

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority

February 2009



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Introduction

- 1 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003 to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
- 2 The purpose of the corporate assessment is to assess how well the FRA engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of FRA activities. It seeks to answer three headline questions which are underpinned by five specific themes.
 - What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?
 - Ambition.
 - Prioritisation.
 - What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?
 - Capacity.
 - Performance management.
 - What has been achieved?
 - Achievement and Improvement.

Executive summary

- 3 Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority (the FA) is a 'fair' authority. In 2005 it was judged to be a 'weak' authority by the Audit Commission's comprehensive performance assessment. A focus on organisational improvement, coupled with strong operational performance, means the FA can demonstrate improvement in important areas which has been sustained over the last three years. Good outcomes have been achieved for local people. Further improvement is needed which the FA recognises and is working towards.
- 4 The FA is developing clear and challenging ambitions that reflect the needs and diversity of its communities. Its strategic aims complement the two Local Area Agreements it is involved in and meet the requirements of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities. Its aims are based on a thorough understanding of local need and risk, secured from extensive consultation and data analysis. The size and diversity of the area, and delivering outcomes through varied and often complex partnerships, is a challenge the FA understands and is working to meet. Partners understand the FA's strategic aims and are supportive in working towards them.
- 5 The FA's five strategic aims achieve a good balance of national, regional and local priorities to support its ambitions. However, the linkages between important performance plans are inconsistent and the FA cannot be sure all areas of the organisation fully understand what it is trying to achieve. Many service plans lack outcome focussed targets and the integrated personal development system has still to fully implement its staff appraisal programme. As a consequence, the FA cannot evidence how the work of individual staff supports the achievement of its strategic aims and service priorities, nor how the performance of staff is actively managed.
- 6 Good community leadership is demonstrated by the Chairman of the FA, the FA's Members and through the work of the Chief Fire Officer and his management team. Members are becoming increasingly involved in challenging services to improve. The delivery of projects in partnership is a strength and project management arrangements are effective. There are many examples of where the FA is able to make a difference to local communities through its cross-cutting work.
- 7 Staff acknowledge the improvement in access to information about the work of the FA and feel they are involved in setting its strategic direction. Further work is needed to demonstrate to staff the FA understands communication is a two way process. The FA does not yet have the confidence of all staff that important issues raised in a 2008 cultural audit, for instance about managing change effectively and improving management style, will be dealt with effectively.
- 8 The FA is able to take and stick to difficult decisions. It successfully implemented changes to the levels of crewing at fire stations and has built capacity to assist in implementing its improvement plans. These decisions required the careful handling of staff relations and the shifting of significant resources across the organisation, both of which the FA successfully achieved. The FA is therefore able to maintain its focus on achieving priorities through effective decision making.

Executive summary

- 9** The FA has adequate capacity to deliver its priorities. A review of the retained duty system is underway and some additional capacity has been secured through the introduction of community fire safety technicians to undertake duties previously completed by retained fire-fighters. The FA systematically aligns resources to priorities and away from non-priority areas. The underlying financial position is strong though the FA is aware the financial outlook is challenging. It achieved a relatively low level of council tax increase in 2008/09 (4.25 per cent) and is one of the lowest precepting fire authorities in the country. The FA has secured financial efficiency savings enabling additional investment in priority areas. Scrutiny is providing greater challenge to the organisation through a forward programme of reviews linked to business plan priorities although a role in policy development has not yet been defined. In addition, some important strategies for asset management and procurement; and enhanced policies for partnership working have only just been published and are not yet embedded. This means the FA cannot demonstrate its capacity is being maximised or is fully sustainable.
- 10** The FA has invested resources in establishing a performance management framework supported by accurate performance information. Performance is measured against a range of national and local performance indicators. However, performance management is not yet fully effective or embedded.
- 11** Good progress is being made in achieving national framework priorities and the FA's strategic aims for safer and more resilient communities; and for protecting the local environment and the area's heritage. Over the last four years, the FA has sustained and improved its performance. In 2008, the Audit Commission judged the FA to be 'performing strongly' in its Service Assessment. In 2007/08, 45 per cent of indicators were in the best quartile and this compares well to the national picture where the average fire authority reports only 35 per cent of indicators in the best quartile. The number of primary fires has reduced in each of the last four years with performance remaining better than average. Incidences of deliberate fire setting have continued to reduce, with performance remaining in the best quartile over the past three years. However, the number of accidental dwelling fires increased in 2007/08 after a three-year period where performance was steadily improving from a low base and performance has returned to the worst quartile.
- 12** Meeting the needs of the area's diverse communities is a challenge the FA recognises and is tackling positively with its partners. There is an embedded approach towards cohesive communities and there have been positive outcomes for hard to reach groups and parts of the community in greatest need. Innovative projects designed to reduce the risk of fire harm to homeless people; to reduce road deaths among young people and also among military personnel; and cross-cutting projects to tackle anti-social behaviour provide evidence of this.
- 13** The FA has secured national recognition from the Department for Communities and Local Government for its equalities and diversity work which targets new migrant communities for attention using a multi-agency approach. Just as important to the FA, are the many achievements and recognition it receives for its work with local communities. Good examples of this are the FA's effective engagement with community leaders from faith groups and its work with voluntary sector partners such as Age Concern to build cohesive communities.

- 14 The approach to equalities and diversity is adequate overall and there have been some good outcomes. For instance, the FA is one of the best performers in the country for the percentage of women firefighters employed (4.7 per cent in 2007/08). The FA is working to increase the diversity of the workforce though the strategic approach is underdeveloped. This means progress towards the strategic aim for a workforce which is representative of the whole community has been slow to date.

Areas for improvement

- 15** In order to maintain the FA's improvement journey, and ensure a sustained emphasis on achievement of strategic priorities, the FA should tackle the following areas for improvement.
- 16** The FA's business planning processes need to consistently reflect strategic aims and priorities. The 'golden thread' from overarching vision and strategic aims, through to priorities set in the annual plan, Area and Group plans and supporting station and business unit plans needs to be embedded across the organisation. All delivery plans need to include specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed (SMART) outcomes and targets. This would ensure the sustained focus on performance and risk.
- 17** Human resource policies and procedures needs to be fully embedded and plans for an integrated personal development system and associated training also delivered to embed the culture of performance management and review across the organisation. Personal appraisals need to be completed consistently and comprehensively, linked to the FA's strategic aims and operational priorities and underpinned by SMART targets. This will enable the effective performance management of staff and in turn ensure staff fully understand how their work supports achievement of the FA's priorities
- 18** The capacity of the FA needs to be improved by:
 - gaining the confidence of staff through effectively addressing the issues raised in the cultural audit and ensuring communication between staff and managers is visible and two way;
 - embedding the approach to strategic procurement, strategic partnership working and asset management. Recently published strategies provide a good platform for achieving this and need to be fully integrated with existing business and financial plans; and
 - taking more positive action to attract people from minority groups into the service.

Summary of assessment scores

Table 1

Headline questions	Theme	Score*
What is the FRA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?	Ambition	3
	Prioritisation	2
What is the capacity of the FRA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?	Capacity	2
	Performance management	2
What has been achieved?	Achievement and Improvement	3
Score		2
CPA category		Fair
*Key to scores		
1 – below minimum requirements – inadequate performance		
2 – at only minimum requirements – adequate performance		
3 – consistently above minimum requirements – performing well		
4 – well above minimum requirements – performing strongly		

Table 2 Scoring rules for determining CPA category

Excellent	No scores of 2 or 1. At least two scores of 4
Good	No scores of 1. At least four scores of 3 or more
Fair	No score of 1
Weak	No more than two scores of 1. At least three scores of 2 or more
Poor	Any other combination of scores

Context

The locality

- 19** Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority (the Fire Authority) serves the area covered by Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council. The county area of Wiltshire has four district councils although a new unitary authority will be created through the merger of the county and district councils under local government reorganisation in 2009. The county is predominantly rural and has a total population of about 635,000. It covers an area of about 1,800 kilometres and is located in the heart of Southern England.
- 20** The county is rich in sites of historic and pre-historic significance, most notably the world heritage centre at Stonehenge and the Avebury stone circle. The historic town of Salisbury and its cathedral, Longleat and Lacock Abbey attract significant numbers of visitors to the area. There are many sites of Special Scientific Interest, providing environments for rare flora and fauna. Salisbury Plain is one of the largest open grasslands in the country.
- 21** While Wiltshire's towns are separated by large areas of open countryside, the north of the county is dominated by the large urban settlement of Swindon. The town has one of the fastest growing populations in the country and one of the highest rates of employment in the region, mainly in the financial services industry.
- 22** Wiltshire has a significant proportion of the country's military personnel based in its Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) bases. Supporting the Military at Salisbury Plain, RAF Lyneham and the Land Warfare Training Centre means many people in the county area are employed by the public sector. The Fire Authority recognises the specific risks involved in working with the Military and co-operates closely with the forces' fire services.
- 23** There are marked differences between the populations of the Swindon area and the rest of the county in terms of population density, ethnicity and age and this brings particular challenges to the Fire Authority in delivering an equitable service. About 4.8 per cent of the population in Swindon is from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) background which is well above the regional average of 2.3 per cent and compares to the Wiltshire county area proportion of 1.6 per cent. The enlargement of the European Union has led to significant migration from Eastern European countries, although absolute numbers cannot yet be confirmed with confidence. The proportion of older people living in Wiltshire is increasing and the numbers of very elderly are expected to increase at an even higher rate.
- 24** There are pockets of deprivation in Swindon and Salisbury, with eight wards in Swindon among the worst 10 per cent nationally based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

- 25** Transport links are variable with the M4 motorway in the north and the A303 in the south providing links travelling between the west and east of the county. The remainder of the road network is predominantly rural and reducing the number of accidents on the county's roads is a challenge facing the Fire Authority and its partners. The very rural location of some dwellings and people represent additional risks the Fire Authority recognises.

The Fire Authority

- 26** Wiltshire and Swindon Combined Fire Authority consists of 13 elected Members drawn from Wiltshire County Council (nine Members) and Swindon Borough Council (four Members). The Fire Authority introduced new structures in 2006, establishing a Programme Board to oversee four Member-led workstreams designed to complement its strategic aims. The workstreams are People; Communities; Performance and Risk; and Finance and Resources. Members oversee delivery of the Fire Authority's priorities with an annual programme of scrutiny based reviews and other 'task and finish' projects set through each workstream.
- 27** The service is led by the Chief Fire Officer and he is supported by a management team of a Deputy Chief Officer, two Assistant Chief Fire Officers, and two other Directors.
- 28** Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) employs 602 operational staff and 111 support staff. Services are delivered through 18 retained fire stations; one affiliated fire station; three full-time shift fire stations; three day-crewed fire stations; a central Training and Development Centre; a Tri-Service control centre shared with the Police and Ambulance Services and a service headquarters.
- 29** The Service has established two 'areas' to cover the local authority area of Swindon and the county area of Wiltshire. The county area is further sub-divided according to the four District Council boundaries. The Fire Authority works with a range of public and private sector partners and has responsibility for delivering various targets through the two Local Strategic Partnerships for the area.
- 30** The Fire Authority precept in 2008/09 was £57.74 (Band D equivalent dwelling) and this represented an increase of 4.25 per cent compared to the previous year. The level of precept is the third lowest among fire authorities in the country. The revenue budget in 2008/09 amounts to £22.6 million and the Fire Authority plans to invest about £2.5 million in its fixed assets over the next three years.
- 31** The Audit Commission carried out a corporate assessment of the Fire Authority in 2005 and it was judged to be 'weak'. In 2008, the Audit Commission judged the Fire Authority's Direction of Travel to be 'improving adequately' and concluded it was 'performing well' in its use of resources. The Audit Commission's Service Assessment in 2008 is the highest possible rating of 'performing strongly'.

What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

Ambition

- 32** The FA is performing well in this area. The FA is ambitious for itself as well as the local communities it serves. The strong and consistent leadership shown by Members and senior management enables the FA to work effectively with its partners. The FA's Mission Statement is 'to continue providing an efficient and effective fire and rescue service, protecting the people in Wiltshire and Swindon, by working together with others to make our communities safer and stronger' This Mission Statement is articulated through five strategic aims. The Mission Statement and aims are understood by staff and stakeholders through the annual plan and its strap-line of 'your safety: our priority'. Strategic aims strike a balance between national framework requirements, the FA's own priorities, community need and available resources. The FA effectively balances these competing priorities, ensuring ambitions are challenging, but realistic.
- 33** The FA's five strategic aims are:
- to provide a resilient response to fires and other emergencies;
 - to create stronger, safer and more resilient communities;
 - to develop a healthy, safe, well trained workforce which is representative of the whole community;
 - to protect our environment and heritage; and
 - to resource our key aims to ensure maximum efficiency.
- 34** The aims are informed by a comprehensive knowledge of what is important to local people, based on widespread consultation and data obtained from the FA's local risk assessments. Information is also obtained in conjunction with partners such as the areas' five local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, the Military operating in the area and the private sector. The FA uses local intelligence and intelligence gathering tools such as the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) toolkit to analyse risk and to plan for the future. As a result, the FA has a clear understanding of the underlying needs of the area and its role in meeting them. Strategic aims complement those published in the Local Area Agreements (LAAs) for the Wiltshire and the Swindon areas and require effective partnership working and good management leadership, both of which are evident.

What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 35** Strategic aims are understood by Members of the FA, staff and partners. Extensive consultation was completed in preparing the 2008/09 annual plan. The FA completed face to face interviews with 8,000 members of the public and commissioned external consultants to undertake focus groups with a range of groups including young people, older people, people with learning difficulties, the business community and migrant workers. The consultation ensures the strategic aims are understood by the community and in particular, hard to reach groups. It also ensures partnership working is aligned to meeting the needs of the areas' diverse communities.
- 36** There is a comprehensive medium term plan to meet the FA's aims which integrates well with other plans. The FA has fully integrated its four-year business plan (covering the period 2006 to 2010), the CPA improvement plan and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) into an annual plan. The annual plan published in 2008/09 contains an IRMP update which specifies a range of actions linked to the five strategic aims and clear targets for achievement. The annual plan contains a good balance of national framework requirements for prevention, protection and intervention. It also has regard to the FA's business plan, mapping the business plan priorities published in 2006 to the five strategic aims. This means the longer term aims of the organisation are effectively underpinned by shorter term targets and priorities which are responsive to changing circumstances.
- 37** Staff appraisal systems, introduced in 2008, are not yet systematic and the performance management culture needed to deliver the FA's aims is not fully evident. Initiatives such as the Chartermark programme are assisting in raising awareness of the importance of how individual performance contributes to corporate ambition and achievement. However, individual appraisal outcomes are not linked to service plans or the Annual Plan and the overall approach to the management of staff performance is not fully embedded.
- 38** The FA has a good understanding of the linked issues of population growth and new housing development, and its own ambitions for resilient communities. It has worked closely with the local authority in Swindon to ensure the FA's ambitions are fully understood and has successfully lobbied for inclusion of additional fire station capacity in the masterplan for the area. This demonstrates how the FA is able to take a longer term view to influence the investment needed to tackle known risk through effective partnership working.
- 39** Clear political leadership is evident and effective. The Chairman of the FA is well regarded both within and outside the FA. Members of the FA are active and enthusiastic about their responsibilities and the Programme Board has brought further prominence and focus to their work. The FA is looking ahead to the new Unitary Authority planned for the Wiltshire county area in 2009 and the members and Chief Fire Officer have successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a Brigade Manager to represent the service on the new Accountable Bodies Group, which replaces the Wiltshire Strategic Board and which will oversee implementation of the LAA. The FA is therefore able to gain recognition for the importance of its ambitions and the contribution they make to the wider agenda of social, economic and environmental well being, contributing to improvements in quality of life.

What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 40** The work of the Chairman of the FA and the Chief Fire Officer to engage the FA's key partners means external communication is effective. Partners understand the FA's ambitions and the progress being made towards them. A new partnership magazine was published in October 2008 and this was circulated to all existing and potential partners the FA had targeted, such as employers who may consider allowing their staff to become retained firefighters. This allows partners to understand the work of the FA and its priorities.
- 41** Internal communication and engagement is not fully effective. Staff feel there is still work to do to ensure communication is visibly a 'two-way' process. Some remain unconvinced the action needed to address concerns raised in the staff cultural audit about managing change effectively and improving management style will be taken. However, staff acknowledge the increasing availability of information through regular bulletins and regard the monthly 'QM' magazine highly. Staff also recognise the increasing use of focus groups to discuss issues such as the annual plan, internal reviews of capacity and the cultural audit completed in June 2008. This means staff have the opportunity to understand the organisation's changing priorities and to influence them.
- 42** Effective partnership working is allowing the FA to deliver its aims for the local area while supporting achievement of regional objectives. The Chairman of the FA was the first Chairman of the South West Regional Management Board (RMB) and this has assisted in raising awareness of the FA's contribution to the SW regional agenda. The Chairman of the FA represents the LGA nationally on the implementation of Regional Control Centres and the Chief Fire Officer participates in national research programmes for safer operational procedures with fires involving acetylene cylinders, car fires and car park construction. The FA's investment in a tri-partite agreement to share a control centre with Wiltshire's Ambulance Service and the Police Service means it understands the benefits of joint working. Learning from this partnership the FA is making an important contribution, in a difficult environment, to the development of the business case for the South West Regional Control Centre. The FA therefore contributes effectively to achievement of national and regional priorities.
- 43** Partnership working and the alignment of key delivery plans and resources towards community outcomes is effective. The FA works with partners to deliver its own ambitions and to achieve the objectives set in the two LAAs for the Wiltshire and Swindon areas. Most prominently, the work of the FA supports achievement of priorities set in the Safer and Stronger block of both LAAs. Many projects led by the FA support outcomes expected across other themes such as Young People and Cohesive Communities. For instance, the FA leads high profile projects such as the 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' programme which targets young people to improve road safety. The project was evaluated in 2007 and has now been extended to include another hard to reach group (military personnel returning from operations). The 'Salamander' project, which is tackling anti-social behaviour, originally in the Salisbury area, but now across Wiltshire and Swindon is another example of how the FA is able to work effectively in a cross-cutting way with its partners.

Prioritisation

- 44** The FA is performing adequately in this area. It has priorities that reflect national and regional agendas, and local need. The 21 priorities stated in the four year business plan (2006 to 2010), recognised by the FA as not providing sufficient focus, have been refined into the five strategic aims which were adopted by the FA in 2008 and published in the annual plan. The strategic aims now provide good focus to the work of the organisation. However, the inconsistency among service delivery plans, and the varying use of SMART targets weakens communication of priorities.
- 45** The FA uses consultation effectively to develop its strategic aims. It has a comprehensive knowledge of the diverse communities across Wiltshire and Swindon based on feedback from partners, notably through the two Local Strategic Partnerships operating in the area but also in delivering projects with private and public sector partners. The extensive consultation undertaken on the 2008/09 annual plan, which included structured focus groups with representatives from hard to reach groups, such as migrant communities, means the FA can be confident its priorities are the right ones.
- 46** The FA's vision and strategic aims translate into clear priorities and these are understood across the organisation and among partners. It uses intelligence gathering tools such as the FSEC toolkit, supplemented with effective local knowledge of risk, to ensure its priorities support achievement of ambitions. Priorities are therefore underpinned with effective arrangements for understanding risk among the areas' diverse communities.
- 47** Short term priorities are set and monitored through the annual plan and service plans. Medium term priorities are included in the four-year business plan and map across to the annual plan. Longer term priorities for the FA are included in the two local area agreements and sustainable community strategies for the area, with the FA being held to account for performance through the two Local Strategic Partnership Boards. The FA can therefore evidence how it is delivering its own priorities and the contribution of partners.
- 48** The annual corporate plan clearly articulates the FA's vision, outlines the challenges it is facing and the action it proposes to take over the next 12 months. It also integrates the IRMP update and maps the 21 priorities contained in the four-year business plan to the five strategic aims. The annual plan therefore provides a clear context for cross-cutting work undertaken within the FA and in partnership. The mapping of priorities to strategic aims provides further context to the FA's medium term objectives.

What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 49** The links between strategic aims, medium term priorities and service delivery plans are not comprehensively understood across the organisation. Some service plans, including those at fire stations, work wholly to the 21 priorities published in the four-year business plan and do not map across to the five strategic aims. Other service plans, including those published by the corporate centre, work wholly to the five strategic aims. Importantly, the Area and Group plans covering fire stations in a local authority area, comprehensively address the five strategic aims, ensuring operational performance underpins achievement of the annual plan and IRMP. This means the FA is able to work effectively towards its priorities and the inconsistency among plans is not adversely affecting service delivery. However, the inconsistency does mean the FA cannot be sure all areas of the organisation fully understand what it is trying to achieve and the contribution individuals make to the overarching vision. The FA recognises this inconsistency and has an opportunity to address the situation in preparing its business plan for the four year period commencing in 2010.
- 50** Resources are systematically and transparently allocated to priorities. The annual budget setting process requires Members to consider a range of potential precept increases and to discuss how resources should be prioritised. The FA has taken, and stuck to some difficult decisions to achieve its priorities. For instance, substantial resources (amounting to £600,000) have been switched to priority areas such as organisational improvement and enhancing managerial capacity, and away from non-priority areas, through the choices exercised by Members in setting the annual budget. Service managers are now being held to account for performance through the work of the Programme Board and its Member-led workstreams, allowing the FA to focus on service priorities and how these are delivered. These processes are fully integrated and the FA now has the platform needed to meet the financial and operational challenges which lie ahead.
- 51** Clear and consistent direction is provided by Members and senior management towards achieving priorities. Strong evidence of this is provided through the way the FA is preparing for the transition of the Wiltshire County Council area to a new Unitary Authority by June 2009. It has successfully lobbied, through the work of the Chief Fire Officer, to have the inclusion of a Brigade Manager to represent the service on the new Accountable Bodies Group, which replaces the Wiltshire Strategic Board and which will have the key responsibility for overseeing delivery of the LAA. The FA has established arrangements for succession planning through the work of the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer with Wiltshire County Council. In addition, the FA has maintained effective partnership working and staff relations as the national programme for Regional Control Centres is implemented. The FA is not distracted by these difficult issues and maintains its focus on its priorities throughout.
- 52** The Programme Board has brought greater focus to the FA's priorities and how the scrutiny review programme can support the prioritisation of resources. The forward programme of work includes reviews of support services; staff development and appraisal; community engagement and youth strategy; and the role of the Fire Authority within the region. The FA is therefore able to evidence how it is planning to support achievement, and the future development of priorities.

What is the FA, together with its partners, trying to achieve?

- 53** The FA has a focused and effective approach, through the work of its Members and senior management, to agree priority outcomes with partners for improving public safety. The negotiation of targets set in the two LAAs for reducing the number of deliberate fires, improving home fire safety and reducing road traffic accidents support achievement of the FA's strategic aims for safer and more resilient communities and provide evidence of its effective partnership working.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Capacity

- 54** The FA performs adequately in this area. Officers and Members are clear about their roles and decision making is becoming increasingly effective. Mechanisms are in place to deliver the improvement the FA expects. Recruitment and training programmes are consistent across all types of firefighters and the FA has been successful in using community based initiatives to attract retained staff into the service. Flexible working and home working as well as flexible retirement plans are allowing more staff to remain in the service as their lifestyles change. Reviews of fire station crewing have improved capacity through the redeployment of six whole-time fire-fighter posts and the conversion to a fully staffed retained station. Project based reviews of the work undertaken by retained fire-fighters have released some capacity and secured better value for money. Overall, the capacity of the retained service is adequate and a comprehensive review of the retained duty system is underway in accordance with the IRMP.
- 55** The performance management of staff is underdeveloped and personal appraisals are not always completed consistently. The FA is beginning to establish a track record, through the work of the Programme Board and its Member-led workstreams, for addressing poor performance in line with strategic priorities. Members are systematically involved in the work of the Fire and Rescue Service and there is an increasing commitment to equalities and diversity. The focus on improving value for money is strong and the FA can demonstrate it is a low-cost organisation when compared to others. Financial management is effective and risk management is becoming increasingly embedded in the work of the FA.
- 56** Corporate governance arrangements are effective. Four Member-led workstreams for People; Communities; Performance and Risk; and Finance and Resources have been established as part of the Programme Board and support achievement of the FA's priorities. The Vice-Chairman of the Authority chairs the Programme Board and each lead Member has a deputy. The management arrangements, and the annual programme of scrutiny reviews, ensure all Members are involved in the work of the fire and rescue service.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 57** The FA has a good track record of using its capacity to deliver its improvement priorities and contribute to effective partnership working. The key actions stated in the CPA improvement plan prepared in 2006 were completed on target. Management involved in key strategic partnerships and officers across the organisation feel empowered to make decisions and this is recognised as a strength by partners. Nineteen new posts were created in 2007 and a new Brigade Manager post was established in 2008. Industrial relations are constructive and the various Trade Unions are engaged with effectively. Operational capacity has been enhanced through the increasing use of case and relationship managers to work with partners and to provide support to firefighters. This has had a positive impact for local people such as the effective multi-agency working which is in place to assist vulnerable young people at risk of becoming involved in fire-setting. The FA is therefore using its capacity effectively to deliver its priorities and achieve better community outcomes.
- 58** In 2007 the FA effectively addressed overspends on the retained duty system overtime budget through a review of the work undertaken by retained fire-fighters. The FA identified a number of tasks, such as installing smoke detectors, which could be undertaken by other qualified personnel. This led to the introduction of community safety technicians who are paid at an hourly rate which is 70 per cent of the normal fire-fighter rate. The FA has therefore increased the capacity of retained fire-fighters and brought the overtime budget back on track through reviewing the workload of retained personnel.
- 59** Targeted community based initiatives are assisting in recruiting more retained firefighters. Open evenings were organised by staff at five fire stations between January and July 2008. Sixty one people attended the events and from 12 applications submitted, eight new retained firefighters joined the service. The initiative is being extended to other stations to involve coffee mornings aimed at parents with young children and evidences how the FA is able to work innovatively, empowering staff to build capacity in areas where recruitment has been problematic.
- 60** The FA's arrangements for undertaking staff appraisals are at an early stage of implementation. All staff have a training plan and there is an increasing acknowledgement among staff that identified training needs are being met. Where reviewed, personal appraisals are inadequate. There are no SMART targets covering personal performance and few linkages to the business planning process. This is an acknowledged weakness the FA is working to address. In the short term, all staff are due to have an appraisal over the next 12 months and resources have been identified to provide all line managers with training to assist in implementation. The suite of Human Resource policies and procedures needed to ensure the effective performance management of staff is not yet embedded and this means the performance management of staff is not yet fully effective.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 61** The FA works effectively with partners to achieve the objectives set in the two LAAs for the Wiltshire and Swindon areas. It has effective project management arrangements and this enables the FA to work in partnership to achieve the outcomes it is responsible for in both LAAs. For instance, the FA is using its risk based approach to Home Fire Safety Checks to meet the target set in the Wiltshire LAA for reducing the number of domestic fires. It has established an arson reduction team designed to tackle deliberate fire setting in the Swindon area to work in partnership to reduce anti-social behaviour. The FA is therefore able to work effectively towards joint outcomes published in the LAAs it is involved in.
- 62** The FA is working to ensure all partnerships are productive and reviewed its partnership arrangements using an external consultant in August 2008. The review highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to partnership working and the need to prioritise the partnerships the FA is involved in. A revised partnership policy and guidance were published in October 2008, providing a comprehensive framework to sustain the FA's effective approach to partnership working.
- 63** The FA works effectively with its partners to plan services around the changing population, working with partners to address the risks associated with future population growth and housing development. It has been closely involved in developing the Swindon masterplan and the FA's proposals to increase the number of fire stations in the area have been adopted in the latest version of the plan to be considered by the Department for Communities and Local Government. In addition to the community based projects highlighted above, the FA is involved in the joint delivery of services through the Tri-Service control centre operated with the Police and Ambulance Services. It has also formalised its work with the Ambulance Service on co-responding to incidents and now secures additional income of about £100,000 per annum from the Ambulance Service. The FA is able to influence its partners to improve its capacity over a long term planning horizon.
- 64** Risk assessment is integrated into strategic and service planning, although the linkages with performance management are inconsistent. A continually updated corporate risk register supports a strategic approach to risk management and since April 2007, the register has been reviewed by the Business Management Team (and previously by the Management Board). The Strategic Risk Register has been considered as a standing item by the Programme Board since November 2006. The annual business planning process considers risk and some business plans, such as Area and Group plans (which cover fire stations in a local authority area) deal with risk in some detail. Other service plans, at the fire station level for instance and among corporate departments, provide few details about risk and do not evidence how risk is managed. There is nevertheless, a clear understanding of and commitment to reducing risk across the organisation.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 65** Financial management is effective and the FA has a systematic approach to setting the annual budget and the medium-term revenue and capital financial plans. In 2008/09, the annual budget setting process offered Members a choice of three levels of council tax increase in determining the annual precept. This encouraged a more transparent debate about the FA's priorities and how these should be financed. Financial standing is sound and supported by effective financial management, adequate reserves, an embedded approach to securing value for money and a track record of securing planned efficiency savings, amounting to £296,000 in 2007/08 and a total of £788,000 over the last four years. Joint financial planning with Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council has highlighted the local authorities' resource bases are likely to reduce and that the financial outlook for the area is challenging. The FA is nevertheless well-prepared for the difficult decisions which will be necessary in preparing its 2009/10 budget and future business plans.
- 66** The FA does not have a strategic approach to procurement. A full-time Procurement Manager was appointed in April 2008 to develop the FA's approach and a procurement strategy was published in August 2008. The strategy is not yet underpinned by a suite of policies and guidance for officers though the FA aims to address this in 2009. In addition the approach to asset management is underdeveloped. An asset management plan has been prepared but it is not fully integrated with the business and financial planning processes. Investment has been made in an asset management system to track the usage of assets throughout their useful life. However, the FA is not working systematically towards maximising its capacity through its arrangements for strategic procurement and asset management.
- 67** Investment in ICT is allowing the FA to achieve its objectives efficiently and effectively. For instance, the provision of broadband in all fire stations is enabling better management of resources and exchange of information. Some 40 per cent of staff access the FA's IT systems from home over a typical seven day period. The introduction of handheld computers means Home Fire Risk Assessments can be completed more efficiently. The public can now use the FA's website to undertake on-line Home Fire Safety Risk Assessments, providing the same level of detail to assist them as a visit to their home. The FA is therefore investing in its capacity to enable better delivery of its services.
- 68** The approach to equalities and diversity is adequate overall though there have been some good outcomes. For instance, the FA is one of the best performers in the country for the percentage of women firefighters employed (4.7 per cent in 2007/08). It has achieved Level 1 of the Local Government Equality Standard and has plans in place to reach Level 3 by April 2009. The approach to undertaking equalities impact assessment is embedded and all strategies, policies and procedures have been reviewed since April 2007.
- 69** The FA's commitment to the agenda is developing, demonstrated by the recent establishment of an equalities and diversity group, led by the Chief Fire Officer and the lead Member who is the equalities and diversity champion. The work of the Group is at an early stage and an action plan is being developed. Awareness has been raised across the organisation through the provision of equalities and diversity training to all staff over the past twelve months. However, only eleven of the FA's 602 staff are from BME communities and this is well below the average level for the area.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

Performance management

- 70** The FA is performing adequately in this area. The FA has a developing performance management culture and is building from a low base. Good performance information systems are in place and support the effective delivery of services. Corporate workstreams are rigorously managed. While performance is measured in some detail, not all data produced systematically informs decision making or results in action. Good quality performance information is shared widely across the organisation though it is not always linked to strategic priorities. Use of data collected about groups at a greater risk of death or injury from fire and other hazards is resulting in better community outcomes, and risk awareness is strong. Monitoring delivery of longer term outcomes in partnership and benchmarking is underdeveloped but improving. Scrutiny, through the work of the Performance Board is developing.
- 71** Performance data against national and local performance indicators is presented in a clear and understandable way. Comparative charts are produced that compares performance against indicators and other family group authorities. The FA has invested in performance systems to increase the knowledge and understanding of risks within local communities. It uses commercial software to produce performance information that is relevant and consistent and is focused on building community intelligence with key partners and stakeholders to support more effective data sharing. Incident data is mapped by output areas (postcode level) and by performance indicators, using a traffic light system to indicate success.
- 72** There is a corporate approach to maintaining accurate, up to date and appropriate data, underpinned by a comprehensive data quality strategy with clear roles and responsibilities and SMART targets, linked to the IRMP and partnership working. A data warehouse system is nearing completion, which will allow the FA to combine the data from a number of information systems and make it available in a consistent way so that enquiries can be made across the entire data set. This means that service planning is well-informed by an understanding of local risk.
- 73** There is an inconsistent approach to managing performance across the organisation. The performance management framework links the FA vision and five strategic aims with an operational review of performance against targets. The FA's priorities are fully integrated within the IRMP and Medium Term Financial Plan. The FA uses a number of methods, including the small number of public complaints followed up via personal interviews, to learn how to improve. It also uses its links with BME and migrant worker communities to take action, such as fire-fighters learning the Polish language to communicate better with migrant workers on community fire safety. There are also clear service delivery performance targets across the two Areas and four Groups, at station level and in the risk register that are well understood by Members, officers and frontline staff.
- 74** However, there is no standard format across Area, Group and individual station plans. Group plans are prepared using the newer five strategic aims as output measures but station plans, prepared earlier in the process, use the 21 service priorities stated in the four-year business plan as a template. This means front line staff do not consistently understand links between operational and corporate plans which hampers a corporate approach to service delivery.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 75** Members play an effective role in performance management. They monitor performance at a number of levels across the organisation, through the Programme Board, where they monitor performance on their allocated workstreams and in more detail, through their involvement in station audits. Members receive regular reports about performance, including monthly on corporate workstreams, using the traffic-light system. There is a forward programme of station audits where Members receive updates on the station plans before conducting their reviews. Also, a business case must be prepared for all projects before they are initiated. The evaluation of project outcomes is becoming more systematic, with the Programme Board receiving reports from officers accordingly. This enables Members to use performance information to help them understand the impacts of the strategic decisions made by the FA.
- 76** A performance management culture is not fully embedded. It is being strengthened through the good engagement of managers. All operational managers up to, and including, Brigade Manager level must undertake a minimum of four operational Quality Audits each year and the policy is being expanded to include the equivalent non-uniformed officers to audit non-operational events. Frontline managers also have a good understanding of their expected performance against operational targets. They receive regular performance information and use it to drive improvement such as tackling high levels of sickness absence at station level. The FA is increasingly identifying those staff with the potential to progress their careers quickly, supporting them in securing the accreditations they need. Appraisals however are not undertaken across the organisation though plans are in place to address this. While the FA has the framework in place to manage its performance effectively, it is not consistently applied. So, the FA is missing the opportunity to reinforce the importance it places on performance management to all staff.
- 77** Knowledge about performance is used to drive continuous improvement in community outcomes. The FA knows how it is performing against LAA indicators. These are reported quarterly, and include a briefing note outlining the reasons for over or under-performance for the period, together with proposed corrective action. Operational targets are SMART, and enable Area and Group Managers to manage performance. Variances from targets are reported monthly to the officers' Management Board and quarterly to the Programme Board in its scrutiny role. Where necessary, action is taken to bring performance back on track. The reconfiguration of the co-responding service undertaken in partnership with the Ambulance Service provides good evidence of this. Service levels were adjusted based on a risk assessment and a memorandum of understanding was drawn up which requires the Ambulance Trust to make a contribution to operational costs. Similarly, identifying young soldiers returning from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were more likely to be involved in serious road accidents, the 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' project has been extended to military personnel with one presentation completed and others planned for 450 soldiers at Tidworth and another at RAF Lyneham. This means the organisation uses knowledge to drive improvement in services.

What is the capacity of the FA, including its work with partners, to deliver what it is trying to achieve?

- 78** Scrutiny is improving but is not yet embedded in the work of the FA. Programme Board members have been trained in their scrutiny role by their nominating authorities. A forward programme of scrutiny reviews is in place, based on priorities and risk. For example, exception reports highlighted high levels of sickness information and Members requested more regular reports to monitor the outcome of management action. However, a role in policy development is only developing. As a result, Members are only partially delivering a scrutiny role which drives improvements to services.
- 79** Performance management of longer-term community outcomes in partnership considers quantitative outcomes and is now beginning to consider qualitative aspects as well. The LAA in Wiltshire specifies targets relating to the fire and rescue service, such as reductions in fires, and these are widely reported on. There have been some good outcomes, such as a reduction in the numbers of young people at risk of committing anti-social behaviour through the work of the Salamander project. Some qualitative outcomes from intervention work are emerging but the overall impact is not yet fully apparent. For instance, the FA is working with the Wiltshire High Sherriff's Charity to deliver extended Salamander courses to young people. The young people involved have often come to the attention of the criminal justice system and are considered by the FA and its partners such as the Youth Offending Service to be at risk of committing further anti-social behaviour. The extended courses encourage the young people involved to become more responsible citizens and the FA can therefore demonstrate it understands the importance of working towards better quality of life outcomes as well as its quantitative targets.
- 80** Benchmarking is developing well but at an early stage. The FA is beginning to compare costs and performance with other similar fire services to identify further savings and share good practice. This includes performance against 'Family Group 2' which involves 13 FAs of similar area and size comparing performance across 16 BVPIs. Members used this approach when they found that sickness was too high and a project on fitness was designed as a result. The 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' project has also been benchmarked against the other FAs running the same programme. The FA is thus able to evaluate the success of its projects using benchmark information though the approach is not yet systematic.
- 81** The FA has a stated aim and clear objectives to secure value for money and there is an effective framework for monitoring and reviewing financial and service performance. Costs and performance are understood by staff and outcomes challenged by managers and Members through regular performance monitoring and briefings. The FA therefore secures good value for money from its operations.

What has been achieved?

Achievement and improvement

82 The FA is performing well in this area. It has a good balance of national and local priorities and achievement is evident in most areas. Good progress is being made in achieving national framework priorities, the objectives set in the two LAAs and towards the FA's own strategic aims for safer, more resilient communities and protecting the local environment. There have been some significant achievements that are leading to a better quality of life for local people. The FA uses its understanding of local need to direct its efforts towards areas of greatest risk across its diverse communities and minority groups. Many of these achievements have been secured in partnership, involving public and private sector organisations, providing strong evidence the FA is able to work innovatively to achieve long-term and sustainable benefits for the area.

Providing a resilient response to fires and other emergencies

- 83** The FA's approach to the prevention of fires is effective. For example, the FA has provided clear guidance to its crews regarding regulatory fire safety and post incident inspections. This means crews can provide appropriate support to owners and occupiers of premises with access to expert fire safety officers should they be required at the scene. Fire-fighters are therefore confident in delivering fire safety advice when it has maximum impact on modifying the behaviour of those most at risk of fire.
- 84** The FA is meeting its standards for attendance times for dwelling fires and surpassed its targets for attending road traffic collisions as at the end of September 2008. The FA has consciously removed its previous discriminatory 'post code lottery' attendance standards and makes no distinction between rural and urban areas, and aims to have an appliance in attendance to dwelling fires within ten minutes of alert on 80 per cent of occasions and within 20 minutes of alert on 98 per cent of occasions.
- 85** Working through its three Area and Group based relationship managers, the FA is able to engage effectively with local communities and its partners as risks and sensitive issues emerge. The FA demonstrated its ability to respond to community concerns quickly and effectively following an arson attack on a Muslim household in the Swindon area. The action taken by the fire and rescue service, to maintain a visible presence in the area in the aftermath of the attack and to work with the local authority to install sprinklers in the home affected, assisted in restoring community relations at a time of high anxiety for the area. Therefore, the FA maintains clear and sustained focus on meeting the needs of its diverse communities.

What has been achieved?

Creating stronger, safer and more resilient communities

- 86** The FA is making good progress towards national framework priorities. It has a prominent role within the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) through the work of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer for Communities as Vice-Chair. This has led to the inclusion of the Wiltshire Road Safety Partnership in all Wiltshire LSPs, allowing the FA to pursue its strategic aim for resilient communities effectively in partnership. The FA also identified the lack of an integrated approach among the emergency services to incidents involving mass decontamination as a significant risk to the area. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer raised the issue with the LRF and now leads a sub-group to review data from such incidents to enable learning across all agencies involved. The sub-group co-ordinates the LRF's response to incidents involving Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear contamination. The FA is therefore able to work with its partners to address national framework priorities.
- 87** The FA targets efforts well with partners and is achieving good outcomes for local communities. It is able to work towards achieving its strategic aims for community safety through complex and cross-cutting partnerships. The 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' project has resulted in reduced casualties among young drivers and has been extended to military personnel returning from operations abroad. The project involves partners from the Police and Ambulance Services, local authorities and the voluntary sector. It also involves the private sector and has secured long term funding from a major car manufacturer based in the area. The worth of this project has been identified by the Chartermark awarding body as being 'compliant plus' and helped with the Chartermark being awarded for the fourth successive year. It has resulted in a reduction in the number of deaths among the target group of 16 to 24 year olds from 61 to 46 persons between 2006 and 2007.
- 88** Another example of how the FA is able to work innovatively with partners is the development of a project in the Trowbridge area which targets homeless people for education and safety advice provided by FA personnel in partnership with other agencies, including the voluntary sector. Each attendee receives a personal protection pack designed by the FA, containing items to help with personal hygiene, accidental fire reduction, safety and shelter and a high visibility backpack to give protection on the roads at night. The FA is therefore able to target some of the most vulnerable and hard to reach people in its local communities for safety advice.
- 89** In addition to these high profile projects, the FA is involved in an array of local community work to improve the quality of life of those living and working in the area. For instance, 'Streetscene' projects allow firefighters to work with residents in targeted areas and in partnership with the local authorities to reduce levels of graffiti, fly-posting and detritus. In addition, some fire stations encourage young people to become 'fire-cadets', educating them in the work of the fire service in an accessible way. All of these projects are having a positive effect on the safety and cohesion of local communities, improving their quality of life and the local environment.

- 90** Other successful projects have targeted disaffected young people and anti-social behaviour. The Salamander project is tackling anti-social behaviour and about 60 per cent of the young people known to the Youth Offending Service who have attended the course have not re-offended. The Juvenile Fire Setters programme is providing education and support to young people up to the age of 17 involved in arson. Over 400 young people have attended the programme and discussed the implications of their actions with trained advisors and there have been only isolated cases of re-offending. Overall, the number of arsons reported across Wiltshire is falling though there are pockets of high activity in the Swindon area which the FA is continuing to tackle.
- 91** Prevention activity is effectively targeted and there has been a reduction in the number of fires in each of the last four years, with performance at the median level for the country in 2007/08 when adjusted for deprivation. The LAA in Swindon contains stretch targets to reduce the number of deliberate fires and these were reached through the targeted work of the FA and its partners among neighbourhoods most at risk. The number of deaths arising from accidental fires has reduced and performance in 2007/08 was better than the national average at 0.31 deaths per 100,000 population. The number of injuries from accidental dwelling fires increased slightly in 2007/08 to 2.64 per 100,000 population which remained better than the national average and significantly better than the 2004/05 position of 5.08 deaths per 100,000 population.
- 92** The FA successfully revised its approach to undertaking home fire safety checks following the failure to secure sustainable reductions in the number of fires, deaths and injuries between 2004 and 2007. There has been an improvement in performance against a range of performance indicators for reducing fires and the number of deaths. The target for installing smoke alarms was withdrawn in 2008 and the FA now ensures each request for a home fire safety check is risk assessed before approval. The FA is also concentrating its efforts on those groups it has identified as most at risk on the basis of information provided by partners such as the voluntary sector, the Primary Care Trust and local authorities. The approach ensures the FA's resources are targeted where they are most needed.

Developing a healthy, safe, well-trained workforce which is representative of the whole community

- 93** The approach to reducing sickness absence is not fully effective or consistently applied. Sickness absence levels for all staff have improved over the last 12 months but remain in the worst quartile when compared to other fire authorities. The FA recognises the adverse effect sickness absence is having on its capacity and has introduced initiatives to improve the situation. For instance, it has developed a fitness programme for all staff to reduce the number of injuries at work and to promote healthy lifestyles. It is however, too early for outcomes to be measured from the introduction of these initiatives.

What has been achieved?

- 94** The FA has established arrangements for succession planning through the work of the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer with Wiltshire County Council. In addition, the FA has maintained effective partnership working and staff relations as the national programme for Regional Control Centres is implemented. There has been some success in attracting retained firefighters into the service as a result of community based recruitment activities. However, there are only isolated examples of the positive action needed to encourage more people from minority communities to join the service. There are good examples of where the FA is supporting high achievers to progress their careers through enhanced development programmes.
- 95** The FA has a comprehensive framework for allowing staff to work flexibly. A flexible retirement policy allows staff to reduce their hours or grades to suit their circumstances. Staff who are parents or carers are able to adapt the number of hours they work or their work location to according to their personal circumstances. The FA's homeworking policy is underpinned with effective ICT arrangements, enabling staff to access their IT systems from home. The cultural audit undertaken in 2008 concluded that 70 per cent of support staff felt working patterns enabled them to ensure a good work-life balance.

Protecting the environment and heritage

- 96** There is a strategic approach to protecting the local environment and this is reflected in prevention and intervention policies. For instance, the FA is a supporter and member of the National Fire Sprinkler Network since its inception and uses its position to encourage and promote the installation of sprinklers in educational, commercial, residential and domestic premises in the area. There have been good outcomes, with sprinklers being installed in the homes of those at risk of fire and successful partnership work with the County Council to include sprinklers in the design of new schools in Wiltshire. At the time of our inspection visit, the FA successfully concluded its discussions with Salisbury Cathedral to install sprinklers at the historic site. The FA is therefore able to achieve its strategic aim of protecting the environment and the area's heritage through its policies for reducing fire risk.
- 97** While there are good outcomes from FA's prevention and protection activities, the FA has not fully embedded the approach to the environment across the organisation. The FA published an environmental policy in 2006 and has followed this up by raising awareness through the staff magazine about the importance of protecting the environment. However, the FA has not undertaken a review of its own carbon footprint and has not put its environmental policy fully into practice by setting stretch targets for improvement.

Resourcing key aims to ensure maximum efficiency

- 98** Over the last four years, the FA has sustained and improved its performance in most areas in terms of the Audit Commission's Best Value Performance Indicators, as adjusted for deprivation. In 2008, the FA was judged to be performing strongly following the Audit Commission's Service Assessment. In 2007/08, 45 per cent of indicators were in the best quartile and this compares well to the national picture where the average fire authority reports only 35 per cent of indicators in the best quartile. An extensive programme of home fire safety visits and the targeting of at-risk groups has resulted in a sustained improvement in performance. The number of primary fires has reduced in each of the last four years with performance remaining above average. Incidences of deliberate fire setting have continued to reduce, with performance remaining in the best quartile over the past three years. However, the number of accidental dwelling fires increased in 2007/08 after a three year period where performance was steadily improving from a low base and performance has returned to the worst quartile.
- 99** High levels of satisfaction are expressed by the public about the work of the FA. In 2008, the FA's own survey indicated 87 per cent of people were satisfied or very satisfied with its work, contrasting with the DCLG survey undertaken in 2007 when only 49 per cent of the public were satisfied with the performance of the FA. The FA has also secured national recognition for its work with diverse communities through an award from the Department for Communities and Local Government. Just as important to the FA, are the many achievements and recognition it receives for its work with local communities. By actively seeking the views of hard to reach groups through its consultations and community based work, the FA is able to make a positive impact.

Appendix 1 – Framework for Corporate Assessment

- 1 This corporate assessment was carried out under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, under which the Audit Commission has power to inspect local authorities' arrangements for securing continuous improvement. The results of the corporate assessment contribute to the determination of the overall CPA category for an authority, which the Audit Commission is required to assess and report on under section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 2 The Fire Authority's (FA's) self assessment provided a key resource in focusing the assessment activity which included consideration of:
 - key documentation, including the FA's improvement plan;
 - updated performance indicators and performance data; and
 - interviews and meetings attended.
- 3 The assessment for Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority was undertaken by a team from the Audit Commission and took place over the period from 13 to 31 October 2008.
- 4 This report has been discussed with the FA, which has been given the opportunity to examine the Audit Commission's assessment. This report will be used as the basis for improvement planning by the FA.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 0844 798 1212, Fax: 0844 798 2945, Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

www.audit-commission.gov.uk
