

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**9<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2009**

**1. NATIONAL AUDIT COMMISSION REPORT – ‘RISING TO THE CHALLENGE’**

Joint report of the A/Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk.

**RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 THAT the Authority note the contents of the Audit Commission report, circulated separately to Members.
- 1.2 THAT the Authority note that the Chairman of the Authority has asked officers to arrange for presentations on the implications of the report to be given to Members at special meetings of the Policy Planning Forum in early 2009.

**2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to advise the Members of the receipt of the National Audit Commission Report dated December 2008 entitled ‘Rising to the Challenge’. Also, to note the way in which the Chairman of the Authority has asked officers to deal with its contents.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Audit Commission’s focus in the above report is on the £2 billion of public money spent on the Fire Service in England; they conduct annual performance assessments of English Fire and Rescue Services. The national study undertaken by the Audit Commission to encourage Fire Services to improve value for money can be found at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/)
- 3.2 The report sets out the history of some of the previous Audit Commission reports, makes references to the Bain Review and talks about the modernisation of the Fire Service in recent years and future expectations.

- 3.3 To help to formulate a response to the issues in the report (a summary is attached at Appendix 1) the Chairman has asked officers to produce a series of presentations to the Policy Planning Forum. These may lead to further pieces of work and reports to the Authority.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out as the report at this stage is to note.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Audit Commission has powers to undertake such studies and produce such a report in accordance with the Audit Commission Act 1998.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Appendix 2 to the report indicates that nationally there are potential cumulative efficiency savings available in the Fire Service of between £160 million and £200 million.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

National Audit Commission Study 'Rising to the Challenge – Improving Fire Service Efficiency'

VIJ RANDENIYA  
A/CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SUSAN PHELPS  
CLERK

### **Audit Commission – Rising to the Challenge Improving Fire Service Efficiency**

#### **Summary**

##### **National Expenditure**

- The total cost of fire to the economy was estimated at over £7 billion in 2004.
- Fire Service funding has risen from £1.3 billion to £2.1 billion in the last decade; a 25 per cent increase in real terms.
- Most Fire Services will see much smaller increases in funding in the next three years; some will experience real terms reductions.
- Fire Services have achieved £185 million in annual efficiency savings since 2004.

##### **Operational Position**

- Accidental fires in the home have fallen by a fifth in the last decade.
- Fewer than 200 people died in accidental fires in the home in England in 2006/07, compared to nearly 400 a decade ago.
- Deliberate vehicle fires have almost halved since 2000/01.

##### **Fire Service Role**

- Successive reports have encouraged the Fire Service to focus more on community fire safety (CFS), leading to a 50 per cent expenditure increase since 2004/05.
- Fire Services have conducted 2 million home fire safety checks (HFSCs) since 2004 and fitted 2.4 million smoke alarms; both help to reduce deaths and serious injuries in fires.
- Fire Services contribute to a variety of projects in their communities, for example improving road safety and reducing anti-social behaviour; their contribution and can-do attitude is widely praised.
- But better strategy and evaluation are required to ensure that Fire Services are getting value for money from their community work.

##### **Continuing to Change**

- The context in which Fire Services operate, and their roles and responsibilities, have changed dramatically over the last 40 years.
- Successive reviews of the Fire Service in that time have encouraged an increased emphasis on prevention, changes in duty systems and standards of fire cover in the interests of efficiency.

- While some Fire Services have led the way in modernising and improving efficiency, not all have followed.
- Strong leadership from FRA members and Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) is needed to overcome resistance to change.

### **Specific Questions to Ask Ourselves**

- How well are we performing?
- What has been effective in improving?
- What impact has the CFS work had?
- How are we targeting to reduce risk?
- Where have we made savings and how do we intend to meet the future savings needed (£110 million)?
- Can money be saved by changing crewing or shifts?
- Do we match resources to risk?
- How well do we engage with the public?
- Can we improve working with our neighbours?
- What activities do we undertake with partners?
- How do we intend to increase numbers of women and ethnic minorities in the workforce?
- How do we intend to reduce the level of sickness absence?
- How does our ill-health retirements compare with others?

### **Areas Highlighted by Audit Commission as Potentially Giving Significant Savings**

- Reduce number of wholetime firefighters required to cover shifts
- Day crewing quieter one-pump wholetime stations
- Taking pumps off the run at night from least busy two-pump wholetime stations
- Replacing second pumps with targeted response vehicles in two-pump day crewed stations
- Reduce false alarms
- Reduce sickness absence
- Collaborative procurement
- Delivering CFS through partners

A significant message through the document is that the top performing Brigades have already managed to deliver significant efficiency savings and if these were replicated by all others then major savings would be possible (potentially up to £200million).

