

BRIEFING NOTE

Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment 2007

Background

Having previously been used in Local Government as a means to assess corporate performance, Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was introduced into the fire and rescue service following the publication of the White Paper "Our fire and rescue service" in 2003.

Assessment is designed to consider performance in relation to the Government's modernisation agenda and expectations contained within the National Framework for the fire and rescue service, published periodically by CLG. The responsibility for the assessment regime has been passed to the Audit Commission.

The first CPA for the fire and rescue service was carried out in 2005/06 following a number of pilots to test the methodology. The CPA report only covers the 46 fire and rescue services in England.

Introduction

The latest fire and rescue service performance was assessed in 2007. The report of the outcomes of the assessment was published on 31 January 2008. CPA comprises three scored elements:

- ? A direction of travel assessment
- ? A use of resources assessment
- ? A service assessment (emergency planning and response)

The direction of travel assessment measures the improvement or deterioration in service delivery including the National Framework priorities. The use of resources measures how well the service manages and uses its resources, in particular, improvements in service and value for money. Service assessment comprises two elements: the operational assessment of service delivery and an analysis of performance information.

The Audit Commission's report can be found on its website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Key findings

According to the Audit Commission all fire and rescue services have improved the safety of local communities since their previous assessment but they also state that there is scope for further improvement. All fire and rescue services are on track to achieve the Government's target for reducing the total number of fires and performing well against the target for deliberate fires. In addition, all but four of the 46 fire and rescue authorities are reported to be on track to meet target for the reduction of fire related deaths and injuries by 2010.

In their report the Audit Commission report on the statistics for fire incidence. What is not evident in the report and arguably remains an issue for the service and CLG to determine is the link between fire and rescue service activity and the achievements attributed to it. The figures shown in the report, reflecting statistics published by CLG, are:

- ? The total number of recorded fires has fallen by 20% in the last five years.
- ? The number of accidental house fires has decreased steadily since 1985.
- ? Deaths and injuries are at their lowest since the 1950s.

Whilst the reductions are welcome, there are however a number of areas where there is concern and a need for further investigation. According to the Audit Commission:

- ? There has been a 6% increase in the number of major fires in businesses
- ? The number of fire-fighter deaths is the highest since 1957

There are also concerns expressed within the report relating to:

- ? lack of effective evaluation of community safety initiatives
- ? performance against targets is starting level off
- ? weak performance management systems
- ? insufficient capacity to deliver priorities
- ? no service demonstrates good practice in relation to equalities and diversity

Underpinning the headline concerns, the report states that a third of fire and rescue services have moved down a category in the direction of travel element of the assessment. There are issues identified in relation to the standards of training and competence between the whole time and retained duty personnel, leading to an inconsistent standard of service delivery. Another area identified in the report for improvement is the assessment that Regional Management Boards are inconsistent in terms of operation and delivery. Finally, no service was assessed as performing well in respect of value for money.

According to the report, all fire and rescue services have effective post-incident debriefing arrangements but some do not apparently act on the lessons learned. This is an issue that gives cause for concern in relation to the effectiveness of operational preparedness and intervention, especially when considered in conjunction with the other issues of competence and the levels of fire-fighter deaths recorded in recent years.

Readers are recommended to consider this briefing note in conjunction with the recent reports published by InFiReS covering “Generic issues arising from the implantation of integrated risk management planning” and “Fire and rescue service operations: An overview”.

Scored assessment

The Audit Commission report contains detailed scores for all FRAs in the three assessed elements: direction of travel, use of resources, and service assessment (see Appendix A). The table shows the comparison with scores achieved in 2005 and the extent to which authorities have remained in similar positions or whose scores have gone down. Of particular concern is the fact that 16 fire and rescue services only scored ‘2’ in the service assessment component.

InFiReS IRMP Toolkit

The IRMP web-based toolkit is available to InFiReS members. It provides information relating to the standards and policies of individual FRAs and their approaches to risk reduction. The web tool is currently being updated with additional fields being introduced including external reports and assessments of FRAs such as CPA.

Issues for consideration

The following are presented for consideration for further action within the InFiReS aims and objectives:

1. To carry out more detailed analysis of the CPA assessment to identify detailed concerns for the commercial estate and the insurance industry.
2. To consider the relationship between CPA assessment scores for individual FRAs and their IRMPS.
3. In 2009 fire CPA will be replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessment. It is important therefore to consider the implications of this new approach in relation to the needs of the Insurance industry.
4. To consider the effectiveness of the CPA methodology in relation to stakeholder concerns about risk reduction in the commercial estate and to make representation to the Audit Commission.
5. To consider the issues raised in relation to CPA operational assessment in conjunction with the wider implications of the outcomes of the HSE improvement notice issued to Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service.
6. To consider whether the increase in fires in commercial premises are attributable to changes in response arrangements or enforcement/inspection regimes.
7. To consider the factors influencing increasing fire-fighter casualty rates and the likely impact on operational effectiveness.

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