



# Comprehensive Area Assessment

Fire and rescue service

Effective from 01 April 2009



## Introduction

- 1 The Audit Commission is responsible for providing explicit assurance that the 46 fire and rescue authorities and services in England meet the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework (the National Framework) when providing services to local people and businesses.<sup>I</sup>
- 2 This Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) Fire and Rescue Service Framework sets out how the assessment of fire and rescue services in England will be delivered from April 2009. It should be read in conjunction with the CAA framework document which sets out the broader context of CAA and provides further relevant detail for fire and rescue services.<sup>II</sup>

## Framework overview

- 3 CAA is the independent assessment of how well people are being served by their local public services. All audit and inspection activity for fire and rescue services will be undertaken within the CAA framework. There are two main elements, which will inform each other:
  - an area assessment that looks at how well local public services are delivering better results for local people in agreed priorities, such as health, economic prospects and community safety, and how likely they are to improve in the future; and
  - an organisational assessment of individual fire and rescue services, combining the appointed auditor's assessment of value for money (through the use of resources theme) with an assessment of the fire and rescue service's performance (through the managing performance theme) into a single judgement.

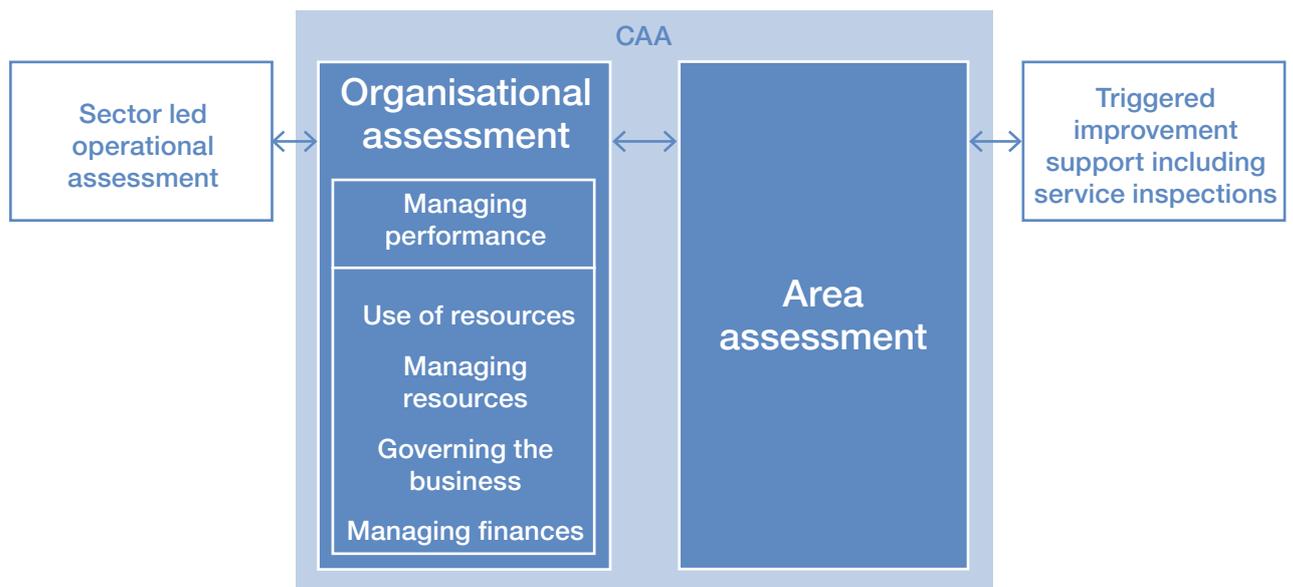
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I Throughout this document we refer to fire and rescue services as we assess the outcomes delivered by the service on behalf of their fire and rescue authority.

II [CAA Joint Inspectorate Framework](#), Audit Commission, 2009.

4 Figure 1 sets out how the assessment of fire and rescue services fits within CAA.

**Figure 1**



5 The managing performance assessment theme reflects the specific performance and service delivery priorities within the fire sector. We will draw on the sector led operational assessment where this has been undertaken.<sup>1</sup>

## Area assessment

- 6 For the area assessment we will take the locally agreed priorities in the local area agreements (LAAs) and the sustainable community strategies as our starting point. We will look at the prospects for future improvement in those outcomes that are most important to the local community and to people in the most vulnerable circumstances. We will take into account how well the local partners understand their local communities and reflect this in their priorities, as well as how well served local people are currently.
- 7 In the area assessment we will be interested in the contribution that the fire and rescue service is making to improved local service outcomes. We will consider the specific challenges and opportunities for the fire and rescue service to contribute to the outcomes delivered through the local partnerships.

<sup>1</sup> A sector led self assessment/peer review toolkit for the operational assessment of front line fire and rescue services.

- 8 The three key overarching questions of the area assessment that will be applied collectively to local partners are:
  - How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
  - How well are outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
  - What are the prospects for future improvement?
- 9 There are specific areas where the fire and rescue service has an important contributory role. These include:
  - engaging more effectively with local communities to build up a comprehensive risk profile for the area;
  - involving local communities in developing fire prevention, fire protection and community safety priorities;
  - ensuring that partners are engaged in larger scale emergencies, civil contingency and local resilience;
  - delivering any fire-specific priorities within the LAA; and
  - contributing to broader local priorities, like tackling anti-social behaviour, in an effective, well coordinated and prioritised way.
- 10 Flags will be used to highlight significant concerns about outcomes and future improvement (red flag) or to highlight exceptional performance or improvement that we consider others can learn from (green flag). Further clarification on flagging can be found in the CAA framework document.
- 11 We will draw on a broad range of evidence to reach our area assessment conclusions. In relation to the fire and rescue service we will draw on the evidence from the organisational assessment; performance data in the National Indicator Set; the conclusions from the operational assessment and nationally available fire data.

## Organisational assessment

- 12 We will assess the effectiveness of each fire and rescue service through an organisational assessment, which combines the appointed auditor's assessment of value for money (through the use of resources themes) with an assessment of the fire and rescue service's performance (through the managing performance theme) into a single judgement. Alongside the area assessment we will publish a short report for each fire and rescue service that includes the overall assessment score.
- 13 The organisational assessment will reflect how well individual fire and rescue services are delivering against the priorities and objectives contained in the National Framework. We will assess how each fire and rescue service is effectively balancing its prevention, protection and response functions. In doing so, we will consider how well equality and diversity are integrated into all aspects of the service. We will also assess the impact and effectiveness of the service's contribution to broader partnership outcomes in the LAA. We will draw on a range of evidence including evidence from the operational assessment where this is available. We will involve peers from the fire sector in the managing performance theme of the organisational assessment. Assessment of progress against the requirements of the National Framework will be carried out on a three-year cyclical basis which will be detailed in guidance.
- 14 Figure 2 sets out the key lines of enquiry for the three use of resources themes and the managing performance theme.

Figure 2

Organisational assessment for fire and rescue services		
	Assessment theme	Key lines of enquiry (KLOE)
Use of resources	<b>Managing finance</b> How effectively does the organisation manage its finances to deliver value for money?	Does the organisation plan its finances effectively to deliver its strategic priorities and secure sound financial health? Does the organisation have a sound understanding of its costs and performance and achieve efficiencies in its activities? Is the organisation's financial reporting timely, reliable and does it meet the needs of internal users, stakeholders and local people?
	<b>Governing the business</b> How well does the organisation govern itself and commission services that provide value for money and deliver better outcomes for local people?	Does the organisation commission and procure quality services and supplies, tailored to local needs, to deliver sustainable outcomes and value for money? Does the organisation produce relevant and reliable data and information to support decision making and manage performance? Does the organisation promote and demonstrate the principles and values of good governance? Does the organisation manage its risks and maintain a sound system of internal control?
	<b>Managing resources</b> How well does the organisation manage its natural resources, physical assets, and people to meet current and future needs and deliver value for money?	Is the organisation making effective use of natural resources? Does the organisation manage its assets effectively to help deliver its strategic priorities and service needs? Does the organisation plan, organise and develop its workforce effectively to support the achievement of its strategic priorities?

Figure 2 (continued)

Organisational assessment for fire and rescue services		
	Assessment theme	KLOE
Managing performance	<b>Managing performance</b>	How well is the organisation delivering its priority services, outcomes and improvements that are important to local people?
	How well does the organisation manage and improve its services and contribute to wider community outcomes?	<p>KLOE focus</p> <p>The fire and rescue service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continually improves services and outcomes it is responsible for;</li> <li>• delivers the requirements of the National Framework 2008-11;</li> <li>• is operationally effective,<sup>1</sup> demonstrating operational preparedness and ability to deliver an emergency response where both public and firefighter safety are paramount;</li> <li>• demonstrates measurable impact from its fire prevention and community protection activities;</li> <li>• delivers its obligations and contributions to make the area resilient and able to deal with larger scale emergencies;</li> <li>• delivers wider community outcomes based on well targeted engagement that has given it a sound understanding of the needs of all its communities;</li> <li>• is tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for people in the most vulnerable circumstances;</li> <li>• contributes to LAA priorities through effective partnership working; and</li> <li>• contributes to local priorities and national indicators that may be outside the LAA.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Informed by the operational assessment.

Figure 2 (continued)

Organisational assessment for fire and rescue services		
	Assessment theme	KLOE
Managing performance	<b>Managing performance</b>	Does the organisation have the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future improvements?
	How well does the organisation manage and improve its services and contribute to wider community outcomes?	<p>KLOE focus</p> <p>The fire and rescue service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a positive and consistent track record in managing change and delivering improvements over time;</li> <li>• has the political will and managerial drive to engage with partners, local people, and all communities to help set and deliver priorities;</li> <li>• has the leadership, capacity and capability to deliver and sustain improvement and is agile enough to manage change effectively;</li> <li>• has the capacity to deliver its future priorities ensuring that staff work safely and effectively;</li> <li>• takes equality and diversity seriously, is delivering its responsibilities and is on track to meet its targets in line with the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018; and</li> <li>• is influencing and delivering effectively its contribution to the regional management board, crime and disorder reduction partnerships, and the LAA.</li> </ul>

- 15 The organisational assessment will:
- support and complement the area assessment's focus on priority outcomes;
  - ensure accountability at an organisational level, including contributions to delivering LAAs and wider sub-regional or regional strategies;
  - bring together contributions from inspectors and auditors to provide a rounded assessment of organisational effectiveness;
  - inform and focus improvement planning, including inspection programming; and
  - help the public hold their fire and rescue service to account.
- 16 The Audit Commission published details of the use of resources assessments to be made in 2009 with an update in February 2009 to incorporate the scoring arrangements.<sup>1</sup> This sets out how the work of appointed auditors under the statutory Code of Audit Practice will be translated into a scored use of resources assessment. It is based on KLOE across three themes, which are assessed and scored by the auditor. The three themes will be averaged into a single use of resources score to enable comparability in the use of resources scores with other sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> [Use of Resources 2008/09: Overall Approach and Key Lines of Enquiry](#), Audit Commission, May 2008.

- 17 In undertaking the managing performance assessment, the Audit Commission will draw on a range of evidence. This includes but is not limited to the following:
- the National Indicator Set and other nationally available data;
  - LAAs, sustainable community strategies and any other locally agreed targets;
  - local performance management information used to monitor local priorities including any self evaluations and evidence from scrutiny;
  - findings from the operational assessment;
  - findings from inspection, regulation and audit, including relevant evidence from other performance frameworks;
  - briefings or evidence from other agencies including the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser; government offices in the regions and the Health and Safety Executive; and
  - the views of people who use services including residents, third sector organisations and local businesses in the area.
- 18 The sector led operational assessment will provide an important evidence source for both the area and organisational assessments. Where we have evidence from the operational assessment we will rely on it, subject to an evidence based 'reality check', where this is deemed necessary. Where an operational assessment has not been carried out we will use our managing performance assessment to conduct a sufficiently comprehensive assessment to meet the Audit Commission's public assurance responsibilities.
- 19 Guidance for our staff will be made available to fire and rescue services after it is published in March. It contains more information on how the key lines of enquiry will be applied.

## Scoring the organisational assessment

- 20 The organisational assessment scores for managing performance and value for money in the use of resources will be combined into a single score using the table below. Where the managing performance assessment theme score and the use of resources score are the same, the grade will simply be carried forward to become the overall organisational assessment score. A score of 1 in either the managing performance or the use of resources theme will lead to an overall organisational assessment score of 1. Beyond this, where the managing performance assessment theme score and the use of resources score are different, we will use our professional judgement to decide the overall organisational assessment score between the options in the table below. This allows for more professional discretion in weighing up evidence and taking account of the local context in determining which assessment themes should carry more weight.

The overall score is shown in blue in the table.

		Managing performance			
Use of resources	Scores	1	2	3	4
	1	1	1	1	1
	2	1	2	2 or 3	2 or 3
	3	1	2 or 3	3	3 or 4
	4	1	2 or 3	3 or 4	4

- 21 The scores 1 to 4 represent the following descriptors of performance:

### Overall the fire and rescue service performs poorly or adequately or well or excellently

1	An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements	Performs poorly
2	An organisation that meets only minimum requirements	Performs adequately
3	An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements	Performs well
4	An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements	Performs excellently

- 22 A formal procedure will allow challenge to the overall organisational assessment score. We will publish details of this by 31 March 2009.

## Reporting the organisational assessment for fire and rescue services

- 23 We will publish a short report that includes an organisational assessment score for each fire and rescue service alongside the area assessment.
- 24 The fire and rescue service plays a vital role in improving the safety of local communities. In reporting the organisational assessment we will provide the public with reassurance through a clear assessment of their local fire and rescue service. We will deliver a balanced assessment on how effective the fire and rescue service is in the achieving value for money and how well it performs by reference to the areas of KLOE focus set out in Figure 2.

## Targeted and triggered inspection

- 25 The findings of the area assessment and/or the organisational assessment could trigger improvement activity, including inspection, if appropriate, of a fire and rescue service.
- 26 We will consider carrying out a triggered inspection of a fire and rescue service in the following circumstances, balancing urgency and significance of service failure or performance on individuals and groups, particularly those in the most vulnerable circumstances:
  - where performance or improvement levels are unsatisfactory, are declining or not improving sufficiently quickly;
  - where a service, outcome or one or more service user group has been identified as being subject to significant risk;
  - where under performance can best be addressed by inspection, bearing in mind the other means available, such as local improvement activity, peer challenge or review, sector led improvement support, directive action through the Secretary of State, improvement notices or intervention;
  - where ministers have given directions for an inspection to take place;
  - in exceptional cases, where performance levels are currently satisfactory but are declining substantially and rapidly; or
  - where there is indication of unsatisfactory performance but insufficient evidence available to make a robust judgement.

- 27 We will clarify to fire and rescue services and the public the purpose of any inspections we undertake. There will be no set number of triggered inspections as circumstances will vary. Triggered inspection may occur at any stage in the year. In practice, we expect most inspections will be scheduled following periodic analysis of CAA evidence, or following the reporting of our annual assessments.
- 28 Although an inspection may be triggered at any stage in the year because of concerns about performance, a related red flag in the area or low score in an organisational assessment will lead to consideration of whether triggered inspection is appropriate. In some circumstances another type of improvement activity may be a more appropriate response, such as improvement support from the fire and rescue sector.

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

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

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