Second verification report on the progress of modernisation

Fire and Rescue Service in England and Wales
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Preface

The pay and conditions agreement

A pay and conditions agreement was signed by the two parties in the fire service National Joint Council (that is, the employers and the employees) on 13 June 2003. It describes a five-stage pay award, with stages two and three 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'.

Scope and nature of this report

This report is the outcome of the Audit Commission's study to assess progress made by fire authorities in England and Wales in implementing the modernisation agenda set out in the pay and conditions agreement. Separate arrangements for reporting were made in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In undertaking the work in Wales, the Audit Commission in Wales took into account a number of issues specifically relating to Wales including:

• the significant restructuring of the Welsh Fire Service as a result of the amalgamation of Brigades in 1996;
• the future devolution of the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to the National Assembly for Wales; and
• the need to take into account the emerging Wales Programme for Improvement Frameworks.

Our work was carried out under powers given us by the Audit Commission Act 1998, section 33.

This report does not comment on the pay award. It concerns itself 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.

We carried out our work in two stages. Our report from the first stage, *Verification of the Progress of Modernisation*, (March 2004), is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk
Glossary and general context

The Fire and Rescue Service uses many specialised terms and acronyms. A glossary is provided (Appendix 1).

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.

The fire service is facing many changes at present. For details, please refer to the White Paper, Our Fire and Rescue Service, published in June 2003, the Fire and Rescue Services Bill (ref. 38) published in January 2004, and the National Framework published by the ODPM in July 2004. More supporting details can be found on the relevant sections of the ODPM website www.odpm.gov.uk/fire

This report assumes a reasonable level of familiarity with these background details and a working knowledge of modernisation in the fire service.
Summary of our work and our conclusions

1 This is our second and final report on the progress of modernisation in the fire and rescue service for England and Wales. We based our conclusions on work carried out on our behalf and on evidence collected by our auditors in the months of January and June 2004. This study assesses the progress being made by each fire authority in the following areas of business and service development:

1 Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP);
2 changing from rank to role;
3 the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS);
4 pre-planned overtime;
5 alternative duty systems;
6 part-time working and other conditions of service;
7 the modernisation agenda; and
8 the financial aspects of modernisation.

2 Items one to six are mentioned specifically in the pay agreement and items seven and eight are, in our view, essential to forming a balanced view. We looked at how well elected members are leading and directing the progress of modernisation, and at whether managers are discharging their responsibilities effectively. Where possible, we assessed progress against guidance or clear measurements. Where this could not be done, we used our best judgement.

3 This report sets out our findings from phase two and is based on the work carried out in June 2004, in which we concentrated on what had changed since January.

4 In our report on phase one, we expressed concern at the relative lack of progress in the three technical areas of overtime, duty systems and part-time working, where changes in operational arrangements and working practices are required if the modernisation agenda is to be delivered. While some progress has been made in these areas since phase one, the Commission is disappointed by the level of progress overall. One-quarter of authorities have not improved in these areas, and the number of authorities achieving 'good progress' in these areas is limited. Only eight authorities have made changes on the ground in respect of overtime and only five have introduced changes in duty systems – a key plank of the modernisation agenda. Only six authorities have made 'good progress' on introducing part-time working.

5 The Commission recognises that these three areas represent the most technical and complex aspects of the change agenda. We also appreciate that many fire authorities remain cautious as a result of the stalled national negotiations between the...
Employers' Organisation and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Similarly, the lack of progress on implementing part-time working is perhaps not surprising, given the longstanding culture in the service and the outstanding issues concerning pensions, in particular, relating to the admission of part-time firefighters to the pension scheme. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, some fire authorities are clearly making much better progress than others in these areas.

Overall, 11 fire authorities were assessed as making 'good progress' (green), 17 fire authorities were assessed as making 'reasonable progress' (amber plus), 18 fire authorities were assessed as making 'some progress' (amber) and four fire authorities (including one red from phase one) were assessed as making 'little or no progress' (red) Figure 1.

This means that 56 per cent of authorities (28) have now been assessed as having made progress towards modernisation and have achieved a 'reasonable' or 'good' progress assessment. At phase one all but two authorities could only be rated as making 'some' progress and none were rated 'good'. In one way or another, and often across almost the full range of our review, most fire authorities were able to demonstrate progress.

We recognise that those fire authorities achieving progress in the period from January to June did so in an atmosphere of continuing uncertainty, with varying degrees of threat of industrial action. Specific instructions issued in mid-May by the FBU to its membership put a stop to certain management actions.

Four authorities were rated as making little or no progress overall, which is an increase from the two rated at this level at phase one. This helps to illustrate how our criteria for making judgements changed from phase one to phase two. Reasonably, in our view, we expected more at the second phase because time had moved on and further milestones towards modernisation should have been passed. The four authorities rated red overall have failed to make sufficient progress in the period under consideration. These authorities should now consider their position carefully and take appropriate remedial action in order to catch up as quickly as possible.

It was in IRMP and in implementing the IPDS that we saw the best degree of improvement. Rank to role is integral to implementing IPDS, and results there demonstrated real improvement too. There is much to do in these important areas of modernisation, and our review showed that many authorities are getting on well. For example:

- Regarding IRMP, we recognise that the FSEC software, which came out during the period between our first and second reviews, requires detailed work on the underlying databases before it can be put fully into use. We commend those authorities that are managing to make some progress in risk-based planning while this work on the database is still in progress.
• Regarding rank to role and IPDS, our meetings with a wide range of employees at fire stations and at other locations showed a steadily increasing level of awareness of what IPDS means for the individuals concerned. We also noted that many authorities are learning from their earlier attempts at internal communications and making a better fist of it now, although there is still plenty of scope to do better.

• Our findings regarding the financial aspects of modernisation were not encouraging. Thirteen authorities were able to satisfy us that they were fully prepared, with cost estimates, and plans for funding, but 29 were only partly able to meet these simple test criteria and 8 authorities were making little or no progress. Again, a disappointing outcome.

11 The last criterion against which we judged every fire authority was on their general achievement in meeting the modernisation agenda. The results show real progress since January, with almost half of the fire authorities now rated green.

12 We have set out above the less favourable view we take regarding certain specific elements of modernisation (overtime, duty systems and part-time working) where we think the authorities could have done more in the time available. We also found that progress in coping with the financial aspects of modernisation is poorer than it could have been by now, and should be improved as soon as possible. We note a half-and-half position in meeting the modernisation agenda generally (half with good progress and half with only ‘some’) and recommend that the trailing authorities review their achievement so far, in order to make improvements. But the fire service has improved overall in its achievements towards modernisation in the year that we studied. It has been a difficult period, with many new demands on the authorities, competing demands for resources and continuing uncertainty in industrial relations.

We would like to thank the fire service in England and Wales, and its elected members, for their assistance to us and our auditors in carrying out this review. We hope our findings help the service as it moves forward.
Aim and overall results

In this section we outline the aim we had and the approach we took, and give the overall results.

Aim

The verification study sets out to assess progress by the fire service in implementing the changes set out in the national pay agreement of June 2003. We examined how well each fire authority is getting on with:

1. delivering an effective IRMP;
2. changing from rank to role;
3. introducing the 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;
7. delivering the modernisation agenda; and
8. dealing with the costs of modernisation (the financial diagnostic).

Appendix 2 outlines the steps we took to achieve consistency, fairness and openness in our review.

Comparability with phase one

In this, the second and final stage of the study, we used the same method and approach as in phase one, so that comparison with the phase one result would be on a like-for-like basis. To acknowledge that time had moved on, from January to June, we adapted our work as follows:

- In phase two we concentrated on progress achieved in the period from January 2004 (phase one on-site reviews) and June 2004 (phase two). In this way we avoided duplicating the phase one work and achieved clarity, for both the reviewers and the reviewed, about exactly what our work was looking for.
- We adapted our lines of enquiry to recognise any deadlines that had arisen in the intervening period (for example, IRMP documents had to have been published and plans for year two should be underway) and to accommodate the passage of time (for example, we asked whether management arrangements for integrated risk management planning are now ‘embedded’, as opposed to ‘being developed’ as in phase one).

We brought in one additional area expanding the work from phase one – the financial diagnostic, noted as item eight above. Our work on phase one highlighted the fact that many fire authorities had not been able to address the costs of modernisation effectively. At phase two, five months further on, we considered it appropriate to look
specifically at how well the authorities were coping with the financial aspect of modernisation including the need to identify and provide for savings.

**Summary of results**

17 In phase one we scored on a green/amber/red traffic light system and in phase two we continued to use the same scoring method for each category one to eight above for consistency. Table 2 shows the results for each fire authority.

18 Table 2 also shows an overall traffic light rating, this time one of four, not three. In phase two we introduced an intermediate category, ‘amber plus’, to give credit for instances where we saw reasonable progress in the period under review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>The overall score traffic light system</th>
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<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td><strong>Good</strong> progress. Guidance and deadlines met. Plans set up properly and being met by action. Evidence clearly demonstrates progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber plus</td>
<td><strong>Reasonable</strong> progress since phase 1. Guidance and deadlines met. All plans in place and some progress on delivery. Evidence supporting compliance and progress is strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td><strong>Some</strong> progress since phase 1. Guidance and deadlines met. Most plans in place and some progress on delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td><strong>Little or no</strong> progress. Guidance not fully met. Limited planning, or plans not yet being actioned. Evidence shows little progress.</td>
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</table>

Source: Audit Commission

19 In coming to an overall assessment for each fire authority, we applied a rule that an authority with a red in any category could not be amber plus or green overall.

20 Most reds (15) arose under the part-time diagnostic, followed by overtime (10), then duty systems and the financial diagnostic (both with 8).

21 Analysis of the results in table 2 may lead to the identification of apparent ‘anomalies’, such as Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority and South Wales Fire Authority. Both authorities have the same range of diagnostic assessments yet a different overall assessment. This arises from the make up of the underlying key issue assessments. South Wales has a stronger set of underlying scores that has led to the higher overall mark (more ‘completely’ assessments). For example, it would be possible for both authorities to gain a good progress assessment against the integrated risk management diagnostic, but one with five and one with eight (out of eight) individual
ratings. In reaching overall assessments the range and strength of all the underlying key issue assessments were considered, along with any recommendations made in order to reach a balanced and considered judgement.

### Table 2

**Results from phase 2**

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Source: Audit Commission
The overall picture from phase two

22 Overwhelmingly amber at phase one, the picture has changed at phase two to green and amber plus. An improvement, achieved in a relatively short time frame Figure 2.

23 Exhibit 1 shows how the overall traffic light scored by each fire authority changed in the period from January to June. At this summary level clear improvement is demonstrated by the majority of fire authorities. There is also some apparent falling back, for a few fire authorities, indicated by the higher incidence of red (two at phase one, up to four at phase two). To understand the results more thoroughly we need to look at the next level down. With regard to the individual diagnostics a summary is provided below with a more detailed analysis in the next section.

24 IPDS and its companion ‘Rank to Role’ are the areas where most movement has taken place; a movement in line with what might have been expected, since most of the changes required to make the move successfully were not affected by the FBU action in May 2004, and were supported centrally by the 'IPDS Hub' located at the Fire Service College. As these results show, management in many fire authorities has been able to get on well with IPDS, with real progress being achieved on the ground.

25 Achievements in integrated risk management planning are also much improved since January. The software, FSEC, was issued during the period and many fire authorities are working hard to refine and enhance the underlying data so that it can be put to its intended use – to support important decisions about fire cover and community fire safety.

26 Planning for the use of overtime, for adopting revised duty systems and for offering part-time working contracts have all moved away from the high quotients of red (meaning little or no progress) observed at phase one. However, as noted in the previous section, we do not consider these achievements to be as good as they might have been.

27 In ‘delivering to the modernisation agenda’, the seventh category, almost half the authorities are achieving good progress now, as opposed to 90 per cent with only ‘some’ progress only at phase one.

28 We were unable to obtain much assurance in phase one about how well the authorities were handling the financial side of modernisation. While the findings from phase two from the new financial diagnostic indicate some progress, we think that the fire service should do better than this.

The next section looks at each of these results in more detail.
Detailed findings

In this section we discuss the findings from phase two in relation to each of the eight categories we reviewed, and draw conclusions.

Delivering effective Integrated Risk Management Planning

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>27 (54.00%)</td>
<td>6 (12.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>22 (44.00%)</td>
<td>42 (84.00%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>1 (2.00%)</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Green to red</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marks moving upwards from phase 1</td>
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<td>Amber to green</td>
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<td>Red to amber</td>
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</table>

Guidance and timetables
Consultation
Monitoring and review
Resources
Opportunities, policies and standards
Assess current arrangements
Risk identification
Management arrangements

Source: Audit Commission

Integrated risk management planning is the means by which the entire fire service is changing from a national regime of fixed standards of fire cover, based largely on risk to property, to a local regime based on risk of loss of life. It began in mid-2003 and is still in a relatively early stage, with fire authorities working to complete their databases. Before a fire authority can safely make risk-based changes in the way it arranges fire cover
Second verification report on the progress of modernisation | Detailed findings

locally, it must be able to demonstrate high levels of integrity in the underlying data about incidents and about the localities where incidents could take place.

30 We began our review by assessing the leadership being provided by fire authority Members (or the principal Member and the county, for a county brigade). We then went on to examine management's arrangements for assessing risk, for deciding how best to manage it and for identifying opportunities for improvement in fire cover. We considered the monitoring arrangements, and the quality of consultation and asked what management was doing to make sure that the authority continues to comply with prescribed guidance and timetables.

31 By the time we carried out our phase two review, fire authorities had learned from the experience of issuing their first draft IRMP document for consultation. The results show a significant improvement in the numbers of fire authorities now rated as making good progress (up from 6 to 26). The lessons learned are being put to good use. For example, in one case, area managers now deliver copies of the IRMP documents in person to each district chief executive and leader, and use this as an opportunity to explain the aims and contents of the document.

32 Our results indicate that the areas with the greatest scope for improvement are:

- reassessing the effectiveness of current preventative, protective and response arrangements with the benefit of the risk analysis (32 authorities achieving this 'partly', 18 achieving it fully);
- identifying and assessing opportunities for improvement (2 not at all achieved, 28 'partly' achieved, 20 completely achieved); and
- assessing and accommodating the resource requirements to implement the changes being made (4 not at all achieved, 23 'partly' achieved, 23 completely achieved).

33 In each of these areas approximately 40 per cent of authorities have been able to achieve completely against the criteria we set, indicating that no insurmountable barriers exist and that many more authorities should be able to do the same. We noted that many of the 'partly achieving' authorities saw the delaying factor in their case as working on the data needed to use FSEC to its full potential. However, our results show that many authorities, sometimes more than half, are able to show complete achievement against these three criteria even while continuing to work on the databases. This demonstrates what can be done where there is strong leadership and where sufficient priority is given to the issue.

34 As part of the study, we sought to collect detailed information on changes in policy that affect service provision. Not all fire authorities were able to provide all of this information but the information that was provided was reviewed as part of the local fieldwork. The results that support the evidence of those authorities that have sought to change policies and make changes on the ground include:
• eight fire authorities have revised their policy on ridership (the number of firefighters on an appliance attending an incident);
• seventeen fire authorities have revised their policy on the number of appliances dispatched to attend an incident; and
• seventeen authorities have reviewed and revised their policy on the response to automatic fire alarms.

**Changing from rank to role**

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>28 (66.00%)</td>
<td>4 (8.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>20 (40.00%)</td>
<td>41 (82.00%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>2 (4.00%)</td>
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<td>Green to red</td>
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<td>Green to amber</td>
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<td>Amber to red</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marks moving upwards from phase 1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Amber to green</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Red to amber</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Audit Commission

Over a number of years, in parallel with the ongoing development and introduction of IPDS, a review has been carried out of the way the service is currently structured and how it could be improved. A consensus has been reached that the 13 formal operational ranks were not appropriate. They provided a rigid hierarchy rather than reflecting the roles actually carried out by people at work. IPDS replaces rank with role and brings in a single standard across the service. The 13 ranks have been replaced by the introduction of the 7 roles that relate directly to the work that people do. By replacing ranks with roles, IPDS does more than shift the emphasis from the uniforms that individuals wear to the role that they play. It also provides a way to describe exactly what each role is and what is expected from everyone in that role.
56 We assessed the extent to which each authority had progressed with pay assimilation and determining the responsibilities assigned to individual roles, in accordance with national guidance and any local staffing plans. We considered the robustness of any action plans that are in place and whether they were integrated with other modernisation activities in progress. And, as always, we thought about the quality of consultation and communication.

57 The pie charts above show that most fire authorities are progressing well with the steps that need to be taken to leave behind the old hierarchical job titles and many of the attitudes that accompanied them. Such a step, together with the other changes involved in implementing the IPDS, involves considerable cultural change in any organisation and those authorities that have achieved it deserve praise. We rated 12 authorities as having completely achieved against each of our assessment criteria for moving from rank to role.

58 The numbers of fire authorities making good progress towards full implementation of rank to role has gone up significantly (from 4 to 28). Only two authorities made little or no progress. It is interesting to note that these two were not among the four rated red in phase one, illustrating how it was possible to fall back between phases one and two. We assessed every fire authority against the same assessment criteria as used in phase one but time had moved on and we expected achievement by the fire authorities to have moved on too. In a few cases, such as in this example, it had not.

59 The weakest area is progress against action plans to complete the move from rank to role. While progress continues, over 50 per cent of fire authorities still have work to do in this area.

60 On the positive side, of the four authorities rated red in phase one, one achieved amber this time and the other three jumped up to green. In total, 12 authorities have achieved greens across the board. This has been achieved by pulling together and implementing a comprehensive action plan that is appropriately resourced, with both employees and unions fully aware and involved.
Introducing the Integrated Personal Development System

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<td>11 (22.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>13 (26.00%)</td>
<td>37 (74.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>3 (6.00%)</td>
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Source: Audit Commission

As in phase one, IPDS shows the highest quantity of green ratings, reflecting the fact that the process, although complex and challenging, has been in development for some time and is well understood and supported. It also shows the best improvement, at 11 greens last time and 34 in phase 2.

We assessed each authority's achievements in:
- establishing sound management structures to support IPDS;
- complying with guidelines and deadlines;
- being fully prepared for programmed workplace assessments, together with all the associated detailed requirements;
• providing the funding and resources; and
• keeping employees and others well informed on progress and the implications for them.

43 Many fire authorities still have work to do to fully assess and accommodate the resource implications of IPDS. There is also a large variation in the delivery of workplace assessments, with some fire authorities already having undertaken more than 400 assessments, while others have not yet started the process.

44 Internal communication was again revealed as an area where fire authorities can do better, but it was clear that much has been achieved since phase one. For example, where auditors visited fire stations and other sites, or held focus group discussions with a range of employees, they reported a degree of concern, sometimes discontent, being expressed at these meetings. However, they recognised that this also meant staff are increasingly well informed on the underlying information about how IPDS is being implemented in their brigades. We also noted that some fire authorities are finding better ways to communicate internally. For example, one authority commented that their intranet is effective in keeping staff informed but is of little use in engaging staff in a constructive dialogue. We noted much use of internal newsletters and other forms of internal publication, a few of which are very effective, although many have some way to go yet.

45 Nine authorities were rated green throughout for IPDS – that is, they completely achieved against each assessment criterion. A comment made in one of those reports epitomises a goal to be achieved by every authority:

*The strong tradition of transparency, communication and consultation, and the support evidenced by good relations with the unions, ensure that staff will be able to cope with the change.*
Paragraph 3.8 of the pay agreement states that employees will be free to undertake pre-arranged overtime at premium rates of pay (one and a half times the appropriate hourly rate) for no more than 24 hours per month, averaged over a six-month period. This is to be on a voluntary basis. The agreement goes on to say that pre-arranged overtime will not be used to make up any planned shortfall in the overall staffing arrangements set out in the fire authority's risk management plan. The FBU lifted its ban on pre-arranged overtime as from 7 November 2003.

We assessed the extent to which management had:

- Reviewed and revised its policies on the use of overtime, in the context of the IRMP, and sought to further the opportunity for increased efficiency or more flexible use of resources. Where no changes were planned, we asked whether the reasons for this decision had been communicated to internal stakeholders.

- Communicated its revised policies (where applicable) on the use of overtime to the extent that staff at all levels are aware of the changes and how they are to be implemented, and put action plans in place to implement any changes in line with key priorities, with such action plans being implemented and monitored. Where no changes are planned, we assessed whether action is being taken to make sure that the current use of overtime is contributing to service delivery in accordance with expectations.
In examining whether overtime policies had been reviewed and revised, we considered how extensive the review was and whether the potential impact of any changes had been assessed and explored. We took consultation with staff into account, and whether any changes had been reflected in the developing IRMP.

In examining communication and action plans, we considered whether the costs of any changes had been estimated. Where there were no changes, we looked at how fully any plans were likely to affect the efficiency or costs of current service provision, and whether the action plans were in line with current objectives.

As part of the assessment, and to support any evidence of changes on the ground, we also collected data looking at how management had changed the use of overtime between September 2003 to May 2004.

The results show progress in terms of the process of reviewing pre-planned overtime, but less progress on the development of action plans and the delivery of changes. The results from the data collection undertaken reinforce the fact that few fire authorities have made any changes on the ground since the ban was lifted. Our information gathering found that only eight fire authorities were able to support the changes on the ground, with evidence of change in overtime hours worked between September 2003 and May 2004.

Those fire authorities that are making progress have either extended or expanded the use of overtime in existing areas, such as training or cover for sickness, or have used overtime to ‘kick-start’ new initiatives (Case studies 1, 2 and 3, overleaf).

**Case study 1**

**West Sussex**

Overtime is being used to:

- Maintain current standards by using whole time officers to cover retained officers when they are not available, in order to keep retained stations operational. Some concerns were raised about how these stations were prioritised.
- Carry out community prevention work by using overtime to fund project teams that can focus on geographical areas and carry out, for example, home safety checks.
- Meet training targets, particularly those relating to New Dimensions.
- Develop nucleus crewing to provide cover for peak periods and so reduce the number of retained fire fighters required.

*Source: Audit Commission*
Case study 2
Tyne & Wear
As stated above, the authority has developed a new overtime policy and procedure in conjunction with its regional partners. Our work shows that local FBU representatives and staff have been consulted on, and accept, the introduction of the new arrangements.

It has been accepted that when specific circumstances arise where the payment of overtime would benefit the public then this will take place in practice. There are already a number of examples of the practical application of this policy, including the payment of overtime:
• to operational crews at Tynemouth fire station to cover attendance at a weekend community fire safety event;
• to operational personnel who attended the recent building collapse in Glasgow; and
• to individuals participating in urban search and rescue training at the Fire Service College, which will be externally funded.

Work has also been carried out to evaluate the potential savings in staff costs that would be generated by using overtime to cover training courses and sickness absence. It is recognised that this will require additional set-up costs, and the authority plans to use the savings generated from the implementation of the PPP and IRMP to introduce a more comprehensive approach to overtime in future years.

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 3
West Yorkshire
At the time of this review over 360 staff had registered to take part in pre-arranged overtime.

The fully revised policy has been drawn up in accordance with the proposals of the draft Grey Book and is currently in consultation. Management Team approval of the full policy has been delayed, but this is expected to happen before the end of June 2004.

A significant commitment in the IRMP was to introduce two new pumping appliances in high-risk periods and to staff these appliances with firefighters working overtime. As these were additional resources, a separate agreement was reached to implement these changes from 5 April – and these pumps are now operating and providing additional support in Bradford and Gipton Fire Stations in the evenings. The recent national developments have meant that some firefighters have become reluctant to staff these appliances during June 2004, but they are still available for some of the week.

In addition to the ‘high-risk’ pumps, some staff are also working overtime in line with the proposed new arrangements. Such examples include staff attending training courses on their rota days and crews providing support for workplace assessments for Crew Managers, as well as some training centre staff.

Source: Audit Commission
As noted above, in our opinion while these results show improved processes they are still disappointing in terms of real change.

Considering and planning for alternative duty systems

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<tr>
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<td>1 (2.08%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>36 (73.47%)</td>
<td>20 (41.67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>8 (16.33%)</td>
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<td>1 Green to amber</td>
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<td>3 Amber to red</td>
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<td>1 Red to green</td>
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<td>4 Amber to green</td>
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<td>22 Red to amber</td>
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<th>Marks moving upwards from phase 1</th>
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Source: Audit Commission

Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.6 of the pay agreement dealt with duty systems. These paragraphs noted the five different types of duty systems in use, stated that they will continue to operate (under certain terms) and gave the principles under which alternative duty systems should be discussed with the recognised trade union. The agreement sets out procedures for dealing with any differences arising between the fire authority and the FBU.

The agreement makes it possible for management to bring in new forms of duty systems wherever this would help to achieve the aims set out in the IRMP document. For example, an appliance might be crewed in a different way, or a station being changed, say, from whole-time to day crewing, might be set up with a new duty system too.
We assessed the extent to which management had:

- Considered the effectiveness of current duty systems in supporting organisational aims and objectives and, having regard to resources, had reviewed and revised its policies on duty systems, in the context of the IRMP. We asked whether alternative approaches had been considered, building on research and experience in other fire authorities in this country and beyond.
- Made (or planned) changes consistent with the IRMP, and embarked on effective consultation and communication processes, having regard to the family friendliness of any changes and the implications of related cost estimates.

As part of the assessment, and to support any evidence of changes on the ground, we also collected data looking at how management had changed duty systems in terms of either an increase or decrease in the resources available (on duty) at time of peak or low demand for services between September 2003 and May 2004.

At phase one just over half the fire authorities had made little or no progress on reconsidering duty systems. Five months later this position has improved, with only eight authorities now in this category (27 at phase 1). At phase one we often heard the objection that changes to duty systems could only be made once the IRMP process had been worked through fully, because a prudent fire authority could only make such significant decisions on the basis of 100 per cent accurate risk information. The phase two results show that, by June, most fire authorities had progressed from this position. However, several examples were cited in local reports of staff and union opposition to any change to duty systems.

While many authorities have now either reviewed, or are in the process of reviewing, alternative duty systems, few have firm action plans in place to deliver changes on the ground. There is, however, evidence that some authorities have undertaken pilots to evaluate new approaches despite not having completed a review.

**Case study 4**

**Greater Manchester**

The Fire Authority has a history of implementing duty systems that are outside the scope of the National Scheme of Conditions of Service by local agreement. Nucleus crewing was introduced first at Greater Manchester Fire 20 years ago and alternate crewing has been used with certain little-used special appliances for at least seven years.

These arrangements remain in place and in the period of review alternate crewing has been extended to:

- two Incident Response Units at Ashton and Farnworth; and
- the hose layer and emergency salvage tender at Rochdale.

Since our last review, day crewing is being implemented at Mossley fire station with cover tailored to the highest risk periods after 1700 hours. The approach is being considered for appliances at other locations.

*Source: Audit Commission*
Case study 5
Stoke and Staffordshire

In light of the Blue 8 activity and call analysis information and the FSEC modelling, proposed duty systems changes have been approved by the Policy Group. Changes made include the following:

- Variable crewing at whole-time shift stations – introduced from 1 June 2004. Staff working the third pumps at Newcastle and Burton stations now carry out proactive work between 9am and 9pm travelling in people carriers. The pump is manned through retained staff. Hanley and Stafford have adopted the same working arrangements, but as these stations are not retained stations staff are carrying out community fire safety work travelling on the second pump. Staff are available for recall to life threatening calls. Retained staff are currently being recruited to provide support to Hanley and Stafford (to be recruited under the conditions in the retained review). These arrangements will be subject to ongoing risk assessment and may be affected if there are; for example, dry spells when grass fires occur. In the 2004/05 budget, £75,000 has been allocated for the introduction and payment of retained crewing at Hanley and Stafford. To cover variable crewing costs, £93,000 has also been identified in the budget from existing resources.

- Officers’ flexible duty system – this rota has been reviewed by the Task Group and from 1 June 2004 new rotas came into effect (it is currently voluntary to work the new rota but this will became compulsory from 1 July 2004). This is to account for annual leave already booked. The entire rota system is to be changed by 1st January 2005 and will be compulsory for everyone. It is envisaged that separate rotas will operate – a Gold Rota (chief officers), a Silver Rota (senior officers) and a Bronze Rota (supervisors).

- Retained review – a pilot has been set up at Cheadle Station effective from 1 June 2004 to trial new arrangements. If the pilot is successful the working arrangements will be rolled out to other retained stations. Four other stations are planned to be online within the next six months. In the 2004/05 budget, £80,000 has been allocated to fund the new retained duty systems. In addition, £50,000 has been allocated to retained CFS from existing resources. The new arrangements will ensure that retained staff are on call for a maximum of 84 hours on average over a 12-week period (most are currently on call for an average of 100 hours). The new arrangements should be more family friendly, as available hours are stipulated by the firefighter and there is more flexibility to on call rotas. Bandings are in place (influenced by availability and demand at the station) that relate to set salary scales. Availability is on a rota basis and retained staff stipulate when they are available. Rotas are in place for officers, drivers and firefighters.

- Critical cover contracts have been introduced from 1 June 2004.

Source: Audit Commission
Once again, few fire authorities were able to provide data to support evidence of changes taking place on the ground at this stage. Data was available in only four cases, and this provided limited support.

Twenty authorities, through CFOA and with leadership from the Cheshire Fire Authority, are co-operating in a formal review of shift systems and are sharing the workload to identify shift systems that can deliver the IRMP action plan, meet corporate objectives and deliver value for money. At the time of our onsite reviews this research was in progress.

As noted above, in our opinion these results, while improved in terms of process, are still disappointing in terms of real change.

Considering and planning for part-time working and other conditions of service

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Phase one</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>6 (12.24%)</td>
<td>1 (2.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>28 (57.14%)</td>
<td>18 (37.50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>15 (30.61%)</td>
<td>30 (62.50%)</td>
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</table>

Marks moving downwards from phase 1

- 0 Green to red
- 0 Green to amber
- 6 Amber to red
- 4 Red to green
- 1 Amber to green
- 17 Red to amber

Marks moving upwards from phase 1

- Implementation
- Review and policies

Source: Audit Commission

Paragraph 3.7 of the pay agreement allows part-time working for employees in all roles, with the same conditions of service and proportionate pay.

The agreement makes it possible for management to allow any member of staff to vary their terms of employment so that they can work less than the relevant standard time or to enable them to work for a different number or arrangement of days or shifts. Until the agreement, most fire authorities were only able to allow office or Control staff to work part-time. The agreement opens up the possibility of part-time working to all staff.
65. Part-time work by firefighters is not pensionable under the current terms of the firefighter’s pension scheme. Some fire authorities are finding ways around this complication while they wait for a review of the terms of the scheme.

66. Requests to go part-time normally come from employees, rather than being offered by the employer, so all fire authorities need to have made any revised or new arrangements known to all staff. They must also consider how part-time working might attract new people to the service, increasing the diversity of its employees (women and others with caring responsibilities).

67. We assessed the extent to which management had:
   • carried out a comprehensive review of part-time working and other conditions of service, consistent with the IRMP. We asked whether alternative approaches had been considered, referring to experience gained elsewhere; and
   • made (or planned) changes, accompanied by effective consultation and communication, and appropriate cost estimates.

68. As part of the assessment, and to support any evidence of changes on the ground, we also collected data looking at how management had made actual changes to the number of operational staff working part-time during the period September-June 2004.

69. The results show progress at a slower rate than for the review of duty systems and overtime. The 30 reds at phase 1 have been halved at phase 2 and the two greens at phase 1 are joined by another four. This is a result of fire authorities beginning to carry out reviews. However, change on the ground remains limited. The slower rate of progress on part-time working is most likely due to two factors: a perceived low level of demand from firefighters for part-time working and the barrier caused by the lack of pension rights for part-time firefighter staff.

70. The results of the data collection show that only four fire authorities have increased the number of part-time operational firefighters during the period reviewed (16 in total).

**Case study 6**

**Avon**

Avon is the first fire service nationally to have introduced part-time and flexible working arrangements in respect of the 2:2:4 shift system.

Currently four staff have had their requests for part-time and flexible working approved. The arrangements and contracts are reviewed every three months, to ensure their ongoing operational effectiveness.

In accordance with the IRMP action plan for 2004/05, the fire service has commenced a comprehensive review of all aspects of its duty systems, this includes flexible working patterns.
The government proposal (employer’s circular 25/03) to reduce the availability of retained staff from 168 to 120 hours per week has been costed and an additional sum of £300,000 included in the 2004/05 budget. Retained staff have been informed of these changes, but so far the authority has not received any requests from staff to reduce their hours. As a consequence the authority has implemented a pilot study, which is increasing retained training hours and paying retained staff to undertake programmed community safety work. The interim policy on secondary contracts, allowing whole-time staff to also serve in a retained capacity (6.1 refers) is also expected to meet a substantial part of any potential shortfall.

The fire service is also considering changes in working arrangements in line with wider organisational objectives. In order to improve overall management effectiveness and speed of communication, the service is examining options to change the flexi duty system for managers at station level and above to ensure that there is one day each week when all managers are working. This is important if the service is to meet its objective of developing the full potential of its managers, for example, to manage devolved budgets.

The changes in part-time and flexible working practices have been subject to formal consultation with the FBU and through the JCC (3.2 refers) and have been communicated to staff.

Sources: Audit Commission

Case study 7
Leicester

Part-time schools fire safety education was originally carried out by full-time fire-fighters in the Community Safety Support Team. However, the authority determined that it would be more efficient and cost effective if this work were carried out by part-time employees. They have accordingly four part-time staff, three of whom are retired fire-fighters and a lady whose employment history is in education services. This approach has enabled the authority to provide fire safety education to around 40,000 children per year through the use of the specialist staff and has allowed significant opportunity for this work to be supported by operational crews.

The authority plans to extend its more innovative approach to community education; nine community safety fire-fighters posts identified in the IRMP, six of which will be dis-established and filled by multi-lingual employees, thereby allowing the authority to address diversity issues associated with the fire safety education of a multi-ethnic community.

Sources: Audit Commission

71 As noted above, in our opinion while these results demonstrate some improvement, they are still disappointing.
Delivering the wider modernisation agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Phase one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>24 (48.00%)</td>
<td>2 (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>24 (48.00%)</td>
<td>46 (95.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>2 (4.00%)</td>
<td>2 (4.17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks moving downwards from phase 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Green to red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Green to amber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amber to red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks moving upwards from phase 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Red to green</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Amber to green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Red to amber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plans to further deliver
Progress on delivering key aspects
Action to deliver key early priorities
Clear and well communicated vision

Source: Audit Commission

72 We assessed whether each fire authority:
- has a clear, up-to-date and well-communicated vision of what it is trying to achieve;
- can demonstrate action to deliver its early priorities;
- can show good progress in delivering on those priorities; and
- has effective plans in place to cover future delivery.

73 We took into consideration the effectiveness of each authority's approach to the establishment of its Regional Management Board, (in England; not applicable in Wales) and whether the authority had developed a strategy to balance competing demands for resources between prevention and protection and meeting its targets for responding to fires and other emergencies. We considered the fire authority's contribution to the wider government agenda of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and the reduction of crime, and looked at how effective and well organised it is at working in partnership with other agencies. We assessed management’s
contribution to diversity, paying attention to local priorities, culture change and the other relevant needs of the service.

74 A key issue for fire authorities must be to have a clear and well-communicated vision. This must then be translated into the identification of early priorities and smart action plans to deliver them. The delivery of these early priorities must acknowledge that internal and external stakeholders will need to be able to identify and recognise the benefits being delivered if fire authorities are to maintain the momentum of change and the high regard in which they are held by the public.

75 Most authorities have addressed these issues and made either some or good progress. Two authorities are doing poorly and will need to consider how they can catch up. There is nothing in the results to indicate that county brigades are experiencing difficulty arising from any factor specific to them. Excluding the special cases of the Isles of Wight and Scilly, there are 14 county brigades in England. Six were rated good and eight 'some' progress; much the same 50-50 split as the overall result for this general modernisation category.

76 However, the weakest area remains the need to have effective plans in place to ensure the continued delivery of the aims and objectives of the wider modernisation agenda. Fire authorities need to further develop and link their key corporate strategies to ensure that the modernisation agenda will be delivered in the longer term. There were several examples of fire authorities that have comprehensive IRMPs, good progress on IPDS, a communicated vision but inadequate evidence of a robust financial strategy. There is a need for authorities to further embed good project management arrangements, in particular, ensuring action plans are in place to deliver elements of the wider modernisation agenda.

77 As further evidence to support the progress that has been made, we collected data on changes that many authorities highlighted as an area of progress at phase 1, including:

- **mixed crewing** - nine examples where fire authorities have provided information on an increase in the use of mixed crewing;
- **whole-time firefighters undertaking retained duties** - 18 authorities have provided information on an increase in the number of firefighters undertaking retained duties, which represents an increase of 153; and
- **anticipated changes in overall staffing levels** - the information provided shows an overall increase of 211 staff by March 2005 from April 2004. This figure is made up of as follows:
  - a reduction of 138 uniformed staff;
  - an increase of 250 retained staff; and
  - an increase of 99 'other' staff.
This tells us that fire authorities are seeking to look at areas where further efficiencies can be gained in order to improve the service. There is a shift in a limited number of cases towards the provision of response service when needed (anticipated increase in the number of retained staff). These are positive changes that deserve praise, but authorities need to ensure that such changes are part of both short-term and long-term plans that are reflected in deliverable corporate and financial strategies.

Dealing with the costs of modernisation (the financial diagnostic)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Phase two</th>
<th>Phase one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good progress</td>
<td>13 (26.00%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some progress</td>
<td>29 (58.00%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no progress</td>
<td>8 (16.00%)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results from the new financial diagnostic support one of the conclusions we drew from phase one. We observed then 'a relatively weak degree of financial planning at many authorities'. In phase 2, only 13 authorities achieved a green for good progress, and 8 were rated red. Yet our criteria in the financial diagnostic were not demanding. We asked two questions:

- Has the fire authority properly costed all its major action plans?
- If the authority intends to use the transitional funding to be made available by government, are there plans to repay it and are the plans consistent with the modernisation agenda? (England only; this question was not applied in Wales)

It is remarkable that so few authorities were able to produce fully positive answers to these questions, indicating to us that many fire authorities may need to consider how well their IRMP work is linked to the financial management side of their business. They must also assess whether they have faced up to the need to estimate whether savings will arise from modernisation.
Sixty-six per cent of fire authorities have yet to fully cost their action plans and priorities for modernisation. In a number of authorities, the costings that have been produced have not fully involved corporate finance staff. As a result, costings in many areas are only at a summary level and further work is needed by all fire authorities to ensure that the resources required will be available and are incorporated within a financial strategy.

In response to concerns expressed by fire authorities about their ability to fund the modernisation agenda, the ODPM is making available £30 million in transitional funding, which must be paid back. (Not applicable in Wales.) Our review of this area identified that 30 fire authorities have not yet fully identified a use for the transitional funding and worked out how it would be re-paid. Of the fire authorities that had identified a use, in the majority of cases this centred around the funding of the pay award.

A number of fire authorities, six, achieved a 'completely' or 'partly' rating for this key issue because they took a strategic decision that the transitional funding would not be required. However, two authorities who had no plans to use the transitional funding were rated 'not at all' for this key issue, as the decision was based more on an inability to identify a method of repayment. This was perceived as a missed opportunity, particularly given that both authorities had further scope for modernisation (one an overall red and the other an overall amber).

As part of the study, and in order to understand the financial implications of modernisation, we sought to collect detailed information on both proposed spend, opportunities for savings and overall financial positions. Not all fire authorities provided this information. The information that was provided was validated as part of the local fieldwork. The results indicate that:

- nine of the sixteen completed returns from fire authorities contained an analysis of both expenditure and savings plans for the year. The remaining seven returns contained only details of the expenditure plans. There were no discernible common themes in either the pattern or level of expenditure / savings; and

- twelve fire authorities reported that in order to deliver their IRMP there may be precept implications of greater than 6 per cent in 2005/06. Eighteen fire authorities failed to answer this question.
Appendix 1: glossary

CFOA  Chief Fire Officers Association
CPA  Comprehensive Performance Assessment
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
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.
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.
New Dimensions  To build resilience within fire and rescue authorities, in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, the government launched the ‘New Dimension’ programme. New Dimension seeks to ensure that fire and rescue authorities are sufficiently trained and equipped to deal safely and effectively with major chemical, nuclear, biological and conventional terrorist incidents on a national scale.
Pay and conditions agreement  An agreement signed by the National Joint Council on 13 June 2003, reference NJC/01/03.
Regional Management Board  The government has recognised in the White Paper and National Framework that there are some challenges to which local fire and rescue authorities working in isolation do not have the capacity to respond to in an efficient and effective way. The government is committed to a regional approach where that is the most appropriate level – both resources and expertise – to deliver services and required that by 1 April 2004 fire and rescue authorities must have established Regional Management Boards.
Retained  Retained firefighters are local men and women who are willing to offer their services promptly in the event of a local emergency backing up their whole-time colleagues.
White Paper

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

Whole-time

Whole-time staff are effectively full-time staff. In practice, many firefighters work a duty system arranged to ensure that a service can be provided to meet demand throughout the day and night and at weekends. Whole-time staff differ from retained staff (see above).
Appendix 2:
verification – achieving consistency and fairness

Forming judgements

As for phase one, we based our conclusions on judgement, informed by the evidence we collected and our understanding of what is required.

To achieve consistency of judgement across the country we defined the method for phase two clearly, issued a toolkit document for the auditors and trained them in how to use it.

The auditors visited every fire authority in June 2004 and produced a first draft report for each fire authority.

The reports

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. In this way, individual fire authorities were given the opportunity to challenge our initial moderation assessment, correct it if appropriate and provide any additional evidence in support of their views.

The resulting reports may be seen on our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk
To order further copies of this report, priced £15, please contact Audit Commission Publications, PO Box 99, Wetherby, LS23 7JA, 0800 502030.

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