

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND CIVIL DEFENCE AUTHORITY

22ND NOVEMBER 2004

1. UPDATE ON COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA)

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Authority notes the content of the report and approves the schedule and planning process to support and manage Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to inform the Authority of the implications of CPA for the fire and rescue service and to explain the preparation for assessment and work completed so far.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment was introduced to top tier Local Authorities in 2002. A tailored version of CPA has been created by the Audit Commission for Fire and Rescue Services.
- 3.2 CPA is designed to help the Fire Authority improve its service to the communities it serves. It does this by looking at how well the service is governed and managed. CPA will not assess the organisation's operations in detail. It will assess how the Fire Authority and Brigade management assure themselves that everything they deem important is being done.
- 3.3 The CPA process for Fire Authorities will commence in January 2005. West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority will undergo assessment in March and April 2005 with a site visit by the Audit Commission team taking place between the 21st and 27th April 2005.

- 3.4 Performance and Planning Department will co-ordinate preparation for CPA but it is crucial that CPA is not seen as the task or property of one department. A new member of staff with the appropriate experience has been recruited to join the team, and the Senior Divisional Officer who leads the Performance and Planning team has completed training at the Audit Commission in order to join one of their teams assessing other Authorities. This experience will be invaluable to the Authority in preparation of its own assessment.
- 3.5 A mass of background information has been studied and a network of contacts with other Authorities is constantly growing. Visits and meetings with pilot Fire Authorities are ongoing. A visit is planned to at least one Council that has achieved "Excellent" status.
- 3.6 Discussions are currently under way with bodies that could carry out peer review following this Brigade's self assessment.
- 3.7 The Audit Commission guidance includes information on "Key lines of enquiry". These are being used to carry out an early preliminary assessment so that where some weakness exists remedial action can be taken well before assessment. One good example is the recent review of business planning processes which have been improved to incorporate Integrated Risk Management (IRMP) and assessment of strategic business risk.
- 3.8 Appendix 1 gives further background information, the CPA methodology, the proposed communication strategy and broad planning proposals for CPA.
- 3.9 There will be further updates, presentations and consultation with members over the coming months.

4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

CPA supports continuous improvement of the service the Brigade provides to the community based on need, irrespective of race, gender, religion and disability.

5. **CORPORATE AIMS SUPPORTED**

The principal corporate aims supported by the information in this report are as follows.

1. To meet the Fire Authority's statutory duties, standards and expectations.
9. To develop and support sustainable outcomes.
11. To continuously modernise and improve the quality of service.

6. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Any costs resulting from peer review and communications will be accommodated within existing budget provisions.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Audit Commission guidance on CPA including specific draft guidance for Fire Authorities.

Further background, CPA methodology, communications strategy and planning proposals attached at Appendix 1.

F. J. E. SHEEHAN
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

APPENDIX 1

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Audit Commission has developed a version of CPA tailored to meet the needs and circumstances of the Fire Service. Four volunteer Fire and Rescue Services, including Shropshire, were subjected to a first pilot assessment during 2003. The prime objective of the assessment was not specifically to assess the Fire Authorities but to proof both the process and the make-up of the review teams. As a result the process and the team structure have been amended. A second pilot has been scheduled for September 2004 with four Fire and Rescue Services selected: Greater Manchester, Somerset, Hertfordshire and Staffordshire. The Performance and Planning Department have obtained self assessments and reports from these Authorities where available.
- 1.2 The central aim of CPA is to assess corporate performance and drive service improvement. The process starts with self assessment, followed by peer assessment by a “critical friend”, usually a team from a high performing organisation with similar issues. The Audit Commission team then consider the self assessment and carries out its own research within the organisation. The output is a report which includes an overall judgement of the Fire Authority in one of five categories:
- Excellent
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Weak
 - Poor

The outcome is intended to be a useful contribution to the Fire Authority's improvement planning process. It should be understood that it is the Fire Authority which is being assessed, not the Fire Brigade.

- 1.3 As a result of the process, each Fire Authority will emerge from CPA with a baseline for improvement and where necessary, it provides a means to identify and deal with poor performance. It will also provide local communities with a picture of performance. The Audit Commission have intervention powers where performance is deemed to be specifically poor. High performers

will get increased freedoms and flexibilities, including some financial freedoms. The Fire and Rescue CPA model builds upon the established CPA process for Local Authorities, whilst also addressing specific needs and issues relevant to Fire Authorities.

- 1.4 CPA scores will be the 'launch pad' for action plans with the overarching aim to secure genuine and long-lasting improvement in Fire Authorities. Freedoms and flexibilities will enable the highest performers to do more. They will also provide a strong incentive for others to change. Where improvements are needed CPA will be the basis for better-focused and more determined improvement planning which will require strong local leadership.

- 1.5 CPA will not assess the general day to day activities of the Brigade. It will however, concentrate on,

“How management (the Fire Authority and Corporate Board) assures itself that everything is being done correctly and in line with their corporate aims”. “The view taken by CPA will be panoramic not baseline”. “Its targets are intended to be fair, accurate and true”. “It will operate independently, analytically and objectively”.

(Mollie Bickerstaff, Audit Commission Director, Fire and Rescue)

2. **CPA METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1 West Midlands Fire Service will be required to undertake the assessment process as detailed below:

- Self-assessment
- Accredited peer challenge to support the self-assessment (optional but highly recommended)
- A corporate assessment, informed by the peer challenge and the self assessment. (Carried out by a team of four assessors including a Fire Service representative)

- 2.2 Assessment is central to CPA and will focus on and test the capacity of the Fire Authority to deliver against national and local priorities. To lead and manage performance, work effectively with partners and the community and make best use of resources and workforce skills.

2.3 The Audit Commission claims that the corporate assessment is a judgement about the Fire Service's ability to improve services for local people and to deliver positive change for those communities. This judgement is based partly on the 'self assessment', which is recognised as essential if CPA is to work effectively as a basis for improvement planning in each Fire Authority.

2.4 The Authority will be required to answer four key questions about its own performance:

- What is the Authority trying to achieve?
- How has the Authority set about delivering its priorities?
- What has the Authority achieved to date?
- In the light of what the Authority has learnt, what does it plan to do next?

2.5 As a subset to these questions are ten themes:

2.5.1 What is the Fire Authority trying to achieve?

- Leadership
- A balanced strategy (balanced between prevention, protection and intervention)

2.5.2 How has the Fire Authority set about delivering its priorities?

- Governance and Management
- Capacity: Finance and Partnerships
- Capacity: People
- Performance Management

2.5.3 What has the Fire Authority achieved to date?

- Achievement of objectives
- Improvement
- Value for money


2.5.4 What does it plan to do next?

- Future improvement

2.6 The assessment process will be driven by evidence, review and selected interviews which will include:

- Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority
- Selected Elected Members including Lead Members for Performance Management and others
- Chief Fire Officer
- Clerk to the Authority
- Treasurer
- All Corporate Board members
- Department Heads
- Section Heads
- Station based personnel
- Representative Bodies

Interviews with external partners will include:

- The Chief Constable
- The Chief Executive of the Ambulance Service
- Local Strategic Partnerships stakeholders
- Local Government Officers 

3. **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR CPA**

3.1 Before the CPA assessment, scheduled to take place during the last week of April 2005, it is important that Fire Authority Members and staff have a good understanding of the objectives of CPA and that:

- Staff have an understanding of the Fire Authority's objectives and how their work contributes to achieving them.
- Staff understand their value too and the part they play within the organisation.
- Staff demonstrate their commitment and motivation to enable necessary improvements to be made.
- Staff and Authority Members become ambassadors for the organisation throughout the CPA process.


3.2 Raising awareness of CPA throughout the organisation will be managed through a 'Top-down' approach, including presentations and briefings to:

- The Fire Authority (including Policy Planning Forum);

- Corporate Board;
- Functional Departments;
- Management Briefings for Station Commanders and Section Heads;
- Representative Bodies.

3.3 The following internal communication tools will be used to communicate CPA key messages, providing relevant and timely information on a regular basis through the following:


- Dedicated CPA Intranet Site, publishing current information including the self assessment submission document, 'jargon busting', frequently asked questions page and a forum facility;
- A cascade briefing system
- A dedicated CPA newsletter
- Intranet articles
- FirePower articles

3.4 her potential opportunities for communicating the CPA message will include discussing the CPA process, the peer review and self-assessment stage with department heads and staff by way of specifically tailored seminars and workshops setting up briefings for Elected Members, who may be aware of the CPA process carried out within their Local Authority, but perhaps not of the impact of CPA on West Midlands Fire Service and placing CPA as an Agenda Item on specific scheduled meetings throughout the Brigade to maintain momentum of CPA and keep updates relevant.

4. **PLANNING FOR CPA**

4.1 Planning for CPA will be managed in phases, taking into consideration the Regional Framework Objectives, the Brigade's Local Verification Report – Phase 2 and the Business Plan 2004/2005.

4.2 This broad approach is detailed in the table below;

Phase 1	Preparing Brigade for CPA	July 2004 – December 2004
Phase 2	Self Assessment	January 2005
Phase 3	 er Assessment Self Assessment Report submitted to Audit Commission Assessment Team	February 2005 March 2005
Phase 4	Assessment Visit	21 st to 27 th April 2005
Phase 5	Implementing CPA Action Plan	May 2005