

# Verification of the progress of modernisation

Fire and Rescue Service in England and Wales – March 2004

**The Audit Commission** is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

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

Steve Bundred, Audit Commission, 1st floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ Tel: 020 7828 1212

Preface	2
1 Summary	4
2 How we assessed modernisation in the Fire and Rescue Service	6
3 Overall findings	9
4 Integrated Risk Management Plans	17
5 Rank to role	21
6 Integrated Personal Development System	24
7 Pre-planned overtime	26
8 Duty systems	29
9 Part-time working and other conditions of service	33
10 Other aspects of modernisation	35
11 The self assessments	37
Glossary	39

# Preface

## Scope and nature of this report

This report is the outcome of phase 1 of the Audit Commission's study to assess progress by fire authorities in England and Wales in implementing the modernisation agenda as set out in the national pay agreement and the subsequent white paper. It covers fire authorities in England and Wales. Separate arrangements for reporting were made in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This report does not comment on the pay award. It concerns itself solely with giving a view on whether the intended benefits of the various national changes are being delivered locally. Recommendations and decisions on the pay award are matters for the Employers to address.

The Audit Commission carried out its work, with the assistance of its appointed auditors, as a study under section 33 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. The work we did to produce this report has come to be known as the verification audit.

## Glossary and general context

The Fire and Rescue Service uses many specialised terms and acronyms. There is a glossary of the terms used in this report at the end.

In this report 'the fire service' means the Fire and Rescue Service in England and Wales and 'fire authority' may, where applicable, refer to a county fire service.

There are many changes facing the fire service at present. For details of the changes, please refer to the White Paper, *Our Fire and Rescue Service* published in June 2003 and the draft *National Framework* published by the ODPM in December 2003. More supporting details can be found on the relevant sections of the ODPM website [www.odpm.gov.uk/fire](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/fire). This report assumes a reasonable familiarity with these background details and a working knowledge of modernisation in the fire service.

## The pay and conditions agreement

A pay and conditions agreement was signed by the two parties in the National Joint Council (ie, the employers and the employees) on 13 June 2003. It describes a 5-stage pay award, with stages 2 and 3 subject to the completion of certain negotiations and the 'verification by the Audit Commission (England and Wales), Accounts Commission (Scotland) and government (Northern Ireland) that the intended benefits (including savings) of the various national changes are being delivered locally'. Stage 2 took effect from 7 November 2003, and stage 3 will take effect from 1 July 2004.

We understand that the Employers will take our report, and those of the other bodies mentioned in the pay agreement, into consideration in finalising its decision on stage 2 of the pay award.

**This report gives the results from the first phase of our work. We will carry out a second verification audit in the summer of 2004.**

## Summary

- 1 In this phase of our work, the first of two, we were looking for progress, not necessarily for full achievement, in every goal. It would be unreasonable at this stage to expect the fire service to have put modernisation fully into effect. We set out to examine the direction of travel. Where we found achievement we gave full credit for it, but we gave appropriate credit for partial achievement too. We also draw attention to areas where little progress has been made.

## Overall assessment

- 2 All but 2 of the 50 fire authorities in England and Wales are making some progress towards modernisation, as envisaged in the pay and conditions agreement and the White Paper. 'Some progress' is a term we defined tightly, as we explain in this report. It is an overall judgement formed from many underlying judgements, applied rigorously and consistently by auditors across the country.
- 3 There seemed to us to be a correlation between the better performers and authorities enjoying clear direction and leadership from Members. Members in the authorities making slower progress could do more to help achieve change.

## Overtime, duty systems and part-time working

- 4 Our review indicated that, overall, there has been little progress on overtime, duty systems and part-time working. We noted that demands on managers have been heavy over the past year, a period when they have had to cope with many new initiatives and demanding time frames. These areas will be crucial to the progress of modernisation of the fire service and it is of concern that so many authorities have not been able to demonstrate progress in these areas, given the short timescales within which they will need to demonstrate real achievement by the summer.
- 5 On the evidence presented to us at the time of our review, it was clear that the FBU has signed up to these changes in principle. The process of getting agreement of the FBU to actual change is a much more difficult task.

## Other areas needing improvement

- 6 We observed a relatively weak degree of financial planning at many authorities. We saw action plans that had not been costed and had not been built in to the authority's overall planning and related budget projections.

Internal communication, in many cases, could be better.

## Next steps

- 7 Much is due to happen in the period between the publication of this report and our next visit. IRMPs are to be finalised, for example, and the associated action plans completed. In the second phase of our work we will review the action Members and management have taken on the matters raised with them in our detailed reports, and we will take into consideration those milestones that were due to have been passed between now and our next review.
- 8 In this report we describe how we formed our judgements (chapter 2) and then we discuss our findings, in chapters 3 to 10. We asked every fire authority to carry out a self assessment, and this is discussed in chapter 11. The glossary is in chapter 12.

# 2

## How we assessed modernisation in the fire and rescue service

9 In this section we explain how we defined modernisation for the purposes of our report and what we did to assess how well it is progressing in the fire and rescue service in England and Wales. The nature of our work, the categories we used to examine progress towards modernisation, and the way we framed our judgements are summarised here.

### Meaning of ‘the progress of modernisation’

- 10 For the purposes of the verification audit, and using the pay and conditions agreement which defined our task, we took the progress of modernisation to be:
- Progress towards achieving those matters specifically referred to in the pay and conditions agreement, for example, duty systems, or production of the IRMP. This gave us six categories against which we evaluated progress.
  - A strategic plan for modernising, within the intentions of the White Paper published by government on 30 June 2003. We looked to see whether the fire authority has a clear vision for the achievement of modernisation and is directing action to achieve it. This was our seventh category.
- 11 We consulted on this proposed definition, both informally when we were drawing it up, and then formally as part of the consultation carried out in September 2003, which included our fee proposals. We received many responses to our formal consultation but none of them raised any significant concerns or disagreement on the criteria we proposed to use to assess the progress of modernisation. The results of this consultation gave us confidence in our overall approach to the task.

### Our categories for review

- 12 We examined how well each fire authority was getting on with each of seven aims:
- 1 delivering an effective Integrated Risk Management Plan (‘IRMP’);
  - 2 changing from rank to role;
  - 3 introducing the Integrated Personal Development System (‘IPDS’);
  - 4 using pre-planned overtime;
  - 5 considering and planning for alternative duty systems;



- 6 considering and planning for part-time working and other alternatives; and
- 7 delivering the modernisation agenda.

## Forming judgements

- 13 We based our conclusions on judgement, informed by the evidence we collected and our understanding of what is required. We did not quantify or score the evidence; we applied judgement to it using the method described below. Consistency of judgement across the country was very important. Every fire authority had to be assessed in the same way. We defined the method clearly, issued a toolkit document for the auditors, and trained them in how to use it.
- 14 In assessing category 7 above, we looked at the principles behind what was being done by the authority rather than at specific activities. This meant, for example, that a fire authority which had started work earlier than others on, say, community fire safety would not necessarily come out of the assessment better than one that started more recently but perhaps had taken a more strategic approach.
- 15 The auditors visited every fire authority in January 2004 and produced a first draft report for each fire authority.

## Moderation

- 16 Every report was put through a central review for consistency, a process known as moderation. Then it was discussed by the auditors with the fire authority and revised as the auditor considered necessary, in order to set right any errors or misunderstandings, and to make sure the fire authority could accept the judgements, ratings and recommendations in the report.

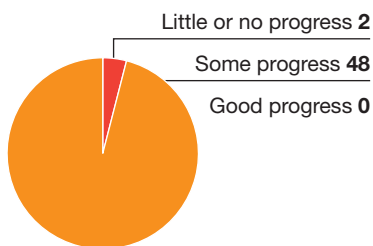
## Interpreting the results

- 17 Fire authorities were measured using a traffic light system (green, amber, red) against detailed criteria for each of the seven areas for assessment. We made the detailed criteria available to every fire authority when we issued our guidance for carrying out a self assessment.
- 18 To make sure our criteria for assessment were fair to everyone, we derived them from guidance already issued to the fire authorities or from commonly accepted best practice. For the IRMP and IPDS, for example, we went to the detail in the authorised circulars issued by the ODPM. In these cases fire authorities were judged against standards already set and with which they were already familiar. There was no prescribed guidance on overtime, duty systems and part-time working and so in these cases we used commonly accepted best practice.

- 19 Where the underlying guidance was not specific we did our best to make it so for the purposes of our verification audit, in order to remove ambiguity wherever possible and to set a clear baseline for judging everyone equitably. We then applied the baseline in a rigorous and consistent manner, across all fire authorities in England and Wales. We made no distinctions for the larger or the smaller authorities, or for the different types. We treated every authority in the same way.
- 20 In applying our judgements we decided that genuinely good progress required the relevant criteria to have been met. Good achievements in other areas, however closely related, would not overcome the absence of any specific requirement, such as an action plan showing cost estimates, for example, or clear evidence of consideration by Members. Similarly, we only assigned a red, for little or no progress, with due care and consideration. We did not hesitate to award a red where the evidence we were looking for was not to be found.
- 21 This report deals with our overall findings on the progress of modernisation in the fire service, set out in the next chapter. Further chapters discuss our analysis of the results for each category of review.

# 3

## Exhibit 1 Overall results from moderated assessments



Source: Audit Commission

## Overall findings

**22** This chapter sets out our overall findings. The overall view is analysed in more detail to understand its meaning and its implications for the fire service. We looked for any general barriers to the progress of modernisation, and we noted good practice wherever we found it: both are reported at the end of this chapter.

### The overall picture

**23** We assessed the fire service as amber overall, meaning that almost every authority is making some progress. **Exhibit 1** gives this picture clearly.

**24** There are 50 fire authorities in England and Wales. 48 were assessed at amber and two at red. No fire authority was assessed at green overall. As at January 2004, the results were dominantly amber, meaning *some progress*.

**25** This overall assessment for each fire authority was formed as a composite from the seven underlying judgements. Taken in isolation from its underlying detail it is a blunt instrument. **Table 1, overleaf**, shows the detailed judgements we made for each fire authority.

### The overall picture

**26** The general picture is amber, *for some progress*, with some green assessments among the seven categories and a good many reds. The reds, *for little or no progress*, arise mainly in three categories:

- pre-planned overtime;
- duty systems; and
- part-time working and other conditions of service.

**27** The degree of red in these three categories may indicate particular circumstances and perhaps particular concerns, as discussed in chapters 7, 8 and 9.

**28** Rank to role and IPDS, which are closely related categories, show an encouraging incidence of green but some red and a generally amber picture. IPDS is something that has been well known and widely understood for quite some time, and so one might expect it to have been further advanced nationally, but there are many technicalities to be sorted out and there have been delays along the way. This is discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

**29** The IRMP also produced a generally amber picture, with a few greens for good progress. In our view this could have been expected, bearing in mind the timing of our review (on site in January 2004) and the timing of the IRMP project nationally (most IRMP documents were in draft and out to consultation at that time). Progress on the IRMP is covered in chapter 4.

30 Category 7, the delivery of the modernisation agenda, shows interesting results. With only three greens, authorities are doing less than they need to in demonstrating leadership, setting a clear vision, and driving action on the priorities. This is discussed further in chapter 10.

**Table 1**  
**Judgements on the seven aims for all fire authorities**

Key	Overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 delivering an effective Integrated Risk Management Plan ('IRMP');	A	A	A	A	A	R	G	A
2 changing from rank to role;	A	A	R	R	A	R	A	A
3 introducing the Integrated Personal Development System ('IPDS');	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
4 using pre-planned overtime;	A	A	A	A	A	A	R	A
5 considering and planning for alternative duty systems;	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
6 considering and planning for part-time working and other alternatives; and	A	A	G	G	A	R	R	A
7 delivering the modernisation agenda.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
	R	R	A	A	R	R	R	R
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	R	A	A	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	G	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	A	A	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
	A	A	A	G	A	A	R	A
	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
	A	A	A	A				A

- R Little or no progress
- A Some progress
- G Good progress

I The fire and rescue service in the Isles of Scilly operates on a wholly retained basis with a total of 39 staff. This, combined with the low level of call outs and limited available workforce on the islands, gives little scope for changes to duty systems, planned overtime or part-time working and therefore we treated these categories as not applicable.

	Overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Kent and Medway Towns	A	G	A	A	A	A	R	G
Lancashire Combined	A	A	A	G	R	R	A	A
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland	A	A	G	A	R	R	R	A
Lincolnshire CC	A	A	A	A	G	R	R	A
London Fire and Emergency Planning	A	G	G	G	A	A	A	A
Merseyside FCDA	A	A	A	A	A	A	R	A
Mid & W Wales	A	A	R	A	R	R	R	A
N Wales	A	A	A	A	R	A	R	A
N Yorkshire Fire and Rescue	A	A	A	A	A	A	G	A
Norfolk CC	A	A	G	A	R	R	A	A
Northamptonshire	A	G	A	A	A	A	A	A
Northumberland CC	A	A	A	A	A	R	R	A
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	A	A	A	A	R	G	A	A
Oxfordshire CC	A	A	A	G	R	A	A	A
S Wales	A	G	A	G	A	A	A	A
S Yorkshire FCDA	A	A	A	A	A	R	A	A
Shropshire and Wrekin	A	A	A	G	A	A	R	G
Somerset CC	A	A	A	A	A	A	R	A
Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Suffolk CC	A	A	A	G	R	R	R	A
Surrey CC	A	G	A	A	A	A	A	A
Tyne & Wear FCDA	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
W Yorkshire FCDA	A	A	A	G	A	A	R	A
Warwickshire CC	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A
West Midlands	A	G	A	G	R	A	R	G
West Sussex	A	A	R	A	A	R	A	A
Wiltshire and Swindon	A	A	A	A	R	R	R	A

Source: Audit Commission

## Little or no progress overall as at January 2004

- 31 As can be seen from Table 1, Derbyshire and the Isle of Wight were assessed as red overall, meaning little or no progress. Every category for the Isle of Wight emerged as red, and there was a majority of reds for Derbyshire. Our auditors have discussed the detailed findings with these authorities and established with them that the basis on which these assessments were made is fair.
- 32 Derbyshire's results show some progress in implementing IPDS and its closely related area, rank to role, but in the other categories, including the IRMP, little or no progress had been made at the time of our review.
- 33 The Isle of Wight is one of the smallest fire authorities in England and Wales, a position which brings with it certain restraints. It may not be reasonable to expect a very small authority to be able to achieve as much as the bigger and better resourced bodies. Yet the Isles of Scilly, the smallest authority, has demonstrated some progress in all the areas applicable to it.

## Best progress overall as at January 2004

- 34 The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) is the largest fire authority in the UK, with over 7,000 staff, 112 fire stations and an annual spend of over £300 million. LFEPA is a regional authority. It has the third largest brigade in the world. LFEPA has emerged from the verification audit as the authority with the most green ratings, including the important IRMP and IPDS initiatives (**Case study 1**).

---

### Case study 1

#### The authority demonstrates good practice in the following areas:

- Modernisation is being well managed with robust governance arrangements underpinning the development and delivery of the change agenda.
- The IRMP sets out a clear direction of travel for LFEPA and how this will lead to a more effective targeting of resources.
- Rank to role preparations are also well advanced, with a fully costed action plan in place.
- LFEPA has been at the forefront of the national development of IPDS, which has been under development at LFEPA over the last 12 years.

#### The authority is making progress in:

- Consultation and communication with staff and other stakeholders on modernisation has been widespread and regular. The use of e-consultation has been innovative.

- Analysis of overtime and duty systems arrangements is well advanced with, for duty systems, externally procured research informing the authority's considerations. LFEPA has also considered the control and probity issues on changes to overtime arrangements.

*Source: Audit Commission report to LFEPA*

---

- 35** Only two other authorities demonstrated green scores for both IRMP and IPDS:
- South Wales, further distinguished by having no reds; and
  - the West Midlands, also green for delivering the modernisation, but showing little or no progress on duty systems and part-time working.
- 36** Tyne and Wear, Stoke and Staffordshire, and Cumbria, a county fire brigade, achieved an amber rating across all the categories, as did the Isles of Scilly in the four categories which apply there. North Yorkshire went one further by achieving one green rating, for its progress with part-time working.
- 37** Only three authorities were awarded a green rating for their progress in delivering the modernisation agenda. They were Shropshire, the West Midlands, and Kent and Medway.
- 38** Stoke & Staffordshire is a good example of amber for *some progress* across the board. In our report to the Stoke and Staffordshire Fire Authority we noted that this authority has been quick to introduce initiatives compatible with delivering the modernising agenda, such as mixed crewing, switch crewing, part-time and other flexible working (**Case study 2**).

---

## Case study 2

### We saw progress being made in:

- Developing detailed action plans through the work of the IRMP Task Groups.
- Developing an information mapping bureau in partnership with external agencies, to improve mapping and intelligence gathering, collating, sharing and analysing systems.
- Implementing the IPDS agenda. Pay assimilation was achieved in November 2003 and all staff had been transferred onto the new role structure. Work was ongoing to develop a Workplace Assessment methodology.

### This authority needs to develop, among other things:

- Linking finances to operational plans and improvement priorities in the IRMP.
- Better data integrity, in order to determine operational priorities more effectively.
- Revised local policies and standards based on the outcome of its own task group reviews.

*Source: Audit Commission Verification report to the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority*

---

## Barriers to the progress of modernisation

- 39 The auditors reported to us on what they saw as the external obstacles to progress at each authority. The reasons given were many and various, often with a local flavour. No overwhelming themes emerged.
- 40 There were only two comments which arose in more than five instances:
- The perception by management of Union-related difficulties. In seven cases we noted some aspect of negotiation with the FBU was recorded as a potential barrier to progress. It appeared as ‘uncertainty regarding employee relations’, as ‘a difficult relationship with the FBU’, as ‘pay negotiations on rank to role’ or even as ‘resistance from junior staff to duty systems changes’.
  - Capacity, whether in people or funding, and a limited scope for savings, arose in eight cases, mainly county or rural fire brigades.
- 41 Some authorities told us they were being held up by the absence of national guidance, waiting for the software known as ‘FSEC’, waiting for pay mechanisms to be finalised, uncertainty about the EU Working Time Directive, and so on. We discounted these claims on the grounds that they apply to everyone.
- 42 A few mentioned that the modernisation agenda itself is an obstacle, due to its size, complexity and urgency. We recognise the agenda facing every fire authority is very demanding but, again, it applies to everyone.
- 43 A couple of authorities are struggling to improve their human resource (HR) arrangements and senior HR staffing. We note this obstacle only as an opportunity to point out that it arose in very few cases. We noted many instances where fire authorities have established professionally run HR departments and are already reaping the benefits as they implement IPDS.
- 44 Regionalisation did not come up as a major theme. It was mentioned, for example, for a few authorities needing regional co-ordination in order to move forward on overtime. One or two other authorities noted that regional co-ordination was tending to slow things down. We expect more commentary on this topic in phase 2 of the verification audit, by which time the Regional Management Boards described in the National Framework (see glossary) will have come into being.

## Areas for improvement

- 45 We also asked the auditors to identify areas where each authority needs to do better or, in other words, obstacles often of its own making that can be remedied by the authority itself. These themes emerged immediately, each for around 20 per cent of all fire authorities:
- Many authorities had done little, at the time of our review, to estimate costs and resource requirements in their action plans.



- Action plans often are not specific, measurable, or time-bound. Our auditors saw many vague assertions in the action plans submitted for review. Good intentions do not constitute an effective action plan.
- Internal communications are questioned by the auditors, who saw evidence that messages to staff were often not getting through. This comment was frequently accompanied by the observation that authorities are unfamiliar with how to carry out an effective consultation. They are learning as they go along, for example, from the guidance on consultation issued by the ODPM as part of the IRMP project.

## Good practice

- 46** We were on the lookout for good practice too. It differed widely among authorities, with many local initiatives or particular prowess being recorded in the individual reports. For example, the major public private partnership investment in Tyne and Wear that is being used to renew selected fire stations, or the training and employee relations noted in Cumbria, where past IIP experience has been put to good and enduring use.
- 47** Again, three main themes emerged:
- regional working: 11 instances;
  - engagement by Members, demonstrating clear leadership and involvement: 9 cases; and
  - a good grasp of what modernisation entails, and good management arrangements in hand to implement it: 6 cases.
- 48** These figures are small. This is perhaps not surprising, bearing in mind the overall amber results. As at January, very few authorities were able to distinguish themselves in the modernisation stakes. We hope that many more authorities will have achieved the sort of good practice that gave rise to positive commentary from the auditors, as illustrated in the following examples (**Case studies 3 and 4, overleaf**).

---

### Case study 3

#### The authority demonstrates good practice in the following areas:

- Members are fully engaged in the modernisation agenda to ensure that progress is monitored and challenged.
- It plays an important role on the Regional Management Board, particularly in terms of developing recruitment.
- Its focused and ongoing investment in IT improves data quality leading to better informed decisions in respect of risks.
- It has developed some policies early which support the overall modernisation process, in particular, the use of overtime working arrangements.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Lincolnshire Fire Authority*

---

---

## Case study 4

### The Authority demonstrates good practice in the following areas:

- Members have championed the modernisation process, and the production of the IRMP has been an integral part of fire authority meetings.
- Communication of the authority's objectives, with regard to the IRMP, is high on the authority's agenda.
- It demonstrates clear commitment to existing partnerships and to the development of new arrangements, which all point towards a shift of emphasis from reactive to proactive service delivery.
- It is working with other local regional partners, for example, in the development of Home Risk Assessments.
- It is involved in a Regional IPDS team, with the aim of implementing IPDS on a regional approach.

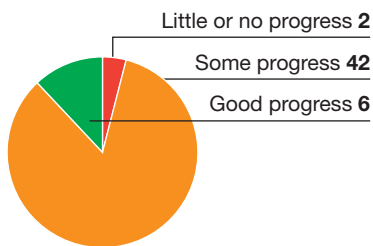
*Source: Audit Commission report to the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority*

---

# 4

## Integrated Risk Management Plans

### Exhibit 2 Integrated Risk Management Plans



Source: Audit Commission

- 49 The IRMP is a major project for every fire authority. It incorporates many of the radical changes envisaged in the White Paper, offers an opportunity to transform the logistical basis of the service from concentrating on property to the risk of loss of life, and may help find savings. It began in mid-2003, aiming for final IRMP documents to be published in March 2004, in accordance with the timetable set by government.
- 50 We drew up our assessment criteria in the same way as for the other categories, using the detailed IRMP guidance produced by the ODPM. Everyone was assessed in the same way against the prescribed guidance. Taking the time available into account, and the stage of development at which our on-site review work was done, we were not surprised to see mostly ambers (**Exhibit 2**).
- 51 Six authorities were green (London, South Wales, West Midlands, Surrey County, Kent and Northamptonshire) and two were red (Derbyshire and the Isle of Wight).

### Assessment criteria

- 52 There were eight key issues and many indicators of prescribed guidance or best practice used in our assessment. They are summarised below:
- 1 putting the necessary management arrangements in place, with clear leadership and commitment from Members;
  - 2 identifying existing and potential risks to the community;
  - 3 assessing the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention work;
  - 4 assessing the opportunities for improvement, and determining the local policies and standards needed to implement them;
  - 5 resource requirements;
  - 6 implementation, monitoring, audit and review;
  - 7 consultation; and
  - 8 compliance with prescribed guidance and timetable.
- 53 We found that many authorities were in good shape as regards the basic building blocks but that achievement against the other seven criteria was patchy. For example, many authorities were only partly achieving against 2 and 4 above, because they were still working hard to assemble all the relevant data, to have it cleaned up to remove errors and inconsistencies, and to be able to use the appropriate software. Estimating the resource requirements was also not being done well, in some cases because the information available so far was not sufficient, but in quite a few other cases, because nobody had got round to doing it yet. Agreeing how the process should be quality

assured is another relatively easy thing to get set up in good time, and it was interesting to see that many authorities had not attended to it yet.

- 54 Our conclusions on the IRMP project are that most fire authorities are working hard on this project, recognising its importance and anxious to do a good job. The central premise of the IRMP is very challenging, requiring a whole new approach to the use and significance of incident data. But we suspect some authorities are letting the frightening aspect of the work allow them to lose sight of a few trees. Basic management controls, such as reliable cost estimates and sound quality assurance arrangements, are not hard to set up, and their absence can, in the long run, turn out to be very expensive.

## Good progress

- 55 The six authorities rated as green did not achieve every one of the eight criteria completely. Their assessments were a mixture of completely met and partly met. For example, Kent, one of the six rated green, was assessed as having achieved five items completely, but as only partly achieving the other three. Kent is one of the authorities intending to use FSEC, the Fire Service Emergency Cover software toolkit. We judged the achievement of Kent and the other five authorities in this bracket as green because we felt the overall picture for them was one of good progress.
- 56 Consultation has been noted already in this report as an area that is relatively new to many authorities. For example, in our report to Kent we recorded this good practice (**Case study 5**).

---

### Case study 5

#### **On consulting partners and the wider community on the proposals in the IRMP**

The brigade has in place a consultation plan identifying areas for consultation, methodology and timescales. The approach to consultation was developed by officers and Members and formally approved by the IRMP panel in September 2003. Consultation included focus groups with public and staff, visits to stations by Members over December-January 2004, press releases inviting the public to obtain a copy of the plan, on-line questionnaires, and issuing copies of the draft IRMP to 504 critical stakeholders, large businesses, and Members of Kent and Medway Council.

Individual visits by the Principal Officers discussing the IRMP and its implications have been undertaken with all full-time and retained fire fighters.

Staff were provided with access to all key background documentation to the modernisation agenda, with regular briefings used to summarise information. Managers' briefings were used to cascade information to stations, and where staff required further information, an IRMP email address was created to provide additional information.

Early feedback from focus groups with the public was used to focus the IRMP on specific issues such as responding to medical emergencies, however as the consultation process is still current, the authority has yet to demonstrate how

stakeholder consultation will inform the final IRMP proposals. A policy paper has been produced to identify initial findings from the consultation process, which is to be presented at the IRMP Panel on 27 January 2004.

Business consultation was conducted via a website hosted by an external contractor (specific business questionnaire developed), with a business breakfast held in January 2004 to gauge more detailed feedback on the IRMP.

**[Rated as completely met]**

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority*

---

- 57 Assessing the opportunities for improvement is one of the criteria we used, and most authorities were only partly meeting it. A typical example comes from our report to Northumberland (**Case study 6**).
- 

## Case study 6

### On assessing the opportunities for improvement and determining local policies and standards

Priorities and objectives within the IRMP were supported by the use of risk maps. While these have been agreed with station managers as representative of the area, there are plans to update them once the data verification process is complete and the new software is received. All objectives should then be checked to ensure that no changes are required.

Action plans have been developed for the implementation of the IRMP, but these are high level and need to be developed further. It is planned that the majority of the objectives will be implemented on a regional basis to ensure that common practices are followed. However, at the time of the review the other three brigades had yet to finalise their IRMPs which was causing some delays in actions being taken within Northumberland.

Ownership of individual objectives has been allocated both at a local and regional level. Several of the recommendations are planned to be implemented immediately. However, as they have not been costed, it is not possible to assess whether the work planned for the coming year is feasible (see assessment of resource requirements below). The timetable for implementation should therefore be reviewed in light of a resource assessment to ensure that it is realistic.

Stations are currently developing their own station plans which are to set out how they will implement the IRMP. Once these are completed, checks should be performed centrally to ensure that these are in line with the objectives and also that all objectives within the IRMP are covered. Furthermore it should be ensured that those which require implementation at a more strategic level, either regionally or via brigade management are addressed.

At present, no local standards have been developed. It is planned that these will be produced following the agreement of these station plans.

**[Rated as partly met]**

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Northumberland Fire Authority*

---

## Areas for improvement

- 58 Fire authorities should note that they will need to have done more even to maintain their amber rating in the second phase of our review. Time will have moved on and the prescribed guidance will, by then, have required more to have been done. We suggest all authorities should consider whether:
- the cost implications of their IRMP have been estimated robustly and built into the budget and planning cycle;
  - they are up to date and in full compliance with government guidance as regards detailed risk maps and how these maps should be used; and
  - the IRMP action plan is specific, realistic, measurable (SMART).
- 59 Much of the purpose of the IRMP is concerned with making realistic assessments of the opportunities it offers for change. In the second phase of our review we will be looking for evidence that this opportunity is being taken effectively.

# 5

## Rank to role

60 Changing over to a less hierarchical fire service grading structure, where role and competence mean more than rank and authority, is central to implementing the IPDS. The rank structure is to be replaced by a new management structure in which levels of responsibility attach to particular roles. National guidance to fire authorities (NJC 15/03) indicates that they are not expected yet to have made final decisions on the long term allocation of roles to existing jobs. Our assessment criteria allowed for the current developmental state of this initiative.

## Assessment criteria

61 In assessing progress on rank to role, we asked these three questions:

- 1 Does the authority have an action plan, setting out the full resource implications?
- 2 Does the action plan include cost estimates, agreed at authority level and incorporated into the 2004/05 budget?
- 3 Are employees fully aware of the implications for them, as a result of effective communication with all staff?

## Results

62 We found most authorities making some progress, with a light sprinkling of good progress from the leaders, but a counterbalancing degree of red (**Exhibit 3**).

63 Four authorities were rated as green and five as red:

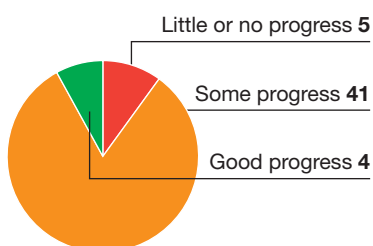
- those with green for *good progress* were London, Cleveland, Norfolk and Leicester; and
- those with red, for *little or no progress* were Durham, Bedfordshire, West Sussex, Mid and West Wales and the Isle of Wight.

## Good progress

64 Few authorities were able to demonstrate reasonably good progress in this category. We were looking for evidence that an authority had its resource estimates properly in place, and had let its employees know what to expect. Put like that, it seems very simple, yet most authorities were behind.

65 There was achievement. For example, Cleveland achieved a green rating for rank to role (**Case study 7, overleaf**).

**Exhibit 3**  
**Rank to role**



Source: Audit Commission

---

### Case study 7

Implementation of a role-based structure is well underway, and expected to be fully operational by 2 February 2004. Rank markings have been removed from uniforms.

**[completely]**

The new structure has been fully costed, with the results incorporated in the 2004/05 budget and resource plans. No key role is expected to be unfilled. **[completely]**

Roadshows were presented to staff to explain the new structure and principles. The key messages will need to be reinforced. The communications strategy is now to be rewritten, recognising there is room for improvement. **[partly]**

*Source: Audit Commission verification audit report to the Cleveland Fire Authority*

---

- 66 By contrast, Durham and Darlington received a red, made up from two not met judgements and one partly met (**Case study 8**).

### Case study 8

The rank to role process is outlined in the IPDS Implementation Strategy, being addressed in three stages. The service should complete the mapping process in order to determine the resource implications of the move from rank to role, and prepare a costed action plan to reflect this process. **[not met]**

Budgetary provision for preparation for moving from rank to role has been made, and further action to be undertaken when final national guidance received. The budget has not yet been approved. **[partly met]**

Full mapping to be completed by mid-February, and firefighters to be issued with the role map then. Section heads have received a briefing document on plans and processes for implementing rank to role, but practical information is limited due to the early stages of implementation. Awareness of the impact of introducing rank to role appeared limited. **[not met]**

*Source: Audit Commission report to the County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority*

---

- 67 Some authorities, for example, Durham, mentioned that they thought the complexity and delay of final guidance is holding back progress towards implementation but we took the view that every authority is following the same guidance. A few are making significantly more progress than others.

## Areas for improvement

- 68 Too many authorities were unable to demonstrate that they have estimated the costs of moving from rank to role and incorporated these estimates in their financial planning. It seems to us that there has been enough time for management to have taken this basic step, and we will expect to see better results in this area when we return in phase 2.



- 69 Effective communication is a more difficult problem to solve. As illustrated below, we found many authorities struggling with it (**Case study 9**).

---

### Case study 9

While there is some evidence of consultation, there is no formal consultation/communication plan in place which establishes process and enables the review of arrangements for effectiveness. Further, there is evidence that a joint group has only recently been established, comprising members of senior management and representative bodies to consider the implementation of the rank to role assimilation process.

Evidence obtained from interviews with operational staff and their representative bodies does not confirm the documentary evidence that a robust rank to role consultation process has occurred or is in place. Comments were made by operational staff and representative bodies that there has been insufficient consultation, that employees are not fully aware of the implications and impact of the assimilation process, and that the support mechanisms in place to assist employees in understanding and coping with the change were insufficient.

*Source: Audit Commission report to a fire authority*

---

- 70 We think those authorities able to recognise themselves among those not doing so well at internal communication should take steps now to learn from the best and to tackle this challenge more effectively.

# 6

## Integrated Personal Development System

71 The IPDS programme will cover all fire service staff at every stage in their development, from entry to retirement. It aims to enable all fire service staff to reach and to maintain the level of competence required to fulfil their role as specified in the National Occupational Standards. Much detailed guidance has been issued, and the IPDS is embedded in the National Framework. Firefighters, control operators and managers will be expected to demonstrate competence in new IPDS roles.

### Assessment criteria

72 There were six key issues, together with many underlying indicators of prescribed guidance or best practice, in our assessment. They are summarised below:

- 1 putting the necessary management arrangements in place;
- 2 keeping employees and other stakeholders informed and building IPDS into individual staff development targets;
- 3 complying with prescribed guidance and timetables;
- 4 carrying out a required 'gap' analysis;
- 5 being fully prepared for introducing workplace assessments; and
- 6 having robust resource estimates.

### Results

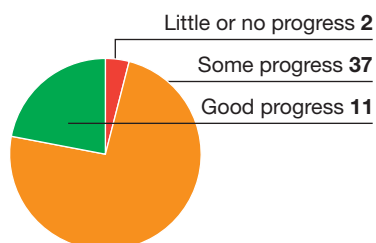
73 The IPDS has been in development for a long time, with the result that many people are familiar with it, in both concept and detail, and many authorities have had opportunities to take part. The IPDS shows the highest proportion of green ratings, with eleven authorities assessed as having made good progress (**Exhibit 4**). They are London, South Wales, Shropshire and Wrekin, West Midlands, Cleveland, West Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Lancashire, Oxfordshire County, Humberside and Suffolk County.

74 Two authorities were rated as red (Bedfordshire and the Isle of Wight).

### Good progress

75 The authorities rated as green were those with more criteria met fully than met partly, and with no criteria rated 'not met'. None of them had met all six criteria fully, so there is still more to be done by everyone.

#### Exhibit 4 Integrated Personal Development System



Source: Audit Commission

- 76 Shropshire and Wrekin was distinguished by its having met 5 of the 6 IPDS criteria completely, with only item 3 (compliance with prescribed guidance and timetables) assessed as partly met. We learned that Shropshire has had a high-level team directing IPDS for two years, with the accompanying processes, systems and cultural changes having been implemented gradually over the past four years. As an accredited Investor in People (IIP) Shropshire was able to demonstrate to us its success in communicating effectively with its own staff.

## Areas for improvement

- 77 Even among the greens there were clear trends to show where authorities need to do more. We found criteria 2 (communications/development targets) and 6 (resource estimates) to have the highest incidences of being only partly met. These two themes arose for the IRMP too, but have slightly different implications under the IPDS.
- 78 On estimating resource requirements, we noted that few authorities were able to convince the auditors of the existence of a fully and properly costed action plan, approved at authority level and built into the 2004/05 budgets. Many came close, and we saw evidence of work in progress. A typical response is this, from West Yorkshire (**Case study 10**).

---

### Case study 10

#### **On whether the resource implications of implementing IPDS have been fully assessed and provided for**

A bid has been constructed by the Human Resources team to deal with the implementation of the IPDS process. This bid is currently part of the budget process for 2004/05 and is subject to agreement before it forms a draft budget.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the West Yorkshire Fire Authority*

---

- 79 The communications criterion for IPDS was more demanding than the corresponding criterion for the IRMP. We wanted to know whether the authority had kept its staff informed, but we also asked whether the IPDS had been built into personal and development targets for key staff. It was from this latter requirement that we found many authorities have a long way to go as yet in setting targets for staff. We concluded that, as for the IRMP, communicating effectively with staff presents problems (**Case study 11**).

---

### Case study 11

#### **On communicating with employees and other stakeholders**

Roadshows have taken place but feedback suggests that some staff remain confused. Briefings to each watch and one-to-one staff meetings have been arranged to reinforce and clarify key messages.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Cleveland Fire Authority*

---

# 7

## Pre-planned overtime

- 80 The pay and conditions agreement required the FBU to lift its ban on pre-arranged overtime and this was done. Employees are now free to undertake pre-arranged overtime at premium rates of pay for up to 24 hours a month, averaged over six months and on a voluntary basis. This is an opportunity for management to explore whether freedom to use overtime can bring efficiency savings or other benefits.

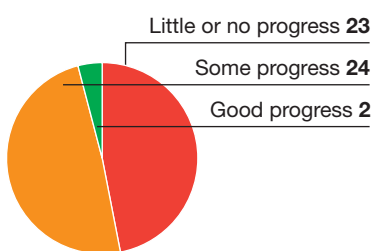
### Assessment criteria

- 81 There were two key issues, set out below:
- 1 Has the fire authority reviewed its own use of overtime, in the context of the IRMP, and sought to maximise any opportunity for increased efficiency?
  - 2 Has the fire authority made changes, or planned for changes? If not, is there clear evidence of a reliable value-for-money analysis?

### Results

- 82 The overall progress on exploiting any potential advantage from pre-planned overtime, reveals about half the fire service as showing little or no progress (**Exhibit 5**).
- 83 Only two authorities were rated green. They are East Sussex and Lincolnshire. East Sussex has carried out a review, drawn up an agreement, and is making changes (**Case study 12**).

#### Exhibit 5 Pre-planned overtime



**Note:** 1 authority not applicable.

**Source:** Audit Commission

#### Case study 12

##### On pre-planned overtime

The authority is reviewing the use of overtime in the light of the changes proposed by the national pay agreement. The approach builds on work that had already been completed over the past 12 months which resulted in a local agreement for overtime to be used for specific purposes.

A draft agreement has been drawn up in full consultation with the Trade Unions and is due to be formalised in February 2004.

The authority has made changes in the use of overtime and the approach is due to be formalised in February 2004. Where the IRMP suggests that changes in operational activity should be made, then the human resources required to implement the change will be reviewed in full.

**Source:** Audit Commission report to the East Sussex Fire Authority

84 24 authorities were rated amber and the rest, 23, were rated red for little or no progress. Pre-planned overtime is not applicable to the 50th authority, the Isles of Scilly.

85 On the face of it, it does not seem acceptable for only two fire authorities to demonstrate achievement here.

## The reasons for little progress

86 We were often told that proposals are still at consultation stage, work is in progress, the details still have to be ironed out, as illustrated in the following example from Essex (**Case study 13**).

---

### Case study 13

#### On pre-planned overtime

The authority has recently completed a review of the use of pre-planned overtime and the potential cost and benefits to be derived from introducing such a policy. However, the work has only just finished and consultation with all key stakeholders has yet to occur. The Authority recognises this as a key process.

The authority has included a statement within its IRMP that it intends to introduce arrangements for pre-arranged overtime where this can help improve the service in a cost effective way.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Essex Fire Authority*

---

87 We noted the occasional delay attributed to union action or the need to hold further negotiations with FBU representatives as, for example, in Merseyside (**Case study 14**).

---

### Case study 14

#### On pre-planned overtime

The Chief Fire Officer wrote to all employees in September 2003 to outline intentions on the use of planned overtime and to canvass interest. This process was halted after the FBU registered a dispute. The authority has now produced a draft policy on pre-planned overtime setting out the proposed arrangements, including eligibility, selection criteria, rates of pay and the approval process. This is now subject to consultation with the unions.

The FBU has raised concerns on the interpretation of the pay agreement, which states that overtime cannot be used to fill a shortfall in the established staffing level. They understand that this would prohibit use of overtime to cover for sickness and other foreseeable absences, and for planned activities.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Merseyside FCDA*

---

- 88 Our auditors met the local union representatives wherever possible, and were told that the FBU fully recognises and is signed up to those matters that have now been agreed, stemming from the pay and conditions agreement of last June. It was also clear, in most cases, that the details remained to be discussed and would need to be the subject of negotiation, which could cause delay later on.
- 89 We concluded that there is some basis for slow progress, in that it has not been long since the ban was lifted and using pre-planned overtime is an unfamiliar device to many managers in the fire service. Management, in most cases, has not yet made a lot of progress in drawing up the details and putting them to the FBU for consultation. Those authorities that seem to have geared themselves up in advance, by carrying out a review and drawing up plans, have emerged with the better results from our review.
- 90 We will expect to see significant development on the topic when we return to carry out the second verification audit.

# 8

## Duty systems

- 91 The pay and conditions agreement allowed for alternative duty systems to be discussed with the recognised trade union, in cases where a fire authority decides that different duty arrangements are needed for the delivery of the IRMP.

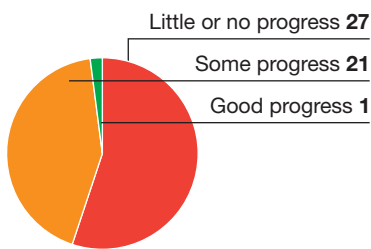
### Assessment criteria

- 92 We set two assessment criteria:
- 1 Has the fire authority reviewed its current duty systems and considered alternative arrangements?
  - 2 Has the fire authority either made or planned to make changes that are in accordance with the IRMP and the objectives of the authority?

### Results

- 93 More than half the fire authorities in England and Wales had made little or no progress against these two criteria (**Exhibit 6**). 21 authorities were rated amber, for some progress, and 27 were rated red. This category was inapplicable for one authority, the Isles of Scilly.
- 94 Only one authority, Nottinghamshire, achieved a green. Many authorities told us they could not make progress, often quoting the need to negotiate with the FBU or, sometimes, a perceived difficulty with the EU Working Time Directive. The following extract from our report to Nottinghamshire shows how one authority is managing to overcome all such perceived difficulties and show progress in an area that this authority believes can help achieve the benefits of modernisation. This positive and forward looking response is why Nottinghamshire, alone, received a green rating (**Case study 15**).

#### Exhibit 6 Duty systems



Note: 1 authority not applicable.

Source: Audit Commission

#### Case study 15

##### On alternative duty systems

The authority has produced several 'Working Differently' documents as part of the IRMP process, which review the current duty system used and how this fits in with actioning the objectives of the IRMP. These documents have been approved by the senior management team.

The authority has come to the conclusion that the current system does not make good use of time, and is aiming to achieve positive 24-hour working. Negotiations are underway as to how this can be implemented in 2004/05. This is phase one of a two phase change, the second phase awaiting the results of current legal cases and any impact the working time directive may have on shift lengths.

The implementation of the change in duty system is radical in comparison with other fire authorities. The authority has begun to identify various shift patterns in preparation for phase two, which take into account the possibility of part-time working and the reduction of shifts to eight hours.

Despite much consultation with the unions, there is still a lot of resistance with regard to the implementation of the new duty system, and it is unclear as to whether it will be implemented on 1 April.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority*

---

## Some progress

- 95 Very many of the 21 authorities rated amber were taking the right steps, and it is reasonable that they should have still been at a developmental stage in January 2004 with the IRMPs still in consultation. Two examples, Tyne and Wear and Surrey, were typical of the sound work being done (**Case studies 16 and 17**). Like Nottinghamshire, they illustrate how negotiations with the unions will be critical to achieving what may be seen by many firefighters as an unwelcome change.

---

### Case study 16

#### On alternative duty systems

There are clear plans in place to implement planned changes to duty systems in specific areas to redirect resources to community fire safety, in line with the objectives of the draft IRPM. These changes are in the draft IRMP action plan and are due to be implemented from 1 April 2004. Monitoring and evaluation systems are also being put in place to assess the impact of planned changes through the continuing development of the performance management framework.

The changes focus on amending shift patterns and work routines to increase the capacity to deliver community safety and to improve cost-effectiveness. They will not produce cost savings directly.

The changes have been discussed with local FBU representatives and communicated to the workforce. It is clear from our work that the work force is aware of the proposed changes. While certain changes have been accepted by local FBU representatives and the work force, the move away from the nine-day fortnight for day shift staff has not been agreed and discussions with fire safety officers suggest this is a very unpopular change.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Tyne and Wear Fire Authority*

---



---

## Case study 17

### On alternative duty systems

As part of the development of the IRMP and the subsequent realignment of risk and resources, two planned changes will be implemented. In addition to this, a working group has been established to review the current duty systems and to recommend changes to existing shift patterns.

At two stations, one in the North of the county and one in the South, it is proposed within the IRMP first year action plan that there are changes to the crewing arrangements to provide a more flexible duty system. The revised system will be based on whole time staff crewing one appliance during the day, and retained staff crewing a second appliance where necessary and during the night time. As a result of these changes additional retained staff will be recruited.

Financial allowance is made for this within the 2004/05 budget.

In order to facilitate sign up to change, additional stakeholder consultation was completed in the two affected areas. Ongoing discussion has been held with the union to ensure their participation in the process. There has also been extensive public consultation.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Surrey County Fire Authority*

---

- 96 Many authorities told us they were waiting until the IRMP process was more fully developed, and we recognise there are many cases where capacity at the senior staff level is limited or other local considerations may apply. We gave credit for evidence that the authority was doing as much as it could. For example, Somerset County, rated amber, was a case of an authority actively considering change (**Case study 18**).

---

## Case study 18

### Has the fire authority reviewed its duty systems in the light of the changes?

Somerset is not planning to make any changes before it runs FSEC.

The Chief Fire Officer has said that Somerset has relatively few opportunities to vary its duty systems – at present it has only four full time rosters – two at Taunton, and one at each of Bridgwater and Yeovil. On the other hand, some managers were of the opinion that certain retained stations could operate better as day crewed stations.

### Has the fire authority considered the effectiveness of current duty systems in supporting organisational aims and objectives?

#### Have alternative approaches been considered, building on research and experience in other fire authorities in this country and beyond?

The IRMP is very critical of some of the existing practices in Somerset; it refers to out-of-date working practices, and wasted time on whole time stations because fire-fighters follow a set timetable, and their time is not managed by watch managers.

We consider that this is explicit evidence that the Brigade is keeping an open mind on duty options, and on the options for combining whole time, part-time and retained staff.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Somerset County Fire Authority*

---

## Authorities making little or no progress

- 97 Some authorities saw little or no scope for benefit from changing their duty systems, but in most of the instances where we were given that view we noted there had been no real review of the options and possibilities and so we rated them as red. When we return for phase 2 of the our study we will expect to see convincing evidence that management and Members have thought through how alternative duty systems could help, and have based their decisions on good solid data.
- 98 Many authorities had just not done anything yet, such as the typical example below (**Case study 19**). Many of the 27 reds were in this state of no progress at all.

---

### Case study 19

#### On alternative duty systems

The authority has yet to review its duty systems. It plans to define its risk assessment methodology (including the new FSEC system) and then determine its intervention and prevention policies. It will then consider the duty systems required to deliver these.

The authority has not yet implemented any changes or outlined its proposals. No action has been prepared to highlight redirection of resources, and there has been no formal consultation on potential duty systems.

As a result, the authority is not yet in a position to know which duty systems are most appropriate to deliver the organisation's priorities.

*Source: Audit Commission report to a fire authority*

---

# 9

## Part-time working and other conditions of service

- 99 The pay and conditions agreement provides for part-time working for employees in all roles in the fire service, and agrees statements of commitment on other conditions of service such as occupational health, fairness at work and maternity provisions.

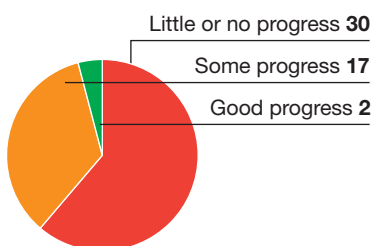
### Assessment criteria

- 100 We set two assessment criteria, exactly similar in structure and content to those we set for duty systems and pre-planned overtime:
- 1 Has the fire authority reviewed its part-time working and other conditions of service and considered alternative arrangements?
  - 2 Has the fire authority either made or planned to make changes that are in accordance with the IRMP and the objectives of the authority?

### Results

- 101 This was the category with the most reds. Two authorities were rated green: North Yorkshire and Avon. 17 were rated amber, and the Isles of Scilly were not rated. The remaining 30 fire authorities were rated red, for little or no progress.
- 102 North Yorkshire, for instance, won its green rating by being able to show us it is already trying out some new options (**Case study 20**).

#### Exhibit 7 Part-time working and other conditions of service



Source: Audit Commission

#### Case study 20

##### On part time working

Examples of changes either in progress or planned:

- job share in control or operationally;
- wholetime retained trial;
- part-time working on community fire safety activities; and
- part-time regulars to be considered.

Staff interviewed were aware and supportive of the review.

Source: Audit Commission report to the North Yorkshire Fire Authority

## Some progress

- 103 The authorities rated amber were generally able to show us evidence that a review was in progress or planned. The comments from our report to Cornwall County were typical (**Case study 21**).

---

### Case study 21

#### **On whether the authority plans any changes to part-time working or other conditions of service**

No changes will be made until the full impact of the review has been considered.

The authority acknowledges any changes will aim to improve service delivery, improve recruitment and retention and lessen pressure on the part-time workforce. Early indications show the need for an increase in staffing arrangements which will impact on resources.

Consultation will take place once the review is complete and outcomes known.

No planned changes have been made. The authority should ensure necessary consultation is carried out as part of this process.

The action plan should highlight redirection of resources based on the risk assessment undertaken as part of the IRMP.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Cornwall County Fire Authority*

---

## Little or no progress

- 104 Some authorities have been making progress on aspects of part-time working (for example, for non-firefighter staff) and the other conditions of service for some time, as a local initiative. There were cases, for example, Hertfordshire and Berkshire, where some work had already been done but we rated recent progress as red. Every authority should be responding to the greater freedoms allowed by the pay and conditions agreement, even those authorities which had already made a good start on the road to modernisation. We treated everybody in the same way.

# 10

## Other aspects of modernisation

105 With this section we aimed to include every aspect of modernisation, to make sure our assessment was full and fair. This, for example, was where we looked for evidence that the authority was developing a strategy that balanced the competing demands for resources to be allocated to prevention and to meeting its targets for responses to fires and other emergencies. We looked at management's contribution to the diversity agenda, and we recognised, as best we could in a brief review, whether there were sufficient resources and skills available to the authority to help it meet its vision.

### Assessment criteria

106 We wanted answers to these four overall questions:

- 1 Vision: what is the fire authority trying to do in respect of the changes in the white paper?
- 2 Action: how has it set about delivering its priorities?
- 3 Progress: what has it achieved to date?
- 4 Plans: what does it plan to do next?

### Results

107 The outcome, like the overview, was overwhelmingly amber (**Exhibit 8**).

108 The two authorities scoring red were the same two that were rated red overall, Derbyshire and the Isle of Wight.

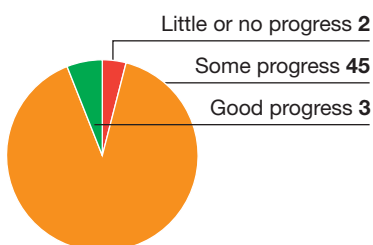
### Leadership from Members

109 Three authorities were rated green (Shropshire, West Midlands and Kent). These three were distinguished from authorities rated amber by their overall progress but also by a higher degree than usual of evidence that Members were in the driving seat.

### Some progress

110 Norfolk, shown below, is a typical example of the authorities rated amber. We saw evidence of a strategic approach and sound work in progress along the right direction of travel (**Case study 22, overleaf**).

#### Exhibit 8 Delivering the modernisation agenda



Source: Audit Commission

---

## Case study 22

### On delivering the modernisation agenda

The authority has established a clear vision which is derived from the county council's objective To make Norfolk Safer. This vision is set out clearly in the IRMP. It was developed from a detailed analysis of Norfolk's position, the national issues outlined in the recently published White Paper and Regional issues in which the authority is actively participating in. Further work will be carried out following the completion of the consultation process at the end of January to confirm the draft objectives, that have already been established, and finalise an action plan to address them.

Seventeen key objectives have been identified in the IRMP which identifies both good practice and areas for further development. A comprehensive action plan is shortly to be agreed which will address these objectives. This is scheduled for March 2004 following consultation and full agreement of the IRMP.

Members and senior management are well informed and focused on the modernisation agenda. The next stage of the process is the finalisation of the IRMP following consultation. This will then enable a finalised plan to be put in place and work on the ground progressed. Regional management board arrangements are currently being developed.

*Source: Audit Commission report to the Norfolk Fire Authority*

---

- 111** Our reviews on site were carried out in January 2004, only six months after the publication of the government's white paper. These overall results seem to us to be encouraging, in that they indicate most authorities are clear about what they need to do and are making some progress towards delivering it.

## Areas for improvement

- 112** These results indicate that there is scope for fire authorities to distinguish themselves by improving the quality of strategic leadership, from Members and from senior managers, and by demonstrating real achievement against their corporate aims. In the second stage of our study we will look again at how authorities are measuring their achievements, and whether their plans are up to date and robust.

# 11

## The self assessments

**113** Before our auditors went out on-site to make their assessment, we asked every fire authority to complete exactly the same assessment on itself. We sent out a *pro forma*, and asked the authorities to rate their own progress.

### The purpose of a self assessment

**114** Self assessments serve two purposes:

- 1 The forms we received back were helpful to us in speeding up our review. A self assessment gives us a good head start and means we can do the work with less disruption than would otherwise have been needed on-site. This is valuable, but less so than the second purpose.
- 2 The exercise of self-analysis can be helpful to the fire authorities, by giving them an opportunity to look at their business objectively and analytically, from perhaps an unfamiliar point of view, and to consider their own strengths and weaknesses in a new light. Such a viewpoint and the resulting analysis can produce fresh insight and a better understanding, for both Members and managers.

**115** We designed our request for self assessment to match the verification study assessment criteria very closely, and we used a *pro forma* to minimise the effort required to complete the self assessment. Every authority which completed the form did so in good time, and their work was very useful to us. Local audit teams, working on site, were able to draw together and use the evidence they needed to form their judgements more quickly and effectively than would have been the case without the authority's self assessment.

**116** Whether the exercise was indeed valuable to the authorities, as described in point 2 above, will emerge in time.

### Content of the first self assessments

**117** We did not ask the fire authorities to come to an overall view on their own progress. We only asked for the detail, using the seven categories described in chapter 2.

**118** Each authority is now able to compare its own initial self assessment to ours, because the *pro forma* matches the structure of our assessment criteria and our reports. We worked hard to make sure our judgements were consistent across the country, and we have presented the detail in our report to each authority on that basis.

- 119** There are differences between our views and those of the authorities in their original self assessments, arising in the main from differing interpretations. About 30 per cent of the detailed judgements differed, some up and some down, as summarised below (Table 2).

**Table 2**

**The Audit Commission's judgements compared to the authorities' self assessments**

We agreed with the authority's own initial judgement	69%
We took a less positive view	24%
We took a more positive view	7%
	100%

- 120** Bearing in mind that this was the first time most fire authorities had carried out a self assessment or had seen the type of assessment criteria we were using, these overall figures indicate a considerable degree of objectivity on the part of fire authorities.

## Future use of self assessments

- 121** We undertake to build future requests for self assessments on the base we used this time, to avoid duplication of effort. We will request an update to the self assessment before we return to carry out the second stage of this study.
- 122** We recommend that authorities use their original self assessment, updating it as they may see fit, taking our report into consideration, to keep their progress towards modernisation under review.



# Glossary

**The Bill**

The Fire & Rescue Services Bill (reference no. 38) published by government in January 2004

**BVPI**

Best Value Performance Indicator

**CACFOA**

Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officer's Association

**EU**

European Union

**FBU**

Fire Brigades Union

**FSEC**

Fire Service Emergency Cover, software to be issued by the ODPM to help authorities carry out the risk mapping required for the IRMP

**HMFSI**

Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate, now part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**IIP**

Investors in People

**IPA**

Initial Performance Assessment, a version of comprehensive performance assessment to be carried out for the first time in 2004 on the Greater London Authority and its four functional bodies, one of which is the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

**IPDS**

Integrated Personal Development System

**IRMP**

Integrated Risk Management Plan

**National Framework**

A document that sets out the government's objectives for the Fire and Rescue service and what fire authorities should do to achieve these outcomes

[www.odpm.gov.uk/fire](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/fire)

**National Joint Council**

The national body responsible for negotiating the pay and conditions of service for uniformed employees, other than principal fire officers, in the UK fire service

**ODPM**

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**Pay and conditions agreement**

An agreement signed by the National Joint Council on 13 June 2003, reference NJC/01/03

[www.lg-employers.gov.uk/conditions/fire](http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/conditions/fire)

**SMART**

Specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, time-bound. Often used for action plans, to express the virtues a good action plan should possess.

**White Paper**

Our Fire and Rescue Service, published by the ODPM on 30 June 2003. Expresses the government's intentions regarding the modernisation of the fire service.

[www.odpm.gov.uk/fire](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/fire)

To order further copies of this **report**, priced £15, please contact Audit Commission Publications, PO Box 99, Wetherby, LS23 7JA, 0800 502030.

This report is available on our website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk). Our website also contains a **searchable version** of this report.

Price £15  
Stock code: LAR3214

Audit Commission  
1st floor, Millbank Tower,  
Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ  
Telephone: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187  
Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

