

CPA Report

July 2005



Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment

**Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue
Authority**

Contents

Introduction	3
Executive summary	4
Summary of assessment scores	6
Report	7
Context	7
The locality	7
The Fire Authority	7
What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?	9
Leadership and priorities	9
A balanced strategy	10
What is the capacity of the Fire Authority to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	12
Capacity: governance and management	12
Capacity: resources and value for money	13
Capacity: people	14
Performance management	15
What has the Fire Authority achieved and, in the light of that, what does it plan to do next?	17
Achievement of objectives	17
Achievement of improvement	18
Future plans	20
Summary of theme scores and strengths/weaknesses	22
Appendix 1 – Appointed auditor assessment	26
Appendix 2 – Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment	27

Audit Commission

Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone 020 7828 1212 Fax 020 7976 6187

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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 Hereford and Worcester 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 Hereford and Worcester 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 Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (the 'Fire Authority') is achievement-focused and has made significant improvements through its early involvement in local public service agreements (LSPA) where pump priming money was received to fund prevention work. Targets were set to reduce accidental dwelling fires and injuries from accidental dwelling fires, these became key objectives of the Authority. The Authority has exceeded these targets reducing accidental dwelling fires by more than 35 per cent between 1999 and 2004.
- 6 A strong performance management culture that flows through all levels of the organisation has ensured that the organisation remains focused on targets and the organisation has developed a sound approach to risk management.
- 7 It has developed key strengths through appointing experienced and committed specialists in their own field. For instance, experts in education and equality and diversity have had a marked impact on the organisation. Good examples of innovative work in these areas are apparent.
- 8 The Authority shows a sound approach to value for money with a structure for obtaining efficiency savings and robust tendering practices. Assets and procurement are strategically managed.
- 9 The Authority has faced difficult circumstances, such as being capped in its first year of precepting. However, the organisation has learned through this experience. A stronger link between financial and service planning has emerged with a more effective relationship between members and senior management. The ability to refocus and respond quickly to change is also evident.
- 10 This limit to resources has created pressures in support services through a lack of administration support and has caused delays to investment in the Authority's information communication technology (ICT) system. This is recognised by the Authority and is addressed in its strategic objectives. Similarly, human resources (HR) has not been strong and various issues surrounding its people strategy and organisational development are now being addressed.
- 11 The Authority has maintained a traditional hierarchical approach despite modernising in other areas. There is a gap between managers and staff. This contributed to industrial relations problems during the dispute and further pressures were put on this relationship when the potential for staff reductions were announced. However, members and officers have worked closely with representative bodies since that time to improve the situation.
- 12 The Authority has developed self-awareness and a more open culture over the last few months. A series of workshops were held involving a cross-section of staff to identify how the organisation could improve. This resulted in new key strategic objectives and a more cohesive approach to linking the vision with service delivery. The message regarding the success of this approach needs to be more widely communicated across the Authority, along with an effective two-way approach.

- 13 Innovation and success is found within individual partnerships. However, further capacity could be gained by ensuring that good practices are spread throughout the organisation. The systematic evaluation of community safety activities would help this process, so would involvement in partnerships at a more strategic level.
- 14 Whilst it has increased its actual budget by 24 per cent from 2003/04 (revised final) to 2004/05, capacity and funding issues may still affect achievability of key strategic objectives.
- 15 The Authority makes a strong contribution to the West Midlands regional management board (RMB) through equality and diversity, health and safety, the education of community safety and the introduction of new dimensions.
- 16 In summary, the Authority is well-placed to improve in the future. A strong achievement culture, effective management, strategies and plans provide a strong foundation from which to move forward.

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	3
Capacity: Resources and value for money	3
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	4
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

- 17 Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority is located in central England, stretching from the metropolitan borders of the West Midlands to the rural borders of Wales. The geographical area amounts to some 390,000 hectares and has a total population of around 730,000. It covers two counties, Worcestershire in the east with a population of 549,300 and Herefordshire to the west with 176,900.
- 18 Both counties are largely rural, however, Worcestershire's population mainly live in the towns of Worcester, Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Evesham, Kidderminster, Malvern and Redditch. The east of the county has the M5 and M42 motorways running through it leading to risks from road traffic incidents, whilst the south has the Malvern Hills. This is an area of outstanding beauty where emergency calls for rope rescue and potential extensive grass and heath fires pose risks. Another major type of risk encountered is flooding. Four major rivers run through the two counties and recent history has shown the important role the fire and rescue service has played assisting members of the public who are trapped in their homes following severe flooding.
- 19 Herefordshire is the second most sparsely populated county in England, with a significant elderly population. The majority of the county has poor infrastructure in the way of transport. It has few large employers and is dependent upon agriculture and manufacturing.
- 20 Both counties are predominantly rural with a wide cross-section of commerce and industry, agricultural, heritage and residential housing. There are no large industrial areas and no major housing or property developments are planned for the near future. Although there are no significant areas of deprivation, some communities have more needs than others such as parts of Redditch and Worcester and the vulnerable people that reside in rural areas.

The Fire Authority

- 21 Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority is a combined Fire Authority constituted under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Its vision is, 'to make Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer from fire and other hazards and to improve community well-being'.
- 22 The Fire Authority comprises 25 elected members, 19 from Worcestershire and 6 from Herefordshire. Worcestershire comprises six district councils and all 19 members are up for election in May. The chair rotates on a bi-annual basis between Herefordshire and Worcestershire. There is no overall political control. There are 11 conservatives, 5 labour, 4 liberal democrats and 5 independent members.
- 23 The revenue budget for 2003/04 was £22.1 million with a capital spend of almost £0.5 million. The first self-precepting budget set by the Authority for 2004/05 was £26.8 million; however, this resulted in a notional council tax band D rise of 29.4 per cent. This rise was well beyond the guidelines set by the Government and as a result, the Authority received a cap of £1 million after much negotiation. The limit set on 8 July 2004 was £25.798 million. This amounted to a notional council tax band D rise of 21.4 per cent.

- 24 Capital spend remained the same at £1.69 million as despite £1.5 million of this relating to the move to the new headquarters, revenue costs relating to borrowing would be minimal in this first year and only start towards the end of the financial year.
- 25 Fire and rescue services, including fire safety activities, are provided from 27 fire stations strategically located across the two counties. These services are co-ordinated within three geographical districts which coincide with local authority and police boundaries. The brigade has five whole-time stations based in Hereford, Worcester and the three towns of Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Redditch. It also operates three day-crewed stations in the Worcestershire towns of Malvern, Droitwich and Evesham. The retained service is mainly based in Herefordshire, with 12 out of the 19 retained stations in this rural county. The fire and rescue service has an establishment of 332 whole-time posts, 369 retained posts, 21 fire control staff and 98 support staff.
- 26 The Fire Authority attended 10,871 incidents in 2003/04. The number of primary fires attended was 1,724; the number of secondary fires attended was 2,913; special service was 1,783. Other attendances related to automatic fire alarms of 4,253 and 198 chimney fires.

What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

Leadership and priorities

- 27 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 28 The Authority has a well-presented vision that is clearly linked to strategic objectives and service delivery. This vision is to make Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer from fire and other hazards and to improve community wellbeing. It deals effectively with local, regional and national priorities. The vision flows into good strategic documents such as those on partnerships, health and safety and equality and diversity. To ensure that it is both realistic and achievable, costs and benefits are taken into account. It has incorporated the objectives and requirements set out in the National Framework. This approach provides clear guidance to managers on how the vision is to be implemented.
- 29 The Authority has worked with staff to determine four key strategic objectives. These are integrated risk management, people strategy, organisational development and building capacity in support services. A series of workshops were held in September 2004, with a cross-section of staff to establish what it was doing well and what it was not. These findings were then tested by a second workshop before being translated into a working document. Subsequent input by middle managers and members has ensured that these key objectives finalised in November 2004 represent issues that the Authority should be tackling. This new direction is being communicated to staff using existing processes such as the performance poster, which is placed on walls through the Authority.
- 30 Priorities and non-priorities have been identified with a sound risk-based approach. Each of the four key strategic objectives has a comprehensive list of service objectives. Priorities for service delivery have been established using a risk assessment methodology. Members were trained in this methodology to help decide which priorities must be progressed in 2005/06, in the medium-term and what were non-priorities. These priorities are now being used effectively for planning.
- 31 Objectives and visions from local authorities are included in the Fire Authority's objectives and best value performance plan. The priorities of key stakeholders are addressed through public service agreement (PSA) targets and crime and disorder work. This demonstrates that the Authority is listening to its partners.
- 32 There has been limited consultation on the integrated risk management plan (IRMP) 2, as there were few changes from IRMP 1. Comprehensive feedback was obtained through questionnaire returns, focus group meetings, town centre events and face-to-face meetings on IRMP 1. Also key partners and stakeholders played a positive role in the Authority's challenge response to capping. However, limited resources have resulted in a slow down of the agenda set out in the first IRMP and this led to few changes in the Authority's second IRMP. Although consultation was not as extensive for IRMP 2, public and partners have been able to comment and the Authority acted on the information received. Major changes are proposed in IRMP 3 and a full consultation exercise is planned.
- 33 Communication with staff is less effective. Although they acknowledge that they have been provided with information, it has often been in such quantity and official language that it has been difficult to fully understand the key messages of what is being proposed. The traditional hierarchical culture which caused barriers between staff and management has also contributed to these problems. Feedback on views expressed by staff has been insufficient. Inadequate two-way communication is having a negative impact on morale.

- 34 The Authority is not involved in all statutory partnerships at a strategic level. Attempts have been made to be more involved however, this has not been achieved. This is part of an inconsistency in their contribution and recognition as Fire Authority members across all communities. Therefore, the Authority's role in community safety is not fully explained or exploited.

A balanced strategy

- 35 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 36 There is a clear strategy in place for prevention, protection and intervention in the IRMP. Seven work streams relate to prevention, four to protection and fourteen to intervention. Whilst these have been in place for two years, planning and understanding of the issues have been further enhanced with the drafting of a five-year plan. Good use is being made of the Fire Services Emergency Cover software (FSEC) to highlight risks to be addressed in the future. Tailored station-based plans with stretched targets are being introduced to focus community safety activities using FSEC overlays. These are called community risk profiles and show locations of fires, other incidents and home fire safety visits so that these visits can be better targeted and their effectiveness assessed. In these ways, the success of community fire safety can be demonstrated and each station is able to use its resources more effectively.
- 37 Community safety work in education is very good. It has been delivered with flair and across a wide range of students using appropriate material to target the relevant issue for each age group and is supported by a strategy. This reaches throughout both counties and includes special needs group, junior fire setters and after school clubs. The impact of education programmes is measured using feedback forms for teachers. Innovative ways of delivering the community safety message is shown through its work with students at local universities. Course material for student teachers and general contact with the student population through fresher events has resulted in a reduction of calls to automatic fire alarms (AFAs) to targeted locations. This wider delivery is underpinned by a youth strategy. A development plan exists for the formulating of evaluation of its effectiveness. This work has been identified by the Charter Mark assessors as good practice.
- 38 The approach to equality and diversity with stakeholders is effective. Particular success has been achieved through the use of a community development officer who understands the dynamics of the local community and targets hard-to-reach groups. The Authority is actively involved in cultural events. The Authority also employs a marketing officer who develops focus on safety issues with specific groups. The strategy and all community safety documents can be made available in a range of formats and languages – the latter via Ethnic Access Link. This enables the fire and community safety message to have widespread coverage.
- 39 The Authority has made an effective contribution to the wider agenda. It has a track record of achievement through local public service agreements (LPSA), where pump priming money of £290,000 over three years was used to increase prevention work. Tough targets were set for reduction in accidental fires and deaths and injuries. These have now been exceeded with the result that the National Framework target has already been met. This success shows a sound partnership approach.
- 40 The Authority has an agile response to changing circumstances. Following capping this financial year, it was able to reset priorities and re-focus budgets whilst continuing to deliver substantial improvement.

- 41 The process by which good practice in community safety work is shared across the Authority is not robust. For instance, pockets of excellence such as the work with the elderly in Wyre Forest and road safety initiatives in Redditch are not always transferred into other districts. The wider agenda would be more effectively developed if good practice was shared.
- 42 The Authority has not effectively addressed the issue of AFAs. False alarms caused by AFAs have increased and this constitutes a significant proportion of all incidents. Reasons behind the increase in calls to AFAs have still to be established. The failure to address this has therefore, reduced capacity.

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 '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 44 The decision-making process is effective. The Authority has made significant progress since the pay verification exercise in 2004 and capping in the early part of its financial year. This is shown by the way that members and officers worked well together to reduce the impact of budget changes and this produced support from external partners and the public.
- 45 The members are clear about their role and responsibilities and make the strategic decisions for the Authority. The Authority has sub-committees covering audit and budget, best value, policy and performance, standards and urgent decisions. Responsibilities and accountability are clear but non-group leaders would like to be more closely involved in the preparation of the reports that come to them.
- 46 Governance arrangements are clear. Corporate governance documents have been revised and updated to full compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE model. Internal audit reports are now appropriately dealt with and a standards committee is in place, which meets once a year, unless otherwise required. The regional management board (RMB) relationship is strong and working effectively with members acting as senior responsible owners on several projects.
- 47 The provision of ICT is well-developed throughout the organisation. All retained stations have been fully networked over the last 18 months providing access to performance data, information systems, email and the internet. Management information and financial reporting is online and data is available in real time at all sites and locations. The ICT strategy has been recently updated with the support of an external consultant. Although the website is used frequently, both internally and externally, the intranet has limited information and is not easy to use. The service has fully implemented the second generation Vehicle Mounted Data System providing a wide range of information direct to frontline staff on the fireground. Therefore, ICT is used effectively as possible to support service delivery.
- 48 Management is effective, but culturally it is task-focused and hierarchical. The management of more junior staff is not inclusive, with a noticeable gap between this tier and middle management. While the Authority is making good progress in many areas, the disassociation experienced by staff is preventing a cohesive approach to modernisation.
- 49 Succession planning is developing from a basic level. Skills profiles have been identified for each station and development activity is geared at filling any gaps. All key positions are supported by either a nominated deputy or team that work closely with senior colleagues. As exit interviews have been found beneficial a guidance document is being developed to embed this in the Authority. However, several key staff are due to leave and replacements have not been found. A mitigating factor is that a new chief fire officer has been appointed and he will be able to influence these appointments.
- 50 ICT, HR and finance functions lack adequate administrative support. This issue has already been identified within the Authority's key objectives for 2005/06, as it has put staff under pressure and is preventing progress in these areas.

Capacity: resources and value for money

- 51 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 52 The Authority's robust approach to the capping of its council tax increase, by the Government, ensured that it was able to justify a significant increase to adequately resource its service delivery. The capping process involved much scrutiny of the Authority's approach to generating capacity. The Authority was initially advised of a £2 million cap which could have meant a reduction in its operational capability. After providing cost comparisons with other authorities, illustrating the gap between grant funding and budget requirements, this cap was reduced to £1 million.
- 53 Managers have a sound approach to integrating financial and service planning. There are close links between financial and service planning for 2005/06. For instance, details of the revenue and capital costs for each of the 24 work streams have been identified in the IRMP. The Authority has a medium-term financial plan in place which matches resources to priorities.
- 54 There is a strategic approach to obtaining value for money, by identifying targets and setting milestones against which to measure performance. This structured approach to achieving efficiencies is demonstrated by its three-year plan to meet government targets. Early gains include savings from the change in crewing of aerial appliances, an estimated £0.6 million over the next two years. A value for money approach is also shown through the way tenders are specified. These are outcome-based rather than solution-based. For example, instead of specifying air compressors they identify outputs for supplying air. This results in capacity being increased through the use of resources on higher quality products. During the capping challenge ODPM teams assessed its approach to value for money to see whether any savings could be made. The ODPM team made no recommendations. Planned efficiencies are creating resources so that the Authority's ambitions can be met.
- 55 A strategic approach is taken to asset management and procurement following best value reviews. An asset management plan exists and is being fully utilised in planning the move out of three separate locations to the new headquarters.
- 56 The Authority uses partnerships effectively to build extra capacity. An example of effective engagement is the leadership it takes on the emergency services forum; joint planning for environmental emergencies meant that a rapid and well-managed response was made to flooding of the river Severn in recent years. Co-operative working is therefore, improving the quality of the Authority's service to the public.
- 57 Individual partnerships are well-managed. A partnership working register exists which ensures that benefits from partnership working are fully utilised. Evaluation is used to identify user satisfaction and that the Authority's involvement is worth while. This is particularly noticeable within the educational work carried out with schools, colleges and universities. Others which involve work with primary care trusts (PCT) and the elderly have benefited through the Authority using managers with the right qualities to maximise the relationship. The Authority is therefore, gaining advantage from its partnership working.
- 58 Partnership working lacks strategic direction. Whilst many successes are noted at a tactical level, the Authority needs to share its partnership strategy with its partners and attract more external funding. This would allow further gains to be made.

- 59 The financial reserves of the Authority are low. The auditors score judgement gave a two for this, as they considered £0.548 million set following the capped budget to be too low. In setting the level of reserves for the initial 2004/05 budget a reserve of 5 per cent was set giving reserves of £1.2 million. However, capping meant that this had to be reset and the risks fully scrutinised to determine the minimum possible acceptable risk. Budget proposals mean that financial reserves have been set to increase to £0.770 million in 2005/06 which is 2.9 per cent of revenue spend. Therefore, a more acceptable level has been reached particularly in view of the history of good budgetary control.

Capacity: people

- 60 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 61 The Authority's approach to equality and diversity is particularly effective. It appointed an experienced manager who enjoys full support from senior officers and now takes a regional lead. Approaches to inclusion and equality are well-defined. All staff are working through a structured approach to training. This is reflected in the way its workforce represents the community, at 0.83 per cent compared with a local population of 1 per cent BME for uniformed staff. Nationally, less than ten authorities match this and it is at the top of its family group for this BVPI. Also, it is making progress on the proportion of female uniformed staff currently at 7 per cent. It also performs well being second in its family group for both, BV11a women and BV11b BME, in the top 5 per cent of earners. It is particularly successful on BV11b where it is placed fifth nationally.
- 62 There is a robust approach to integrated personal development system (IPDS) development. This has led to an active involvement on regional issues and has seen the operational element of the watch management development programme run within the service as a regional pilot in 2004/05. It will now become the regional model for 2005/06. There is also good recent work on rank to role, which involved developing a role model and conducting an interim analysis of uniformed posts measured against role maps. In addition, skills profiles have been identified for individual stations and personal development records (PDR) are mapped against this. The Authority has also invested time in getting supervisory managers to understand what the organisation needs are and is currently revising the skills profile. The moderation process for PDRs monitors for connection to the skills profile and ensures that the Authority targets its developmental resources to meet its primary skills needs. Good training has been provided to meet emerging needs. These aspects show an understanding of the skills the organisation needs.
- 63 The Authority has the people it needs to achieve its vision. It has appointed able people to key functions who have brought in valuable outside experiences. It is keen to develop managers and encourages delegation. It has also invested in member training and development. Even though capacity is currently stretched in support services, it has people with sufficient experience to manage a modern organisation.
- 64 Absence management is effective. Performance against sickness indicator BVPI 12 is top of the family group, with less than 9 per cent of working days lost. The Authority was 12th in the national tables for sickness absence of whole-time uniformed staff and 10th overall for all staff. The trend has improved over the last three years.

- 65 The Authority makes good use of different types of staff and conditions. Retained staff are included on equal terms in IPDS development and are used to deliver community safety messages in innovative ways. Two types of duty systems have also been reviewed. The Authority is therefore, increasing its capacity through a good use of its people resources.
- 66 The Authority has still to effectively address cultural change. This has not matched the pace of other changes in the modernisation agenda. The traditional hierarchical culture is causing barriers between staff and management. Whilst the culture is beginning to change through initiatives such as the approach taken to develop key strategic objectives mentioned above, there is a gap between managers and staff as a result of the style of management adopted. This problem aggravated issues during the dispute and union relationships are still impacted. Although this means that the capacity to introduce changes is impeded, the problem has been identified and is a key part of the 2005/06 corporate plan.
- 67 HR lacks strategic direction. The organisation is aware of this. One of its four strategic objectives for 2005/06 is the development of a people strategy. However, it is too early to assess its track record. A cohesive framework which brings all its HR strategies and policies together is not currently in place.
- 68 HR policies are not always applied flexibly. Whilst there are good examples of a family friendly approach and work life balance, support staff have been unable to take flexi-time for extra hours worked. This has contributed to staff believing that they are not valued.

Performance management

- 69 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 70 The Authority has developed a sound approach to risk management. Strategic and departmental risk registers were finalised in December 2004, which map risks to internal controls. Resources have been allocated to identify risks in the 2005/06 budget and priorities for service delivery have been established using risk management criteria. Members had training in November 2004 and were integral to this decision-making. Each identified risk is assigned to a manager who is responsible for managing and controlling the risk. This places the Authority in a good position to effectively manage its business risk.
- 71 The performance management system is systematic throughout the organisation. The delivery of the vision is assisted by target setting at all levels. The balanced score card approach is used whereby individuals are set targets in their PDRs, which are reviewed every six months. These are linked into watch and station folders whose targets are set using the community risk profiles already mentioned. Senior and middle managers targets are linked with the key strategic objectives with the responsibility for each service objective assigned to one individual. A performance wall poster and plan presents easy to understand information to staff, on how performance management is being used to improve services in key areas, clarifies the Authority's vision and objectives as well as its priorities and plans. It is on widespread display. A revised 2005/06 poster has just been produced which takes into account suggestions for improvement.

- 72 Performance is effectively monitored. Regular reporting identifies levels of performance through a traffic light system. This system highlights both good and poor performance which is shared with strategic and middle managers enabling them to deal with issues of underperformance and identify trends in performance provision. There is also a members' performance review forum. Reporting for 2004/05 is analysed between education and prevention, response and intervention, people and skills and corporate management. At a tactical level, station managers have used performance information to investigate local issues. For instance, malicious calls have been driven down in Kidderminster through external funding of CCTV beside a telephone box. Calls to fires have also been reduced following the installation of a sprinkler system in a block of flats above the bin area. As challenging targets are set for national and local performance information, close scrutiny of any slippage is ensuring that the Authority maintains its improving trends.
- 73 Information technology-based performance management systems are embedded in the organisation. ICT is put to effective use through the Authority's management information system. For example, at district level group managers use remote access to obtain information on a regular basis. Email can also be used successfully to make contact with remote stations in a widespread rural area. As already mentioned, improvements could be made to make the system easier to use and more responsive. However, whilst the information is not in the most usable form, it is fit for purpose and provides a sound framework for monitoring performance.
- 74 The Authority understands the importance of how their performance is perceived by the public. It has introduced two surveys, one for after incidents and the other for fire safety visits. This enables the Authority to respond to information received and improve performance.
- 75 The contribution that staff make to improving performance is not clearly understood or recognised. There is little celebration of success. Despite the clear success enjoyed by the organisation such as the significant reduction in accidental dwelling fires, staff do not believe that they are valued.

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

Achievement of objectives

- 76 This theme is scored by this assessment as '4' – well above minimum requirements, performing strongly.
- 77 The Authority is high-performing in terms of the best value performance indicators (BVPI). For those that relate to the effectiveness of intervention and prevention measures, the Authority is at or near the top of the family group (being 4th overall nationally on BVPI 142(ii) primary fires) for these apart from BVPI 142(i) total number of calls to fire (where it is 15th in the national table). For the group of BVPI that relate to the effectiveness of measures to limit the impact on human life, the Authority is at the top of the family group for injuries (being 11th nationally) and the middle for deaths (as it is nationally). The Authority is second in the family group for hoax calls and fourth in respect of AFAs (but 17th nationally for both). BVPI 150 was not audited because of capping and we are therefore, unable to comment.
- 78 The Authority has changed its corporate aims and objectives from those set out in its first published IRMP in January 2004. Its initial approach was to have three broad aims. These were to reduce the incidence and consequence of fire and other emergencies, secure the safety of employees and provide value for money. While it has maintained a similar vision, it has revised and refined their objectives for 2005/06, based on their new way of working to enable them to focus clearly on current issues. It has set out four strategic objectives as outlined in paragraph 29 of this report.
- 79 The Authority has been successful at achieving quality standards. This has been recognised externally through the award of the charter mark for the third time along with ISO9001 status at the training and development centre. A quality approach to people issues has also received recognition through the investors in people award to the same centre. This contributes to one of the aims of the Authority which is to secure the safety of employees.

Prevention

- 80 The Authority has a strong record of achievement in prevention. The Authority has increased the numbers of hours spent on prevention from 2,000 in 1999 to 24,000 this year. Arson initiatives have also developed and involve collaboration with police and local authorities. The Authority is involved in developing, with the ODPM, national best practice in the education of community safety. This last year has seen school visits expanded to rural areas with a doubling of the output of school visits and fire safety education has been expanded to cover young people outside mainstream education. All operational staff on stations are involved in delivering community safety.
- 81 Significant progress has already been made towards meeting specific targets set in the national framework, as these are also in line with LPSA targets. In particular, the Authority has reduced accidental fires by 35 per cent over the five years from 1999 to 2004.
- 82 The Authority has made a good contribution to the West Midlands RMB at officer and member level. The Authority has played a significant lead in the progress of the National Framework, including health and safety, new dimensions, regional control centre and equality and diversity. Significant progress is therefore, being made against the regional agenda.

Protection

- 83 Progress has been made where possible against the four protection work streams. For instance, the level of smoke alarm ownership has been raised with 2,280 home fire safety checks and 2,711 smoke alarms being fitted last year. A recent local survey established that only 12 per cent of households do not have smoke alarms compared with a national average of 20 per cent. It also introduced smoke alarms for the deaf. However, the other three work streams were held back because of financial constraints. Priorities have subsequently been assessed as mentioned in paragraph 30 and the remaining three work streams were considered to be non-priorities for 2005/06.

Intervention

- 84 Good progress is demonstrated across all 14 work streams relating to intervention. Particular successes are noted in its approach to the environment and civil contingencies. Detailed work has been done with the Environment Agency to plan for major flooding incidents and includes the development of a working protocol. New dimensions incident response units have been introduced for public mass decontamination. These demonstrate achievement against the Authority's intervention objectives.
- 85 The Authority can demonstrate achievement against its objective of delivering value for money in intervention. Efficiency savings have been made from the change in crewing of aerial appliances which will save the Authority £0.6 million over the next two years. Best value has driven service improvement and change. In particular, arrangements for procurement have been improved, a good recent example of successful procurement being the introduction of high quality gas tight suits. Detailed comparisons of unit costs were made in the Authority's submission to ODPM when challenging the original proposed cap, which illustrate that it provides good value for money.
- 86 The Authority has taken a structured approach to developing its own intervention standards. A base case for modelling has been established using Fire Safety Emergency Cover (FSEC) software data which has been refined using the local knowledge of firefighters on roads and details regarding buildings of multiple occupation. Many scenarios have now been explored using suggestions from across the organisation and the Authority is reviewing options. Procedures are in place to update the tool with data on incidents for the previous two years. A new response standard has been set for AFAs and supporting guidance has been issued regarding the reduction of unwanted fire signals from premises of concern. The Authority is well-placed to determine its own local standards of fire cover and optimise the use of operational resources.

Achievement of improvement

- 87 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 88 The Authority has made significant improvement on a range of key BVPI. The Audit Commission have used 12 BVPIs against which the Authority's performance and improvement has been benchmarked. Improvement trends have been noted in eight BVPIs, these vary from HR indicators as discussed elsewhere in this report to operational indicators such as BV142(ii) primary fires, BV142(iii) accidental dwelling fires, BV143(ii) injuries and BV126 hoax calls.
- 89 The performance for four BVPIs has deteriorated, these include the BME representation of the work force, although this is still relatively high as mentioned earlier, and operational indicators such as BV142(i) calls to number of fires, BV143(i) deaths and BV149 AFAs.

- 90 The Authority has achieved its strongest improvement in its own approach to modernisation. After being disappointed with the grading they received in the Audit Commission pay verification study and being capped, its whole process to determining key objectives was modernised. An in depth review of the Authority's objectives was undertaken by a cross-section of members and staff. This triggered the resetting of objectives and priorities which tackle the Authority's poor performing areas, and included a people strategy, organisational development and building capacity in support services. A positive impact is already visible within the Authority.

Reducing the incidence and consequence of fire and other emergencies

- 91 The Authority has evidence of high levels of stakeholder satisfaction. The recent public opinion survey showed a high awareness among the public of fire safety issues and confirmed that community safety measures are being effective. The response levels showed that the public had engaged with the fire service and agreed with what it was doing. The Authority has demonstrated that the public feel safer.
- 92 Improvement has been noted in areas where the Authority has already shown good performance. For example, the schools education programme has expanded coverage significantly, the community development officer and uniformed staff are being used to target specific cultural groups such as travellers and involvement in crime and disorder partnerships has become more active. This illustrates that once good foundations have been laid, significant progress can be made.

Securing the safety of employees

- 93 The Authority has improved the safety of employees through its commitment to training and health and safety. Training provision has been of good quality and attracts students from other authorities. The Authority was the first to introduce new dimensions showing it is committed to the latest developments. The Authority leads on health and safety in the region and has had successful outcomes to their ROSPA audits. This demonstrates that the safety of employees is improving.

Providing value for money

- 94 Positive expectations for improved working have been raised by the proposed new headquarters for the Authority. Managers and support staff are keen to move to a single building rather than being spread around a number of locations throughout the two counties. They recognise the benefits of easier and more immediate contact with each other. The whole project is expected to not only remove current barriers to staff working effectively, but also bring about redeployment of operational resources in line with identified risks.
- 95 The Authority has delivered priorities within financial constraints. Despite the reduced budget set following capping, the Authority has achieved its objectives and improved on the majority of its performance indicators.

Future plans

- 96 This theme is scored by this assessment as '3' – consistently above the minimum requirements, performing well.
- 97 The Authority has established good linkages between vision, strategies and plans. The 2004/05 IRMP is a key part of corporate planning. It has a clear action plan for the future that addresses the risks identified in the plan as well as being closely linked to the vision set out in the community safety strategy. Corporate policies – for example, on procurement – have also been reviewed and updated to support future plans. Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) plans exist for each project. This all provides a solid foundation for putting the Authority's vision into practice.
- 98 Plans and individual initiatives are reviewed regularly. The IRMP is reassessed annually as part of financial and service planning, and is updated as further progress is made with data mapping and risk identification in FSEC. Work within community safety partnerships is being reviewed as part of the renewal of LPSAs. Outcomes from individual projects within these partnerships, for example, reduced car crime in specific areas, are assessed to ensure their effectiveness. Work on new dimensions is reassessed to meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act, the National Framework and regional and local partners. These measures ensure that the Authority's plans reflect changing circumstances and are meeting their objectives.
- 99 Self-awareness is emerging and external challenge is used positively to create change. The Authority responded well to the first and second phases of the Audit Commissions pay verification study and put in place clear structures to monitor the delivery of the resulting action plan. It also uses the framework of charter mark to move services forward. This responsiveness to external challenge has brought about stronger management arrangements.
- 100 Networking with other organisations facilitates positive learning on new issues. There is regular contact on community fire safety with other fire authorities in the West Midlands through the regional management board and regional partnerships, as well as contact with other public and voluntary bodies in the two counties. The Authority also makes a strong contribution to national fire safety work through representation on national bodies. New Dimensions work also involves close working and learning within the region, particularly on the identification of risks, planning, provision of training, and joint procurement of specialist equipment such as gas tight suits. These arrangements all provide a solid foundation for future regional co-operation and implementation of the broadened agenda now expected of the fire and rescue service.
- 101 The quality of community safety has been improved through innovation. A key example of this is the signposting project within the LPSA in Herefordshire. In this scheme, a single visit is made to vulnerable elderly people to assess all their needs for safety, security, and wellbeing, and referrals are then made to all the relevant public and voluntary bodies. Firefighters have a key role to play in making these visits, and the project co-ordinator is based in Hereford fire station. The project has a development plan and stretch targets to meet the growing demand for its services. Through such schemes, the fire service can deliver fire safety more widely, while contributing to wider social issues.

- 102 The work the Authority is doing in relation to education demonstrates innovation. For example, earlier work with the youth offending team on car crime and pupil referral units has extended into a ground breaking scheme called juvenile awareness group (JAG) which identifies young people on the edge and working with other organisations seeks to prevent repeat crime.
- 103 Ineffective communication impedes the implementation of the Fire Authority's plans. There is also a lack of shared learning internally and no systematic process for sharing good practice. Staff believe they are not sufficiently consulted about how new policies will work in practice.
- 104 They are also concerned that upward feedback on plans goes unheeded. This lack of understanding has impacted on ownership of new policies and plans by staff.

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"> Well-presented vision flowing into good strategic documents. Priorities and non-priorities identified with a sound risk-based approach. The vision from local authorities is incorporated into the Authority objectives. Engaged with staff to determine key strategic objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited consultation was carried out for the year 2 IRMP. Ineffective communication with staff exacerbated by the traditional hierarchical culture. Not involved in all strategic partnerships at strategic level.
<p>A balanced strategy</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention, protection and intervention has clear strategy aided by stretch targets using community risk profiles. Community safety work in education has been delivered with flair. The approach to ensure equality and diversity in dealing with communities is effective, ensuring good communication with hard-to-reach groups. Effective contribution to the wider agenda through LPSAs with progress on National Framework. Priorities reset following capping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process by which good practice in community safety work is shared across the Authority is not robust. False alarms from AFAs not effectively addressed reducing capacity.

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

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Capacity: Governance and management</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate governance documents comply with CIPFA models. RMB relationship is strong and working effectively. Members and senior managers have clear role in decision-making. Decision-making is effective, with significant progress since pay verification two and capping. Management effective apart from traditional authoritarian style. ICT provision is well-developed across the organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Succession planning is at a basic level Resources around ICT, HR and Finance are stretched

Theme	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Capacity: Resources and value for money</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound financial management and budgetary control. • Financial and service planning now linked closely over the medium-term. • Good approach to VFM with structure to efficiency savings. • Asset management and procurement approached strategically. • Individual partnerships managed well. • Extra capacity through partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working partly lacks strategic direction and draft partnership strategy has not been shared with partners with limited external funding attracted. • Financial reserves in 2004/05 set at minimal level.
<p>Capacity: People</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong approach to delivering on workforce equality and diversity. • Appointments to key specialisms bring outside experiences. • Risk-based approach to IPDS. • Retained personnel given equitable access to IPDS. • Effective absence management. • Good work on rank to role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No people strategy leading to insufficient strategic direction. • Inflexible application of HR policies so staff do not feel valued. • Cultural change has not matched pace of other changes in the modernisation agenda.
<p>Performance management</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management system addresses strategic and functional risk, responsibility assigned to individuals. • Performance management system is systematic with delivery of vision assisted by target setting at all levels. • Effective and regular monitoring of performance. • Robust ICT-based performance management systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contribution that staff make to improving performance is not clearly understood by them or recognised.

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 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing well on most BVPIs. • Successful at achieving quality standards. • Good progress on National Framework targets on prevention with strong community safety work. • Active contributor on RMB. • Protection progressed through increased levels of smoke alarm ownership. • Procurement producing VFM and best value drives service change. • Progress on all 14 intervention work streams in IRMP. • Structured approach to developing local standards of fire cover. 	
<p>Achievement of improvement</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement trend in six key BVPIs. • Progress on equality and diversity. • Areas for improvement addressed. • High stakeholder satisfaction. • Improvement in areas where performance already good such as community safety education. • Safety of employees improved through commitment to training and health and safety. • Delivered priorities within financial constraints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls to AFAs increasing, as are total number of calls to fires.
<p>Future plans</p> <p>Score 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good linkages between vision, strategies and plans. • Plans and individual initiatives are reviewed regularly. • External challenge is used positively to create change. • Networking with other organisations facilitates positive learning on new issues. • The quality of community safety has been improved through innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffective communication impedes implementation of the Fire Authority's 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

105 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	3	<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	2	<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.
Financial statements	3	<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 key

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

Appendix 2 – Framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment

- 106 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.
- 107 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.
- 108 The assessment for Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 21 February 2005 to 4 March 2005.
- 109 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.