Operational Assessment key findings and notable practice

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Addressed to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Summary
This circular accompanies a report summarising key findings from the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD). Appendix 1 includes a selection of notable practice examples identified during OASD.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 A report has been produced summarising the key findings from the Fire and Rescue Service Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) undertaken at the end of 2006. The report can be found at http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1511018. This draws on the findings from all 45 reviews. The report’s themes have been identified by a review of the written feedback and collation of common strengths, common areas for improvement and notable practice.

1.2 The overall results from OASD (which formed one half of the Service Assessments for the Fire and Rescue Service) were published by the Audit Commission in February.

1.3 Appendix 1 to the report contains a range of notable practice examples identified during the OASD process.

2.0 Key Findings

2.1 As the report sets out in greater detail, FRAs demonstrated, on average, good overall performance in the service delivery areas examined by the OASD process and that their performance has not declined in the period since HM Fire Service Inspectorate stopped inspecting. 25 per cent of FRAs were assessed as performing strongly, 62 per cent as performing well and 13 per cent as performing adequately. No FRAs were assessed as performing inadequately.

2.2 Many FRAs have made significant progress in introducing integrated risk management planning, and are using this to target their prevention and protection activity. There is a high degree of professionalism about how the risk analysis process is conducted, and a number of FRAs have used this to generate substantial outcomes.

2.3 A significant amount of innovation was found across FRAs but there are also some common areas for improvement including the need for better evaluation of community fire safety activity, an improved focus on the delivery and recording of operational training, and the assessment of competence.

2.4 The highest scoring Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) was Prevention and Protection, and a considerable amount of notable practice was found in this area. This was closely followed by Risk Analysis and Call Management & Incident Support, and then by Operational Preparedness and Emergency Response.

2.5 FRAs tended to score higher in organising, planning and implementing their activities, and less well in monitoring, auditing and reviewing them.

2.6 The style and length of FRA self assessments differed significantly, and FRAs generally slightly over-estimated their level of performance. A number of FRAs said that they found the timetable for completing self assessments challenging, and felt that more guidance was necessary.
3.0 Notable Practice

3.1 Appendix 1 includes a range of notable practice examples both as detailed case studies and also as ‘snapshots’. These have been organised under the five ‘Key Lines of Enquiry’ used for the Operational Assessment.

3.2 These OASD case studies and ‘snapshots’ supplement the four batches of case studies published in 2006 on the Department’s website at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1502365.

3.3 As with the earlier case studies, some of the notable practice included at Appendix 1 has not yet been fully evaluated. Other examples represent opportunities only available in particular circumstances that may not be applicable to all FRAs, so cannot be described as universally transferable. They cannot therefore be described as “best” or “good” practice at this stage. Our intention in making this selection of examples widely available now is both to include information about a range of initiatives that have been successful elsewhere and also to increase awareness of different approaches - with a view to encouraging other FRAs to consider whether any of the initiatives might be applicable to their own situation.

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