

11 April 2008

Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment

1. In January 2008, the Audit Commission published 'Fire and Rescue performance assessment scores and analysis of performance in fire and rescue authorities in 2007'. The document can be downloaded from:

http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/65813F7C-C7DB-41f9-BAD6-3EA0EE82B6DE/fireandrescueperformanceassessment_scores2007_final%20proof.pdf

2. The main findings of the report are that:

- The number of fires in England continues to fall and fire deaths are at their lowest levels since the 1950s.
- Fire services have become better at preventing fires and reducing the impact on life and property when they do occur. This has been achieved through a better understanding of who is at greatest risk from fire and targeting efforts towards protecting people in the most vulnerable circumstances.
- All fire services are on track to meet the government's target for reducing total numbers of fires and they are performing well against national targets to reduce arson. However, although targets are being met, there are concerns that performance is starting to level off. This may have implications for performance in future years.
- Direction of travel assessments for 2007 show that all fire services are improving. Over half are improving well and five fire services (10 per cent) are improving strongly. However the rate of improvement in almost a third (30 per cent) of fire services has slowed.
- All fire services show great commitment to delivering imaginative campaigns to improve community safety, such as projects to deter young people from starting fires or targeting home fire risk assessments to have maximum impact in reducing deaths and injuries from fire. But this is not always matched by rigorous evaluation of their impact.
- Partnership working is now a key feature in all fire services.
- In this year's use of resources assessments 37 fire services (80 per cent) are performing well, with 38 (83 per cent) retaining last year's score. Fire services continue to have good financial arrangements and most have reliable systems for financial reporting and manage financial risks well. No fire service is performing inadequately, but equally only four fire services (8 per cent) are performing strongly.
- An important component of the overall use of resources assessment is the value for money judgement. No fire service is performing strongly on this component.

However, all services are achieving some efficiency savings, and 31 fire services (67 per cent) are meeting their efficiency targets.

- Business processes are improving.
- No fire service demonstrates good practice in its approach to equalities and diversity. While awareness of equality and diversity is improving in all fire services, the lack of a diverse workforce remains a major issue, because it significantly reduces the service's ability to reach and educate different communities about the risks from fire.

3. Andrew Hughes, Fire and Rescue Service National Policy Lead at the Audit Commission will attend the Fire Forum meeting to talk to members about the report.

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