectiveness of IPDS. In the meantime, training may not yet be focused on those areas and those people who need it the most, which in turn may limit the Authority in achieving its objectives.
- 65 The Fire Authority is investing in leadership and development of its new borough and district commanders. The Fire Authority has purposefully appointed these managers prior to the change in duty system in September, and is providing development training in the interim period to ensure they have appropriate skills to act in their new roles. Through investing in the development of key managers, the Fire Authority is in a strong position to ensure it has the appropriate skills to deliver services and manage its people effectively.
- 66 The Fire Authority promotes flexibility through its policies, although further work is required to ensure parity of uniformed and non-uniformed staff in respect of part-time working arrangements. A generous career break policy is in place allowing breaks of between six months and five years. This has been actively taken up with around 25 staff currently on career break. Job-share and part-time working policies are also in place, and have been taken up by a range of staff, including those in the control room. Proposed changes in the IRMP will help promote flexible working amongst uniformed staff.
- 67 The Fire Authority has been proactive and innovative in reviewing its duty systems, to promote flexibility in its available resources. A composite system of 12 and 18 hour duty shifts is currently being negotiated with representative bodies, after being approved by the Fire Authority. Beds will be removed from stations to support this, a change that reflects its overall readiness to challenge traditional systems where deemed necessary. Through this approach, the Fire Authority has demonstrated it is willing to take difficult and challenging decisions to match its available resources to risks and needs of its communities.
- 68 The Fire Authority has made slow progress in addressing the diversity and equality agenda. Whilst training has recently been initiated for all staff, the Authority remains at level 1 of the local government standard and has yet to undertake a cultural audit and impact assessments of key policies and standards. Consequently the Fire Authority does not meet part of its statutory responsibility in this area. Progress has been hindered by high turnover of managers within the equality and diversity team, which has prevented the Fire Authority developing a consistent approach to increasing awareness and effecting cultural change. The team does not appear well-integrated with other functions in the organisation. The Fire Authority will not achieve its vision without raising the profile of equality and diversity consistently across the organisation and promoting fair and equal treatment both within its workforce and of local communities.

- 69 The Fire Authority is proactively targeting and assisting minority groups through its recruitment processes, although the workforce is not yet representative of the community it serves. Women and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups currently represent only 2 per cent and 6 per cent of uniformed staff respectively, although this proportion is increasing. However, the representation currently is poor relative to achievement by other services, and does not reflect demographics of local communities. Positive action initiatives are undertaken to attract applicants that represent local communities, for example awareness evenings at schools and colleges with high BME representation, female football clubs and specific ethnic groups such as the Sikh youth forum. Assistance is provided prior to the recruitment process to manage expectations and promote success. Recruitment tests have also been reviewed to promote fairness. Through such initiatives, the Fire Authority is well-placed to develop a workforce that reflects the makeup of its local community.

Performance management

- 70 This theme is scored by this assessment as '2' – performing at only minimum requirements, adequate performance.
- 71 There is strategic support by members and directors for effective risk management. The Fire Authority has set up a strategic risk management group, which is chaired by the Director of Performance and Planning. Key risks on the risk register were identified by members and directors, and are supported by SMART action plans to address those risk. The Fire Authority is well-placed to identify and manage future risks at a strategic level.
- 72 The approach to risk management is not well-established throughout the Fire Authority. Developing an awareness of risk management which is wider than health and safety and operationally-based risk is limited beyond directors and members. This is recognised by the Fire Authority as an area for further development, and a key part of the remit of new borough commanders will be to develop a culture of risk management within stations, for example, around entering into local partnerships.
- 73 Performance measurement is not yet driving performance management throughout the Fire Authority. Whilst there are station plans, which are developed to be consistent with district plans prepared through the *Directed Action Planning* (DAP) process to ensure alignment to the corporate aims, the station plans are inconsistent. Station commanders are unclear about how they are held to account for not only their own station plans, but also for overall contribution to the district plans. Additionally, there are unclear links between how an individual's role contributes to achievement of the overall vision. Without consistent and SMART station plans, holding managers to account for their own performance, and that of their staff, is undermined, and performance management is ineffective.
- 74 The Fire Authority extensively measures performance information, although this does fall short of performance management. In addition to best value performance indicators (BVPI), station commanders are encouraged to develop local performance indicators (LPI) to support delivery of station plans, for example, percentage of dwelling fires where a smoke alarm was fitted. Statistical analysis is undertaken by the Fire Authority's dedicated statistician. Information is reported through the intranet for all staff, and at Scrutiny Planning Days, attended by station commanders on a rotational basis, and chaired by the director of community protection, and quarterly to members, with more regular meetings with the lead member for performance management. However, these Scrutiny Planning Days are not working effectively to drive improved performance through sharing good practice and experiences.

- 75 There is a strong commitment to effective project management within the Fire Authority. Through the programme management group (PMG) the Fire Authority monitors progress against action plans for all projects. The Fire Authority has invested in project management training for its managers. Through this approach, the Fire Authority is managing key projects effectively.
- 76 The Fire Authority uses its access to extensive sources of data effectively. It has used *Blue 8* software to underpin its IRMP, is a member of a number of data warehouses, including Community Safety Monitoring System (COSMOS), and has data sharing protocols, including those with Coventry and Wolverhampton City Councils, and West Midlands Police Authority. The Fire Authority is also using benchmarking information well, for example, through the Fire Services Consultation Association (FSCA). By using data effectively, the Fire Authority is well-placed to make informed decisions to support its developing performance management framework.
- 77 The Fire Authority is in early stages of evaluating its community safety initiatives. The programme of HFRA's was established in 2004, and limited evaluation to date has been possible. There is much anecdotal evidence supporting impacts of its community safety initiatives, especially in relation to the Young Firefighters Association and The Princes' Trust schemes, and the Red Hot Education Station at Handsworth. This is also reflective in limited evaluation of performance of partnerships the Fire Authority is involved in. There has been limited qualitative and quantitative assessment to date, and the Fire Authority is developing a means of reviewing its activities in line with developing its overall performance management framework.

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

Achievement of objectives

- 78 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 79 The Fire Authority is achieving positive outcomes for local people within a background of high levels of social deprivation, particularly in urban centres. There are large numbers of anti-social behaviour and arson related fires. Performance against other fire authorities nationally and with a 'family group' of similar authorities reflects this local context.
- 80 The Fire Authority achieved performance within the top 50 per cent against national comparisons for the following indicators in 2003/04: deaths arising from accidental fires per 10,000 dwellings (BVPI 143i); injuries arising from accidental fires per 100,000 population (BVPI 143ii); and false alarms caused by automotive fire detection equipment per 1,000 non-domestic properties (BVPI 149).
- 81 The Fire Authority was within the top two performers within its family group for the following indicators in 2003/04: total number of calls to fires per 10,000 population (BVPI 142i); primary fires per 10,000 population (BVPI 142ii); deaths arising from accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 dwellings (BVPI 143i); and injuries arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population (BVPI 143ii).
- 82 The Fire Authority was amongst the worst 50 per cent of authorities nationally in terms of total number of calls to fires (BVPI 142i), primary fires per 10,000 population (BVPI 142ii), accidental fires in dwellings per 10,000 population (BVPI 142iii), and calls to malicious false alarms per 1,000 population (BVPI 146), reflecting the context within which the Fire Authority delivers services. Of these, the Fire Authority was in the worst 20 per cent nationally for accidental dwelling fires (BVPI 142iii) and calls to malicious false alarms (BVPI 146), reflecting poor comparative performance, including against those services with similar characteristics.
- 83 The Fire Authority has achieved a 72 per cent public satisfaction rating in its most recent Opinion Research Service (ORS) Survey, which is relatively high performance relative to other fire services.

Preventing

- 84 The Fire Authority continues to demonstrate its commitment in preventing fire and other incidents through a range of community safety initiatives, and these are making a real difference to people living within its communities. It uses a range of data from partners to target its activities, for example, data sharing protocols have been agreed with Coventry City Council and West Midlands Police Authority.
- 85 The Fire Authority has achieved considerable success in some of its partnerships. It has successfully achieved and exceeded the two targets it was responsible for, reducing accidental fires and fire related deaths and injuries in the home, under Birmingham City Council's local public service agreement (LPSA). As a consequence, it has achieved a share of performance reward grant of £4.6 million, part of which has been invested in establishing a joint Fire Reduction Team with the community safety partnership (CSP) in Birmingham.

- 86 The ATF is achieving successful outcomes. It was set up in partnership with West Midlands Police Authority two years ago. Through targeted initiatives, including the Red Hot Education Station, at Handsworth Community Fire Station and the 'Keep your business in business' project, and a separate arson education pack for Key Stage 2 pupils, it has already exceeded its target of reducing arson related fires by 10 per cent from a 2001/02 baseline position, by 200 per cent. The Fire Authority is well-placed to continue to develop and deliver initiatives to sustain this achievement.
- 87 The HFRA programme was launched in June 2004, later than many other services, but has achieved significant coverage in its first nine months of operation. Assessments are undertaken by all station-based crews, and over 12,000 have been undertaken since the launch. Further coverage of vulnerable groups has been achieved through partnership working with other agencies. Through a successful bid to Wolverhampton City Council, over £350,000 was secured to fit ten-year tamper proof alarms through external agents to residential council properties. To date, over 15,000 alarms have been fitted in these properties, representing 60 per cent of such properties in the area. The Fire Authority is successfully targeting these initiatives towards vulnerable groups within its communities.
- 88 The Fire Authority is successfully targeting initiatives at identified vulnerable groups within its communities. Since establishing its Juvenile Firesetters programme, over 250 referrals have been received, with a non-offending rate of 99 per cent for participants.

Protecting

- 89 The Fire Authority has successfully developed and introduced a risk-based inspection programme for legislative fire safety which has enabled a more flexible use of resources.

Responding

- 90 The Fire Authority has been proactive in seeking to use its responsive resources flexibly. In its IRMP, it proposed to establish a strategic reserve of 15 appliances, based upon extensive risk assessment data, which could be used for community safety and training purposes, but also respond to emergency incidents if required. The Fire Authority has successfully introduced this proposal, and is looking to develop this further through proposals under its IRMP action plan.
- 91 The Fire Authority has revised and published its attendance standard targets, with a first appliance attending in an average of five minutes, and a second within an average of seven minutes. These targets have been set taking into account firefighter safety in respect of appliance speed. The Fire Authority is performing well against these targets, and is continuing to monitor performance. The Fire Authority is maintaining strong performance in its intervention services.

Value for money

- 92 The Fire Authority continues to demonstrate value for money throughout its range of service delivery. Through year 1 IRMP actions, resources have been reallocated from responsive services and reinvested in preventative services. This reallocation includes £900,000 in relation to reduction of special appliance movements.

- 93 Through undertaking BVRs on human resources, the Fire Authority has achieved savings of £200,000 per year. Through reviewing all posts as they become vacant, with 33 fire safety posts earmarked becoming non-uniformed posts, saving over £6,000 per post. The Fire Authority has embraced its policy of re-employing some retired staff, creating overall savings as only salary costs have to be met, but maintain extensive experience of those staff.
- 94 The Fire Authority is achieving a cost per head of population of £37.50 in 2003/04, which is within the lowest 50 per cent nationally, and the third lowest within its family group, and reflects good performance taking into account the context within which the Fire Authority operates.

Achievement of improvement

- 95 This theme is scored by this assessment as '4' – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 96 The Fire Authority is demonstrating improvement in a broad range of service delivery areas. It has achieved sustained improvement, over the past three years, in the majority of key BVPIs, including: primary fires per 10,000 population (BVPI 142ii) by 14 per cent; accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 dwellings (BVPI 142iii) by 10 per cent; deaths arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population (BVPI 143i) by 16 per cent; injuries arising from accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population (BVPI 143ii) by 37 per cent; and number of malicious false alarms per 1,000 population (BVPI 146) by 22 per cent.
- 97 The only key area in which a slight deterioration has been noted is in relation to the number of false alarms caused by automatic detection equipment (BVPI 149). The Fire Authority has recognised this trend in performance, and is addressing it through increasing its call challenge procedures to reduce weight of response, and has seconded an officer to address this issue specifically.
- 98 The Fire Authority is proactively addressing aspects of performance where it has identified that it is underperforming, in order to achieve further improvement in the future. Through starting to undertake comprehensive training in equality and diversity awareness for its staff, the Fire Authority is confident that it can work more effectively with minority groups to further impact on the number of injuries and deaths from accidental fires.
- 99 The Fire Authority is able to demonstrate continued improvement against its targets and prior year performance in unaudited performance information for 2004/05.

Preventing

- 100 The ATF continues to demonstrate improved performance since it was established. Since 2001, arson related incidents have reduced by over 7,200 incidents from 25,565 incidents in 2001, to 18,293 incidents in 2004, an overall reduction of over 28 per cent. Within this overall achievement, arson vehicle fires and number of malicious false alarm calls attended have both been reduced by over 35 per cent.

- 101 The Fire Authority continues to develop the scope of the educational messages it is able to deliver. Education programmes are delivered to all pupils at Key Stage 2 within the 1,600 schools in the area. Additional education messages are delivered to pupils in identified areas of higher risk, and to pupils who have special educational needs. The Fire Authority is increasing the range of work it is undertaking with young people, many of whom are on the fringes of crime, for example, through Juvenile Firesetters, the Young Firefighters Association and the Princes' Trust schemes. Increasing numbers of staff are involved in these schemes as tutors and mentors, including 75 instructors for the Young Firefighters, drawn from different service departments within the Fire Authority.
- 102 The Fire Authority is delivering improvements which are recognised by local communities. Through its *Cubit* scheme, abandoned vehicles are removed, preventing arson related incidents on these vehicles, but improving the environment for local communities.
- 103 The Fire Authority is proactive in reflecting feedback it receives from communities. Under '*Compliments, Comments and Complaints*' (CCC) on the internet and intranet sites, feedback is recorded, reflecting differences that communities do recognise. Comments referring to visits by scouts to Brierley Hill Station, and acknowledgement for an HFRA undertaken at the home of a disabled resident are included, reflecting the Fire Authority's commitment to being open to comments raised by members of the public.

Protecting

- 104 The fire service has developed a number of LPs to measure performance in relation to fire safety. Unaudited performance data for 2004 for these LPs, for example, dwelling fires where a working smoke alarm was fitted, reflects improvement in performance during the year.

Responding

- 105 The Fire Authority has proactively addressed the health and safety of its staff, and has achieved improvements that are recognised by those staff. Unaudited data indicates that accidents have reduced from 900 in 2000 by 66 per cent to 337 accidents in 2004. The Fire Authority has introduced policies to promote safer driving through the '*drive to arrive*' initiative which is focused upon safety of both firefighters and wider public, and suggests that this level of performance can be maintained and developed in the future.

Future plans

- 106 This theme is scored by this assessment as '4' – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 107 The Fire Authority is open to reviewing its management structure and revising it to effectively address local, regional and national agenda. The agreed structure, aligning boroughs and district areas to local authority areas, will be implemented fully in September 2005. Borough commanders will be appointed, acting as performance managers co-ordinating activities of groups of stations, and providing clear lines of communication and accountability within the Fire Authority, and enhancing the overall performance management framework.
- 108 The restructure aims to deliver a number of benefits, whilst building upon the strong features of the current structure. Further development of communication across the Fire Authority, which is currently not working effectively in all cases, will assist sharing good practice throughout the Fire Authority. Through introducing this structure, the Fire Authority has recognised the importance of building upon, and developing, its previous experiences.

- 109 The Fire Authority has challenging and robust plans for its future development and improvement. The IRMP action plan outlines two focused proposals to improve flexibility of resources it has available. The innovative proposal focuses on reducing the number of fire appliances available from midnight to 8am from 62 to 49, and changing the shift system to support this resource allocation to a two twelve hour shift system, and is removing facilities for sleeping during shift. The proposals have associated efficiency savings of £1.6 million per annum. The Fire Authority is constantly challenging its existing status quo to ensure that it is deploying its resources effectively to provide services that meet needs of local communities.
- 110 The Fire Authority regularly reviews its strategies, plans and targets to ensure that they remain relevant in terms of its local, national and regional challenges. There is a well-established cycle of reviewing policies through the performance management group, and is supported through the annual ten-year scanning process. The standing order for partnership working has been revised to include clear reference to equality and diversity, and performance management of partnerships. The Fire Authority regularly uses the Local Government Information Bureau (LGIB) to inform it of developments in local government and European requirements. The Fire Authority is well-placed to ensure that its policies and strategies are relevant, and robust to meet its future challenges.
- 111 The Fire Authority recognises that the proposals it has agreed are challenging and realises the importance of effective communication within the Fire Authority to successfully deliver these changes. It is working with its representative bodies, and delivering comprehensive information to its staff outlining rationale and effects of these changes, including clear focus upon developing core values outlined in the National Framework. However, the Fire Authority does realise that communicating effectively with its staff is an area where work by directors, staff and representative bodies is still needed to enable effective change management.
- 112 The Fire Authority continues to invest in raising the profile of equality and diversity throughout the Fire Authority. External consultants have been engaged to review current training provision, and have developed comprehensive training and awareness information for all staff and members, which is imminently about to be delivered. The Fire Authority has recently appointed additional equality and diversity trainers to increase resources within the equalities section of the Fire Authority. The Fire Authority is in the process of employing advocates to improve communication in some minority groups within its communities. The Fire Authority demonstrated its commitment to the agenda when it hosted recent conference *All Backgrounds Welcome*, and is looking to develop this initiative further. Through raising awareness, the Fire Authority will be in a stronger position to work effectively within its communities, and promote further awareness for working with its own staff in delivering services consistently throughout its communities.
- 113 The Fire Authority is open to being challenged from both internal and external sources, and has embedded a culture of self-awareness throughout the Fire Authority. The Fire Authority demonstrated its ability to learn from challenge following its peer review, and has prepared a detailed action plan to address areas for development that were identified. This approach is consistent with learning from other challenges, including external and internal audit, and engagement of external advisers, for example, around diversity training.

- 114 The Fire Authority proactively seeks opportunities to learn from experiences of other fire and rescue services, and other organisations, and shares its own experiences. The Fire Authority has developed its programme of HFRA after consulting other services, including Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, and learning about developing and training members through a county council outside of the region. The Fire Authority has developed an e-learning programme for its HFRA programme, and has been approached by other services to adapt and implement this approach. Through working with other services, the Fire Authority is committed to implementing the Remote Intelligent Management Support and Training (RIMSAT) project. Openness to learning places the Fire Authority in a strong position to identify good practice, and adapt it for its own services.
- 115 The Fire Authority embraces innovation. It established the first community fire station in Europe in Handsworth, reflecting its long standing commitment to preventative activities. Despite being advised to develop its integrated risk management plan using Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) software, the Fire Authority felt that using Blue 8 software complemented the Fire Authority's existing risk management information systems. This approach was unique at the time, and since, other services have approached the Fire Authority to learn from its experience. Through working with Boras Fire Service, the Fire Authority is entering into a European partnership with Prague and Milan services to introduce revolutionary *Cobra* equipment. The openness of the Fire Authority to embrace innovation and change places it in a strong position to achieve its long-term vision and objectives.

Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses

A – What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Leadership and priorities</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vision is consistent and simple to remember, was developed with support of members and is easily recognised by staff and partners. • The vision is supported by clear mission statement and corporate aims. • Effective prioritisation of strategic plans to deliver vision, supported by SMART action plans. • Extensive strategic consultation with partners. • The Fire Authority is influencing the strategic agenda of partners. • Different ways of communicating staff have been introduced, for example, focus groups and 'Firepower' publication. • Regular meetings, and ad-hoc forum, for working with representative bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with staff is not working effectively all of the time. • Communication is not working effectively under the current management structure. • Joint Consultative panel is not working effectively.
<p>A balanced strategy</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-established commitment and history of delivering community safety initiatives. • Initiatives are supported through dedicated financial resources and personnel, and further reinforced through Strategic Reserve. • Initiatives developed and delivered across the Fire Authority area, including education and HFRAs. • There are proactive local initiatives to tackle identified risks within local communities, supported by station commanders. • Effective use of a wide range of data to focus service delivery. • Commitment to delivering initiatives that tackle the wider social agenda, including the environment. • The Fire Authority has set a challenging agenda in its IRMP, reflecting commitment to the modernisation agenda. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of focus for consistently delivering some community safety initiatives, for example, HFRAs. • Inconsistent and unstructured approach to communicating with all sections of communities, for example, around language differences.

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"> • Clear and transparent corporate governance arrangements, which exceed good practice. • Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of directors and members, resulting in an effective working relationship. • Senior managers have considerable experience and expertise to discharge their roles. • Proactive role and contribution to the regional management board. • Openness to reviewing management structure, using previous experience effectively. • Well-established support services through service level agreements, which are reviewed annually. • Good provision of ICT within the Fire Authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy of current management structures.
Capacity: Resources and value for money Score 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-established and effective financial management arrangements. • Prudent approach to financial standing has enabled improved resilience to meet future pressures. • Well-established system of devolution of budgets. • Proactive approach to obtaining additional external funding. • Innovative approach to procurement. • Proactive, strong and committed approach to partnership working recognised by partners, both at strategic and service delivery levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some further development of aligning financial and service planning cycles. • Developing approach to measuring and recording efficiency savings. • Absence of corporate partnership strategy to support partnership working.
Capacity: People Score 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant investment in middle manager training. • Changes to promote flexible working for all staff. • Proactive review of duty systems. • Some good examples of positive action initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource planning for personnel is underdeveloped. • Lack of progress in implementing IPDS. • Lack of clarity about the skills and knowledge that exist within staff. • Slow progress in addressing the equality and diversity agenda.
Performance management Score 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic support and commitment to corporate risk management. • Extensive measurement and monitoring of performance information. • Effective project management is present. • Data from wide range of sources used to inform decision-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of risk management is not embedded throughout the Fire Authority. • Performance measurement and monitoring is not yet driving performance management throughout the Fire Authority. • The Fire Authority is in the early stages of evaluating community safety initiatives and its partnership working.

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

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Achievement of objectives</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top 50 per cent nationally for key BVPIs, including deaths and injuries, and among top performer in family group for calls, primary fires, deaths, and injuries. • Achieved targets under Birmingham City Council LPSA, and achieved reward grant. • Strong achievement through Arson Task Force. • Success in achieving coverage through HFRA programme. • Publication and achievement of revised attendance standards. • Examples of value for money from all service delivery areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom 50 per cent nationally for some BVPIs, including total number of calls, accidental fires and calls to malicious false alarms.
<p>Achievement of improvement</p> <p>Score 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained improvement in key BVPIs, including deaths, injuries, accidental fires and false alarms. • Identification of areas where further improvement can be achieved, for example, additional training in equality and diversity to reduce numbers of accidental fires. • Arson Task Force continues to deliver high levels of achievement. • Communities recognise improvements, for example, through Cubit scheme and acknowledgements on the internet. • Improved health and safety record. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some deterioration in calls for automatic fire alarms.
<p>Future plans</p> <p>Score 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revision to current management structure to develop the performance management framework and improve internal communication, assisting in sharing good practice. • Focused and challenging proposals in IRMP action plan for reducing availability of appliances overnight, supported by a change in duty systems. • Regular reviews of strategies, plans and targets to ensure relevance in context of local, regional and national agenda. • Significant investment to further implement aspects of the equality and diversity agenda. • Open to being challenged, and reacting positively to outcomes of those challenges. • The Fire Authority is open to learning from experiences of other agencies and services. • The Fire Authority embraces innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication with staff is a high profile challenge for successful implementation of plans.

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

116 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
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	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical framework. • Governance arrangements. • Treasury management. • Prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.
Financial statements	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness. • Quality. • Supporting records.
Legality of significant financial transactions	3	<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

- 117 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.
- 118 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.
- 119 The assessment for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 21 April to 27 April 2005.
- 120 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.