

Audit Commission's Performance Assessment **Frequently Asked Questions**

Q1. What did the Audit Commission's performance assessment involve?

In 2006/07 all 47 fire and rescue services in England were assessed in three areas:

- Operational Assurance - our frontline services
- Use of Resources - how well we use our resources
- Direction of Travel -how we're improving on our 'Fair' rating from last year's inspection

This involved the Service completing a self- assessment questionnaire detailing how we think we performed against set criteria. We then received a visit from an inspection team in each of the assessments. They looked at how well we were performing in those areas which led to a score which was benchmarked and then a report was produced.

The Operational Assurance Assessment was combined with our performance against seven performance indicators to give an overall score.

Q2. So what did we get?

East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service received level 3's in all of the assessments.

- Use of Resources - performing well (3 out of 4)
- Direction of Travel - improving well (3 out of 4)
- Operational Assurance - performing well (3 out of 4)

Q3. What are the range of scores available?

Use of Resources and Operational Assurance are scored on the following scale:

- 1 = Adequate performance – below minimum requirements
- 2 = Adequate performance – only at minimum requirements
- 3 = Performing well – consistently above minimum requirements
- 4 = performing strongly – well above minimum requirements

Direction of Travel is scored slightly differently and the scale is as follows:

- 1 = not improving adequately or not improving
- 2 = improving adequately
- 3 = improving well
- 4 = improving strongly

Q4. How was the Overall Operational Assessment Score worked out?

The Overall Operational Assessment Score is calculated by the Audit Commission. It combines the results of a visit by inspectors from the Department for Communities and Local Government and our performance against seven performance indicators.

The assessment looked at how well the Authority is planning, organising and delivering its operational services. The visit took place last year and involved reviewing the Authority's policies and procedures covering risk analysis, prevention and protection, operational preparedness, emergency call management and incident support, and emergency responses to fires, accidents, rescues, major incidents, terrorism and environmental threats.

The performance indicators used by the Audit Commission included the number and type of fires, injuries, deaths, false alarms and attacks.

Q5. What was included in the other two assessments?

The Use of Resources Assessment looked at five areas:

- Financial reporting
- Financial management
- Financial standing
- Internal control
- Value for money

An individual score was awarded to each of these elements and then an overall score given.

The Direction of Travel Assessment looked at a number of areas including how Authorities are modernising and refocusing their services from putting out fires to preventing them happening in the first place. It also looked at how each individual Authority is improving in the areas highlighted following their assessment in 2005. An overall score was awarded.

Q6. Will the 'Fair' rating we received in 2005 for how well the Service is run change?

No. We have the opportunity to be recategorised if we want to pursue it but the Fire Authority and CMT believe that resources can be more effectively used to continue to improve the Service.

Q7. What does this mean to the Service and to me?

This means that our services are performing well, we are continually improving our service and we are providing value for money to our Council taxpayers. The visit showed that our operational services are performing well and we should be proud of this. The summary says:

“ESFA is delivering outcomes against its improvement and corporate priorities. For example, 50 and 15 per cent reduction respectively in arson incidents and attending false automatic fire detection alarms; 24 per cent reduction in dwelling fires where no smoke alarms were fitted last year and a 3 per cent increase in smoke alarms activating since last year. Operationally, the service is performing well.

Performance management is good with 73 per cent of performance indicators improving. Some areas of poor performance are being addressed, whilst others remain, such as shifts lost to sickness.

Its corporate capacity has recently been strengthened, sickness absence is reducing and partnership working is increasing capacity and delivering positive outcomes, particularly in community fire safety. Arrangements to ensure the effectiveness of all partnerships are in development. Its work is increasingly focused on the diverse community it serves, for example, safety visits to the elderly and LIFE courses for young people.

The Service is modernising, delivering efficiencies and is committed to securing value for money. Future challenges include developing its workforce and financial capacity, its processes for assessing value for money and continuing its modernisation.”

Q8. Why didn't Merseyside and Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Services take part in the Operational Assessment?

Both were categorised as “excellent: in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment into how fire and rescue services were managed in 2005. As a result, they were given some freedoms and flexibilities, including exemption from the Operational Assurance Assessment.

Q9. So what now?

We will seek to improve on the areas identified as we continually strive to improve our services to the community we serve. The next round of assessments of fire and rescue services will be late 2007/08.

Q10. Where can I get more information?

You can contact Liz Foster on ext. 2389, look on the intranet or look at the Audit Commission's website at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/fire>