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This circular is	Request for information	By	17 August 2006
This circular is	Relevant to the National Framework		
Status	This circular accompanies the final version of the operational assessment toolkit to be used as the basis of the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery.		

Operational Assessment of Service Delivery - Self-Assessment.

Issued by:

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Director, Operational Assessment of Service Delivery

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

The operational assessment toolkit forms one component of the Audit Commission's Service Assessment of the Fire and Rescue Service in 2006-7. This circular highlights the main revisions made as a result of the consultation process and is a formal request for fire and rescue authorities to complete a self-assessment against the revised toolkit. Full guidance on how the self-assessment should be completed, accompanies the toolkit.

For further information, contact:

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1.0 Operational Assessment of Service Delivery

- 1.1 This circular accompanies the final version of the Operational Assessment Toolkit to be used as the basis for the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery in 2006/7 following a ten week consultation exercise which concluded on 16th June.
- 1.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government is conducting the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery which will form one component of the Audit Commission's Fire and Rescue Service Assessment for 2006-7. The Fire and Rescue Service Assessment will form part of the Single Tier and County Council CPA judgement for County fire and rescue authorities and will be a stand-alone assessment for all other fire and rescue authorities.
- 1.3 Fire and rescue authorities are asked to complete a self-assessment against the operational assessment toolkit. The self assessments will be reviewed by a seconded team of Service professionals during brief on-site visits to all fire and rescue authorities. The timetable for these visits has been circulated separately.

2.0 Changes to the Operational Assessment Toolkit.

- 2.1. The revised Operational Assessment Toolkit takes on board the comments. DCLG has received in written responses to the consultation exercise and comments received from fire and rescue authorities attending three joint DCLG/Audit Commission consultation seminars. The process was also informed by the five pilot self assessment exercises that were carried out by volunteer fire and rescue authorities.
- 2.2 Respondees were broadly happy with the content and coverage of the toolkit. However, the key issues identified through the consultation were:
 - The format of the toolkit required development to reduce its length and duplication. It also needed to be amended to make it easier for those conducting the self-assessment to reach a judgement.
 - The scoring methodology needed more thorough development and further consideration of the proposals to weight the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) was required.
 - A standard format for the self-assessment would be useful.
- 2.3 We have aimed to address these concerns as far as possible in the revised version of the toolkit. In particular we have:
 - Revised the format of toolkit to reflect the Audit Commission Use of Resources/Direction of Travel format to:
 - ✓ aid determination of judgement
 - ✓ Make easier to follow
 - ✓ Reduce duplication within the toolkit.

✓ Reduce the overall size of the toolkit.

- Decided against weighting each of the KLOEs since consultees were divided on the merit of the system of weighting proposed. However, Audit and Review has been combined into one key area of enquiry within each KLOE. This places greater emphasis on the other KLOE areas such as Policy, Organising etc.
- Provided detailed guidance on the scoring mechanism outlined for each of the KLOE and the overall assessment.

2.4 The KLOE themselves have not changed substantially but the evidence criteria for judgement have been reformatted as statements under headings to aid scoring. Respondees considered that there was a need to increase the time estimate given in the consultation for the completion of the self assessment was an underestimate. The time requirement has therefore been altered to 15-20 person days for completing the self assessment. We do not expect fire and rescue authorities to spend longer than this in completing the assessment.

2.5 Further detailed comments on the changes made as a result of the consultation exercise will be made in due course in a written response to the consultation exercise.

3.0 The Self- Assessment.

3.1 The attached document contains full guidance on conducting the self-assessment, a template to use for completing the self-assessment (Appendix 2) and the revised toolkit itself (Appendix 1). A MS Word format of the self-assessment template will be made available to FRAs to aid completion. These documents are also available on the DCLG website at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1124793>

All self-assessments must be completed and returned to Di Bell at DCLG at the above address by **17th August 2006.**

Max Hood

Fire and Resilience Directorate