WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

QUALITY ASSURANCE/AUDIT OF SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS

1.   POLICY

It is the policy of West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority (WMF&CDA) to continuously modernise and improve the quality of service provided to the communities of the West Midlands.

2.   STRATEGY

WMF&CDA recognises that in order for it to continuously modernise and improve, a number of strategic projects will be ongoing at any one time. A fundamental element of project management is quality assurance. Quality assurance can be defined as reviewing and assessing the progress of a project to ensure it continues to reflect the original business case and needs of the organisation. During this process, it is also important to determine that this business case is being met within budget, on time and to the specified standards set when the project was initiated.

3.   PROCEDURES

Whilst each Project Manager should ensure that their project is being quality assured, as detailed in Standing Order 01/09 - Project and Programme Management Process, the Performance and Planning Department will carry out a high level audit of progress of significant projects.

3.1   The Audit Process

Staff from the Performance and Planning Department (P&P) will conduct audits.

- Auditors will identify the Project Manager and work with them to determine the objectives of the project being audited.

- In consultation with the Project Manager, the scope of the audit and key stages and key stakeholders will be identified, to ensure they are consulted during the audit process.

- If appropriate, external good practice will be researched.

- Using relevant project documentation, any guidance/Standing Orders and examples of good practice outside WMF&CDA, a list of requirements of an 'ideal' project will be produced and used as the benchmark to measure progress of the process/project.

- A list of questions, based on the benchmark project outlined above will be compiled. If necessary these questions will be adapted for different stakeholder groups (i.e. users and providers of a project may need to be asked different questions). To ensure consistency, each group of stakeholders should be asked the same questions.

- P&P staff will ensure consultation with a wide cross section of users and providers of the project. This consultation will form evidence for the audit.

- P&P staff are trained auditors and will ask questions to help determine whether:

- the outcomes meet the objectives of the project;
- the outputs justify the inputs;
- a more efficient and effective way of delivering the service can be provided for the same level of output.

3.2 The Conduct of Auditors

- Auditors will act professionally, accurately and in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Auditors will not intentionally communicate false or misleading information that may compromise the integrity of any audit.
- Auditors will not disclose the findings, or any part of them, of the audit team gained in the course of an audit to any third party, unless authorised by both the auditee and the audit team to do so.
- The aim of auditing a process is not to apportion blame but to uncover areas for improvement and where appropriate, understand why a process isn't working. Only when we understand why something isn't working can we help support service improvement.
- Where good practice is highlighted, this should be shared as widely as possible.
- Where responses to questions asked by the auditor are considered anecdotal, the auditor will verify these responses and look for evidence to support these responses.

3.3 What to do if You Consider This Process Has Not Been Followed

Where you consider the conduct/processes of auditors from P&P have not reflected the process detailed in 3.2 above, the head of the Performance and Planning Department should be contacted. If this occurs, this post will carry out a full investigation.

4. CROSS REFERENCES

Standing Order 01/09 Project and Programme Management Process.

Standing Order 23/01 Performance Management Framework.

5. RESPONSIBILITY AND REVIEW/AMENDMENT DETAILS

5.1 Responsible Director/Department

This Standing Order is the responsibility of the Director, Performance & Planning Department.

5.2 Created/Reviewed/Fully Amended

Created by the Service Delivery Improvement Manager, Performance & Planning Department, January 2005. Review due January 2006.