

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

20TH APRIL 2009

1. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer.

RECOMMENDED

THAT the Authority note the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is submitted to inform Members of the outcomes from the three aspects of the latest round of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process including the Service, Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessments.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 During the last year the Authority has been subject to three different types of CPA review undertaken by the Audit Commission. The assessments included the Use of Resources judgement, a Service Assessment focusing upon an assessment of our performance against our Best Value Performance Indicators and a Direction of Travel assessment, which included an element of value for money. These assessments cover the 2007/08 business year. This is the final year of CPA, which will be replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) from 1st April 2009.
- 3.2 The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter has now been received from the Audit Commission, who attended the Audit Committee meeting on 30th March to give an overview and answer questions. The Performance Assessment and Improvement Team (PAIT) will await the deliberation of Members in relation to the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter before finalising a response.

The report includes sections dealing with:

- key messages
- how is the West Midlands FRA performing?
- direction of travel report
- service assessment
- audit of accounts and value for money
- looking ahead
- closing remarks

3.3 The Authority has been rated as '**improving well**' during 2007/08 and good progress has been recognised in a number of priority areas. Some key successes were:

- a strong downward trend in the number of primary fires, accidental home fires, deaths and injuries. More than half of home fire safety checks are in high risk and vulnerable households.
- the FRA is making a sound contribution to wider community outcomes particularly with young people.
- progress is being made on Equality and Diversity through improving access and quality of service for vulnerable people.
- there is a clear commitment to reviewing the effectiveness of the organisation and ensuring capacity is maximised. Internal communication and engagement with staff is improving. Effective management of partnerships is developing. The service is well positioned to continue improving.

3.4 Those areas for improvement highlighted by the Audit Commission have been included in Departmental/Command Area action plans (where appropriate) and progress will be updated through the route map. Some key areas of improvement were:

- the processes for managing value for money are still developing. The Authority needs to continue to integrate financial and performance management to assist it in deriving maximum value for money from its ongoing activities and future reviews of its asset and personnel structures.
- seek appropriate technical advice for any new or unusual events to ensure correct accounting treatment.
- the Authority needs to continue working well in partnership, maximising its use of resources in meeting its priorities and the wider community outcomes for each of the seven district areas.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters raised in this report do not relate to a change in policy or of function.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is a legal requirement for the Authority to consider the Audit Commission's Audit and Inspection Letter under Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 564 – The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2006.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Notes of Meeting with Audit Commission – 16th March 2009

V RANDENIYA
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER