

Chapter 3

Consolidation and Improvement.

Fire and Rescue under the New Labour Administrations 2005-2010

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Introduction

This chapter examines the experience and performance of the Fire and Rescue Services in the period 2005-2010. It included the final New Labour administration of Tony Blair and the period from 2007 when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister. Unlike the previous period which was a turbulent period of change when industrial relations and human resource management issues tended to predominate, this was a period of consolidation and relative stability when performance management and service improvement issues increasingly tended to dominate the agenda.

The general election of May 2005 was the third election that the labour party, under Tony Blair, won. Although its majority in the House of Commons was reduced to 66 seats from the 160 seat majority it had held over the previous four years, the outcome was not really in doubt¹. The liberal democrats saw their share of the popular vote rise and they won more seats than any third party since 1923. Despite losing popularity over the Iraq war, Labour campaigned on the basis of a strong economy, while the conservatives under, Michael Howard, campaigned on immigration, improving the NHS and reducing crime rates.

The focus on public sector reform and the need to improve public services was a key feature of the campaign that became a central pillar of the new administration. It also featured strongly in the Queen's speech to the opening of parliament.

"My government will build on their programme of reform and accelerate modernisation of the public services to promote opportunity and fairness. My government will bring forward legislation in the key areas of public services delivery: education; health; welfare; and crime."

(The Queen's Speech. May 2005).

The new emphasis on planning prevention and protection, and the key themes of modernisation, public service delivery alignment and collaborative working across the public sector, established in the previous period, with local authorities in the vanguard, was set to continue and, if anything, become even more influential.

Many of the elements or work streams of the original modernisation agenda, which are shown in table 1 in the previous chapter, were built upon and developed between 2005 and 2010. Figure 1 below attempts to show some (but not all) of the initiatives and their development into the post 2005 period.

The service entered this period under the continuing policy jurisdiction of the ODPM, although in May 2006 departmental responsibilities, including Fire and Rescue, were transferred to the newly created Department of Communities and Local Government under a new Secretary of State Ruth Kelly. A dedicated Fire Minister was retained in the new department but whereas Nick Raynsford had been Fire Minister for the previous four years over the succeeding five years, five ministers held the portfolio. Jim Fitzpatrick (2005-06) a former Firefighter was succeeded by Angela Smith (2006-07), Parmjit Dhanda (2007-08), Sadiq Khan (2008-09) and Anne Snelgrove (2009-10).

	Concepts	Ambitions	Initiatives	Local Delivery Plan	Delivery Mechanism
2000-2002	Modernisation	Community Engagement	Best Value	Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs)	Local Strategic Partnerships
2002-2008	Continuous Improvement: - Services - Corporate	Community Leadership	Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)*	Local Area Agreements (LAAs)	
2009-2010	Continuous Improvement: - Area Based - Multi Agency		Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)**		

* Original CPA methodology 2002-2004. "The Harder Test" methodology 2005 -2008
** Replaced CPA in 2009. Abolished by Coalition in 2010.

Figure 1. The developing Modernisation Agenda, Source: Jones 2013

The two central of the new government’s initial drive to continue to improve local public services individually and collectively, where the second generation of Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPAs) and the replacement of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) with Local Area Agreements (LAAs) (ODPM 2004, DCLG 2006). Both directly involved the newly renamed Fire and Rescue Services. In addition, 2005 saw the publication of the second national framework for fire and rescue services (ODPM 2006), and a new approach to regulation, termed as strategic regulation (Audit Commission 2003) and the inspection of public services by all the inspectorates and regulatory bodies for locally delivered public services, summed up in the title of the OPSR report ‘Inspecting for Improvement’ (OPSR 2003a, 2003b, Davis et al 2004, Davis and Martin 2008, Downe 2008).

This chapter will explore each of these in turn before looking at the final part of the new labour era under Gordon Brown, when Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) replaced CPA, a second generation of Local Agreements were agreed and the second National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services 2008-2011 was published. The brown administration was also the period of the great recession and the onset of austerity and public sector financial restraints which came to dominate the next period of Conservative led coalition government between 2010 and 2015.

The 2005-2008 Comprehensive Performance Assessment Regime.

Following the 2004 verification reports (Audit Commission 2004a, 2004b) by the end of the second Blair administration there was general agreement between central and local government, the local government regulators and the inspectorates that a radical review and updating of the local government CPA regime was required.

“Unlike the introduction of Best Value and the first iterations of CPA, the general principle and desirability of a new version was relatively uncontested. By 2005 it was generally accepted, albeit grudgingly, that CPA had generated substantial quantitative and qualitative improvements across local government services as well as significant efficiencies in their running costs (Martin and Bovaird 2005). Nevertheless, all parties considered that it could be significantly improved (Martin 2006, Ashworth et al 2010). There were clearly lessons to be learned from the implementation of the previous regimes, and from the two rounds of Fire Service verifications undertaken by the Audit Commission, as well as from performance management regimes in other sectors such as the police, education and health”.

(Murphy and Greenhalgh 2013 p.227)

The Office of Public Service Reform (OPSR) within the Prime Minister's Office, had produced its report 'Inspecting for Improvement' as well as the government's new inspection strategy for public services (OPSR 2003a, 2003b, Davis and Martin 2008). The 2005 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), and the associated Public Service Agreements for Whitehall spending departments, (HMT 2004) had signalled a move to a new set of national objectives for the public sector focused on local outcomes within communities rather than input or output measures for individual public services. They therefore encouraged collaboration across Whitehall departments and sought to re-enforce the connections between public services at the local authority level.

In 2005, 'CPA the harder test' (Audit Commission 2005) was published by the Audit Commission. By this time, as a result of the OPSR report, the Audit Commission had formally taken on the role of co-ordinating the various inspectorates and regulators that monitored and assessed locally delivered public services (Campbell-Smith 2008). It was also rolling out what it called 'strategic regulation' and envisioning fewer but more strategic performance frameworks and inspections across the public services (Audit Commission 2003, 2006).

The new CPA methodology not only looked at how a council was performing as a corporate and service delivery organisation, but also as community leaders and collaborative partners to other local services. The new methodology also included a specific service assessment for the Fire and Rescue Services.

CPA for fire and rescue services was to be fully aligned and built on the principles and processes for CPA in local government but it was also intended to address issues specific to fire and rescue authorities. However, because of political sensitivities and the quality and quantity of comparative information available, the first Fire Assessment in 2005 looked only at back-office functions. These were, however, quickly followed in 2006 by assessments of the whole services, that included operational services and emergency preparedness as well as back-office services (Audit Commission, 2006, 2007).

From 2006, a Fire and Rescue Service Assessment was included in the overall framework for CPA for those 13 councils with sole responsibility for Fire and Rescue Service in their area and the same methodology was applied to the (then) 32 other combined and metropolitan Fire and Rescue Services and to the London Fire and Rescue Service. Figure 2, below, was the generic diagram used by the Audit Commission to summarise the new CPA framework as a whole while figure 3 summarises the Fire and Rescue Service Assessment model.

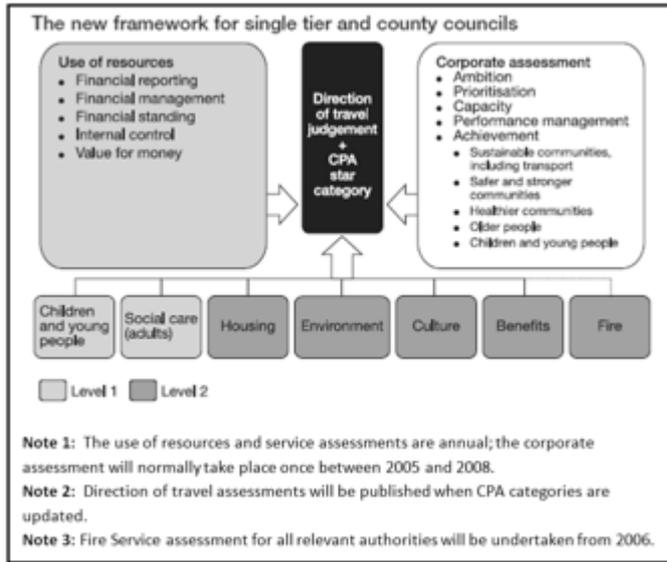


Figure 2. The 2006 CPA Methodology

whether the service was improving sufficiently rapidly – the latter being called a ‘direction of travel’ assessment.

All of these judgements, were based upon explicit and publically available ‘Key Lines of Enquiry’ (KLOEs), supported by detailed diagnostic guidance. All elements, together with the scoring and weightings used in the subsequent judgements, were developed in consultation with the government, the local authorities the fire services, and, at least by intention, the public.

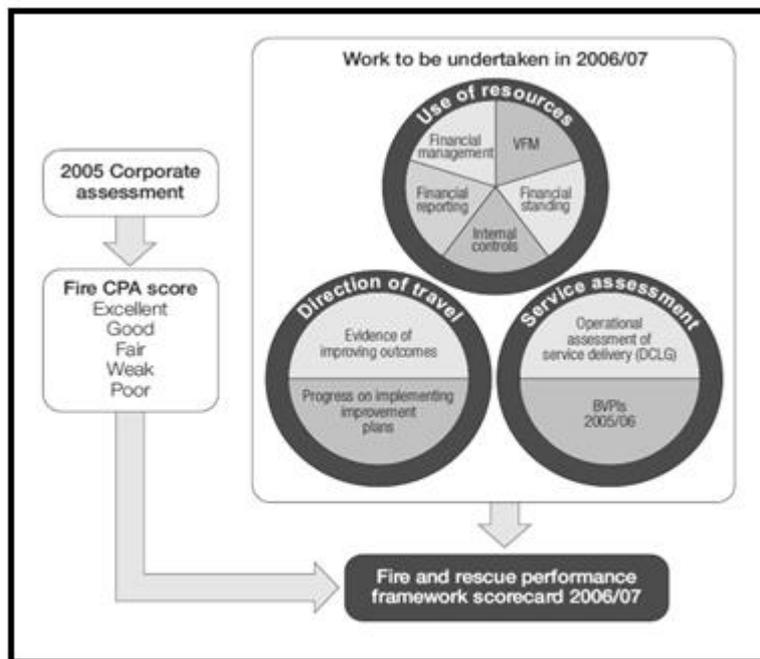


Figure 3. Evaluation components and techniques

It was designed for use in performance management regimes, and can be applied to individual services, to organisations or to whole sectors. It identifies four ‘characteristic’ stages, from

The 2006 Fire and Rescue CPA was a corporate assessment that attempted to assess performance across both national and local priorities for the service and evaluate the fire authority’s response to meeting the needs of the local community. The methodology employed used a self-assessment, completed to an Audit Commission template; a peer challenge (provided by peers, both officers and elected politicians from outside services on the assessments teams) and an external inspection from an Audit Commission team. These assessments, were complimented by an evaluation of how economically, efficiently and effectively the services was making use of the resources available to it, and an evaluation of

The evaluation components and techniques, which are shown on Figure 3 below, were by 2005 becoming tried and tested parts of the wider regulation and inspection regime within the public sector, although as mentioned above the initial 2005 assessments were not actually ‘comprehensive’, as they primarily related to back-office functions.

The early assessments were however both dependent on a very limited and immature evidential base, as the earlier verification exercises in 2003 and 2004 had revealed. Figure 4 below gives a four-stage generic typology for the development of

undeveloped immature information environments (data poor environments) to robust mature evidence bases (suitable for self-regulation). There are indicative descriptors included for each of the four stages, although in practice the reality is always likely to be more complicated than this simplistic model implies.

It is however clear from this typology that in 2005, despite Fire services being part of the Audit Commission's and later the government's successive generations of national performance indicators since they were established in 1995, Fire and Rescue Services still had only a 'data-poor' evidential base from which to operate, benchmark and assess performance and improvement.

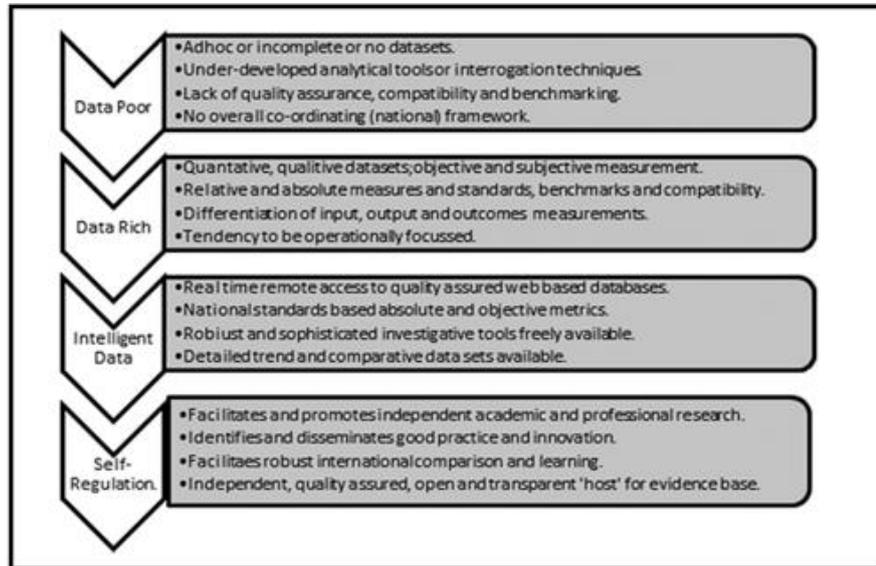


Figure 4. Typology for the development of evidential bases

In 2005 the forty-six³ fire authorities were assessed under CPA and were also required to produce their annual 'Use of Resources' Assessments. The results of these are shown in table 1 below which shows the overall performance and the performance by type of authority. However, the fact is, that in 2005 63% of fire and rescue authorities were only performing 'at or below' minimum standards as shown by the individual authority scores at August 2005 (Audit Commission 2006).

The Audit Commission assessment concluded that:-

"Whilst there is a clear appetite for change in fire and rescue authorities the pace varies substantially and improvement has not been achieved to the extent that might be expected.only a small proportion of fire and rescue authorities are performing across the board at above minimum requirements"

(Audit Commission 2006 p.2).

Authority	Type	Score
Avon	Combined	Fair
Bedfordshire and Luton	Combined	Weak
Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes	Combined	Weak
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough	Combined	Good
Cheshire	Combined	Good
Cleveland	Combined	Fair
Cornwall	County	Fair
County Durham and Darlington	Combined	Fair
Cumbria	County	Fair
Derbyshire	Combined	Fair
Devon	Combined	Good
Dorset	Combined	Good
East Sussex	Combined	Fair
Essex	Combined	Fair
Gloucestershire	County	Good
Greater Manchester	Metropolitan	Good
Hampshire	Combined	Good
Hereford and Worcester	Combined	Good
Hertfordshire	County	Fair
Humberside	Combined	Fair
Isle of Wight	County	Poor
Isles of Scilly	County	Fair
Kent and Medway	Combined	Excellent
Lancashire	Combined	Fair

Authority	Type	Score
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland	Combined	Good
Lincolnshire	County	Poor
London	London	Good
Merseyside	Metropolitan	Excellent
Norfolk	County	Good
North Yorkshire	Combined	Good
Northamptonshire	County	Weak
Northumberland	County	Fair
Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham	Combined	Fair
Oxfordshire	County	Good
Royal Berkshire	Combined	Good
Shropshire and Wrekin	Combined	Good
Somerset	County	Fair
South Yorkshire	Metropolitan	Weak
Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire	Combined	Good
Suffolk	County	Fair
Surrey	County	Good
Tyne and Wear	Metropolitan	Fair
Warwickshire	County	Good
West Midlands	Metropolitan	Good
West Sussex	County	Fair
West Yorkshire	Metropolitan	Good
Wiltshire and Swindon	Combined	Weak

Figure 5. 2006 Fire CPA results

In a section on 'next steps for supporting improvement', it adopted the now prevailing collaborative approach to public service improvement. It set out what it anticipated that the government would do to improve the situation; what the commission itself would do; what the improvement organisations would do, and what it expected the fire authorities themselves to do. It also gave a foretaste of its proposals for the next round of CPA so that all Fire services could better prepare.

The authorities found to be in the lowest 'poor' and 'weak' performance categories, became subjected to a central government improvement and intervention regime. This essentially consisted of appointing a 'Lead Official' to act as the chair and co-ordinator of a Government Monitoring Board, and provide direct liaison with the government's fire minister. The monitoring board would be responsible for drawing up and implementing an improvement or recovery plan. In so doing, it was to be aided, and could call directly upon the resources of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Audit Commission, and the Local Government Leadership Centre (LGLC) together with assistance from other

fire and rescue services and from local authorities. It could also commission services from the private sector, if necessary.

This regime was explicitly built on the ‘intervention’ model which had been developed for significantly underperforming Local Authorities and individual local authority services, under the CPA regime since 2002 (ODPM 2003, Jones 2013, Murphy and Jones 2016). The generic model was by this stage robust and well trialled and was subsequently applied to other sectors including the NHS.

All of the remaining fire authorities, however, also had available to them capacity and capability, innovation and improvement tools, techniques, programmes and guidance from these same improvement agencies. By the time the CPA results for 2006 were published in late 2007, the majority, 37 (80%) of the fire and rescue services were rated as improving ‘well’ or ‘strongly’ (the top two categories). In addition, the scores for the annual ‘Use of Resources’ assessment showed equally impressive improvement.

Although Fire and Rescue Services were initially reluctant and were late to become involved in CPA, it is fair to say that they benefited from the lessons learned by both the Audit Commission, the government and the local authorities in the early days of CPA (Audit Commission 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009b). The key stakeholders were therefore able to capture, disseminate share and apply, lessons learned, demonstrable good practice and organizational and systemic innovation from their peers. By 2009 when the Audit Commission published its overall assessment of the impact of CPA between 2002 and 2008, few argued with their view that CPA had achieved its objectives of stimulating service improvement and efficiency in Fire and Rescue Services as well as in wider local government (Audit Commission 2008a, 2009a, 2009b). In terms of financial improvements, in addition to the annual 2% that HMT assumes will be achieved as a result of technological innovation and other generic improvements, and therefore builds into its annual financial allocations, local government services were making annual cumulative financial saving of between 3 and 4%. Similarly, in terms of service improvement, because of the requirement for continuous improvement and the relative nature of a lot of the national indicators, to

Direction of travel

All fire services have continued to improve in the last year.

Direction of travel category	2006	Change		2007
Improving strongly	2	↓ 2	↑ 5	5
Improving well	30	↔ 13	↔ 5	23
Improving adequately	15	↓ 12	↑ 8	18
No improvement	0			0
Total fire services	47			46

Key
 ↓ Down 1 category ↔ No change ↑ Up 1 category

Source: Audit Commission

Use of resources scores

Most services (80 per cent) are performing well.

Use of resources category	2006	Change		2007
Performing strongly	3	↔ 3	↑ 1	4
Performing well	37	↓ 3	↔ 33	37
Adequate performance	7	↔ 3	↑ 4	6
Inadequate performance	0			0
Total fire services	47			47

Key
 ↓ Down 1 category ↔ No change ↑ Up 1 category

Source: Audit Commission

attain the same level of performance from one year to the next on national indicators required an actual improvement on average of about 3%⁴. Thus the improvements in the tables below appear less impressive than the *actualité*.

The quest for continuous improvement was not however over and in 2009 CPA was replaced, by a new regime called Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA). This was foreshadowed in the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. In 2008 the government also published the second National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services for the period 2008-2011 which was inter-related with the new CAA regime. However, in order to understand the thinking and philosophy behind these changes it is necessary to understand the development of a second major driver of public service improvement between 2005 and 2009 namely the Local Area Agreements.

Local Area Agreements.

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) had been introduced in 2004, as a development of the previous Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs) between Central and Local Government. Like their predecessors, they were a mechanism for achieving challenging targets for improved service delivery based on national and local policy priorities. As a reward for achieving agreed performance targets, local authorities and their local partners would receive additional monetary reward and a reduction in central government regulation over particular activities.

LAAs were negotiated with 150 Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) rather than with local authorities, although the authorities were expected to lead negotiations on behalf of the partnerships. They were 3-year agreements focussing on revenue rather than capital expenditure and were geographically defined by individual local authority boundaries. From the start Fire and Rescue Services, who were members of all Local Strategic Partnerships, were also actively engaged in LAAs. In March 2005, the first round of 21 'pathfinder' LAAs were signed-off by central government and local area representatives.

In return for achieving mutually agreed 'stretch' targets for improving local delivery of priority services, local area partners would be rewarded through financial incentives and so-called freedoms and flexibilities' from central government regulations. Although the objectives, priorities and targets for the first agreements were organised around 3 'blocks' of service areas (Community Safety, Children and Young People and Older Peoples Services) this was quickly developed into four slightly more comprehensive blocks that then endured for the life of LAAs. The second round of 66 agreements were signed in March 2006 and the final 62 in March 2007, by which time every large local authority, every Police and Fire Authority and every Primary Care Trust (PCT) from the NHS, together with hundreds of their delivery partners were working collaboratively across the country to deliver LAAs.

The key issues for individual LAAs arose from the Sustainable Community Strategy⁵ for an area and these were corralled around four baskets of services and activities, universally referred to as blocks.

- Safer and Stronger Communities, which were proposals for improving community safety and building more resilient local communities,
- Children and Young Peoples Services, which included ambitions such as raising attainment levels in schools or reducing teenage pregnancies in an area,
- Healthier Communities and Older Peoples Services which essentially embraced public health, social care and wellbeing issues, and
- Economic development, enterprise and innovation in the local economy.

Local budgets and efforts were pooled, co-ordinated or rationalised to achieve outcomes agreed on both national and local priorities (see figure 4 below). Each of the four blocks had to have agreed outcome targets, sub-outcomes, indicator targets and delivery activities. Three types of funding went into the agreements.

- Mainstream funding from central and local sources which could be aligned against specific LAA outcomes and targets
- Area specific funding from government departments to local areas which could be pooled in an LAA,
- Non-Departmental Public Bodies funding which they could choose to align with LAAs.

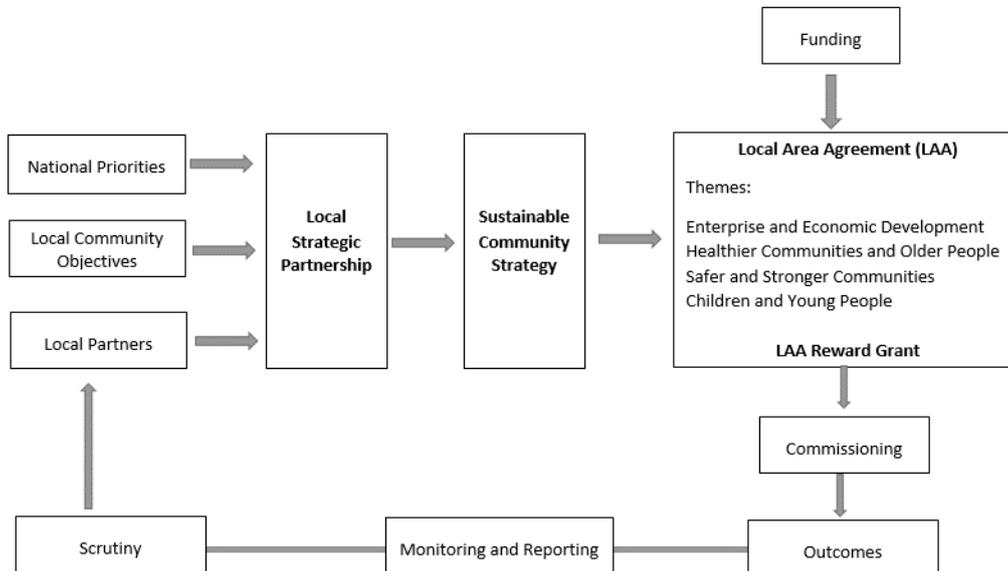


Figure 5. The Local Area Agreement Regime

LAAs led to more effective joining up, co-ordination of local public services and significantly improved outcomes for local communities. They also led to better informed and more economic, efficient and effective government at both the national and local levels. Whitehall departments, as well as local delivery agencies, had to strategically align objectives and policies into mutually reinforcing strategies that would lead to improved outcomes for communities.

As the potential success of the three rounds of pilots became clear the 2006 Local Government White Paper and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act that followed, made LAAs a key performance management and priority setting tool for local areas. Place and place shaping entered the lexicon of national and local government language and a new series of LAAs were a key part of the new ambitions and arrangements⁶.

Local Authorities were vested with the duty to lead and enable LSPs in the preparation of new LAAs with much wider partner involvement. The act listed 21 types of organisations with a duty to co-operate and have regard to the targets. It strengthened involvement of the third sector, simplified funding within LAAs and encouraged a move from four blocks (allegedly encouraging a silo service mentality) to four cross cutting themes. Prevention and protection rather than cure and reaction, rose even further up the policy priorities at national and local levels.

Although a new (much reduced) national indicator set was produced⁷, there was a much greater focus on local priorities. A 'dry run' of negotiations was undertaken with 17 areas to generate good practice and ensure a local focus could be maintained. New LAAs had to build a coherent narrative, tell a story, and develop the vision of the local 'place'. The local evidential base therefore had to be built and refined⁸ to underpin any decisions or targets and justify priorities in negotiations with central government. Negotiations with central government were conducted through the Government Regional Offices and the whole regime was made open and transparent with a single dedicated publically accessible LAA website,

acting as the central repository for all agreements and every target. New Local Area Agreements were successfully agreed for all 150 LSPs as previous agreements reached their termination dates, and a further round were negotiated prior to the 2010 general election and were subsequently implemented over the next three years.

In July 2010, immediately after the election, the coalition government's new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles announced the end of any further LAA's' the abolition of the Audit Commission and the closing of Government Regional Offices. This was followed by the Chancellor George Osborne announcing the (misnamed) 'Bonfire of the QUANGOs'⁹ which included the dismantling of much of the systemic improvement infrastructure designed to support local authorities, the police, the NHS and Fire and Rescue Services to improve their services to the public¹⁰.

These abrupt policy changes, effectively brought to an end the period of joined up policy and delivery and an era of unprecedented vertical collaboration between central and local government and horizontal collaboration between public and voluntary services within local communities. However, before we examine the Coalition Government years between 2010 and 2015, we need to look at how these collaborative principles were developed and enshrined in the two National Frameworks for Fire and Rescue Services which was published in 2005 and 2008 and covered the periods 2005-2008 and 2008-2011. LAAs, Crime and Disorder Partnerships and community safety strategies had encouraged and enabled Fire and Rescue Services to collaborate with local delivery partners, the National Frameworks focussed on national and local emergency services and their preparations and responses to local and national incidents.

The National Fire and Rescue Frameworks 2006-2008 and 2008-2011,

The second National Framework covered a two year period and the third framework covered a three year period. The second followed a very similar scope, content and structure to the one adopted for the first framework although it clearly moved on in terms of objectives and targets. The third national framework was noticeably slimmed-down and less prescriptive.

These frameworks attempted to complement and, where possible, integrate with the developing performance management regime for the sector. They were also increasingly the product of co-design between the government and the fire and rescue sector as a whole. Relations between the government and the fire sector and the fire sector and the public both continued to improve, as public satisfaction and regard to the fire sector returned to some of the highest levels of trust and confidence experienced by public services.

With each iteration of the fire service framework the emphasis on prevention and protection became more pronounced as the performance of the service continually improved. In 2013 the then government Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor, Sir Ken Knight, reflected this in his comment,

"It is clear that the cumulative effect of building and furniture regulations, Integrated Risk Management Planning, and the localisation of decision making, and importantly the fire prevention and protection work carried out by fire and rescue authorities has significantly reduced the risk of fire in England"

(Knight 2013, p.12)

The second National Framework reflected and complemented the later iterations of the CPA regime, the first generation of LAAs and the final Tony Blair administration. The third National Framework was aligned with the CAA, the second generation of LAAs and the administration of Gordon Brown as prime Minister.

Comprehensive Area Assessment and the new generation of LAAs

Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAAs) were introduced by the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which also heralded a new 3-year Comprehensive Spending Review; a new set of Public Service Agreements for Whitehall delivery departments, a new national indicator set and the second generation of LAAs described above. They were only carried out once, and were intended to assess the performance and impact of local public services on local communities in 2008-2009. This impact was to be measured both collectively and individually.

Like the new PSA's they were intended to be outcome focused and to ensure locally delivered public services were aligned, joined up, or integrated wherever possible. They were to be based on collectively agreed local objectives and priorities and to be delivered in the most economic, efficient and effective ways possible. They were also to seek to achieve more sustainable and more equitable outcomes for local communities.

CAA was integral to the third National Framework (DCLG 2008) and consisted of an area assessment of the impact or outcomes being achieved collectively by the key public services within a geographical area, complemented by an individual organisational assessment for these key local public service providers. This group included the core members of the Local Strategic Partnership i.e. the local authorities, the Primary Care Trusts (part of whom's formal duty was to lead and co-ordinate the local NHS), the local Police Authority and the Fire and Rescue Authority.

For Fire and Rescue Services it included the first 'operational service assessments' of Fire and Rescue Services (DCLG 2008) and for all parties it included a common 'Use of Resources' Assessment to be carried out by the same external auditors¹¹ for each of the services in a single area. A new 'Use of Resources' model designed, inter alia, to exclude the shifting of costs from one public service to another, was rolled out annually from 2007. It included an assessment of the use and management of all human, financial and physical resources and it embraced the assessment across short, medium and long term horizons. The 'Use of Resources' assessment had come a long way from the simple assessment of the content and publication of the annual financial accounts in the first CPA in 2001.

As well as the generic area assessment, specific organisational assessments were developed and carried out on all of the 46 FRS, as well as all local authorities¹² PCTs¹³, territorial police constabularies¹⁴, figure 6, with the results published on the Audit Commissions dedicated "One Place" website (Audit Commission 2010).

Strategic alignment across frameworks

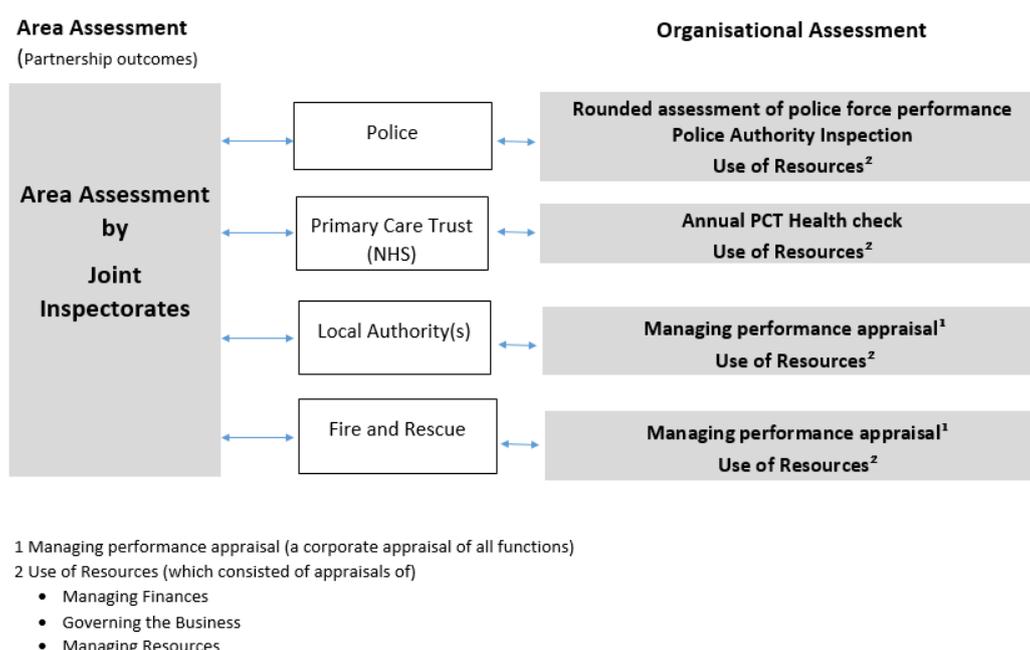


Figure 6. LAA Methodology, Source: Audit Commission

LAA became a key part of the area assessment, while an operational assessment, together with the Use of Resources Assessment, where key parts of the FRS organisational assessment.

To facilitate benchmarking, sharing and dissemination of ideas, lessons learned and good practice three dedicated, open access, interoperable and real time websites were established. These were intended to operate as central repositories or 'one-stop shops' for the new Local Area Agreements, for the CAA results and reports (One place)¹⁴ and by the Local Government Leadership Centre for the 13 innovative pilots that were intended to help facilitate the next stage of development of the improvement agenda for local public services (Total Place).¹⁵

Conclusion

By 2010, although Fire and Rescue Services had not reached the levels of performance being achieved in local authorities, and clearly had potential for further significant improvement, the annual reports and scores reflected an increasingly engaged and improving sector with an accelerating and positive direction of travel (Audit Commission, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2009b). The CAA reports published on the CAA (One Place) website also showed organisational improvement collaborative improvement and further financial improvement in the year that the CAA system operated.

In early 2010, it was anticipated that the Audit Commission would produce an annual analysis of the results of the CAA process and for the first time have a fully comparable assessment of the use being made of the public resources being expended across Local Government, Health, Police and Fire Services in local communities. The Commission with the assistance of its regulatory partners, should have been able to report on the quality and quantity of collaboration, as well as providing individual service judgements. It should also be able to give the government the public and the public service delivery bodies an idea of the level and speed of improvement of those public services, as well as being able to identify and demonstrate areas of innovation and good practice.

As most readers will know this was not to be, in the next period the Audit Commission was abolished, CAA abandoned and no more Local Area Agreements were signed. The emphasis on prevention,

protection, service improvement and public service reform in fire as in other public services, was about to be succeeded by an emphasis on austerity and reductions in public funding occasioned by a change in political control and macro-economic strategy.

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Notes

1. A very late narrowing of the gap in support between the two main parties meant the popular vote was much closer than seats won.
2. Key Lines of Enquiry were originally conceptualised and developed by the former Audit Commission, but are now used by most public service inspectorates. They direct the focus of an inspection or assessment onto critical questions or issues. The inspection teams usually publish these in advance and then use a standard set of key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) to all of the service delivery bodies.
3. Following the amalgamation of Devon and Somerset, the number of Fire Services reduced to 46.
4. The calculation of 3% performance improvement on national indicators was a calculation made by analysts on the Intervention Team when evaluating improvement and recovery strategies. The 3-4% financial savings is a calculation triangulating evidence from the Use of Resources reports, the schedules of 'Gershon' savings by local authorities and the successive annual 'Invest to Save' programmes. It is little known (except of course by HMT) that the Invest to Save programmes undertaken by local authorities consistently outperformed the programmes of central government departments and non-departmental public bodies.
5. The preparation of a community strategy was a requirement of the Local Government Act 2000. It sets out a long-term vision for an area (which matches the authorities boundaries), and is backed up by action plans to achieve it. Every local authority should prepare a community strategy 'for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom'. The name generally became the Sustainable Community Strategy during the roll-out of LAAS and was formally endorsed in the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.
6. In addition to Local Area Agreements, 'Multi-Area agreements' aimed to encourage cross boundary partnership working at a geographical scale greater than a single local authority area, (either regional or sub-regional). They were not constrained by the three-year timescale of an LAA nor by including only revenue expenditure. Promoted by DCLG as voluntary agreements between two or more top tier (county councils or metropolitan district councils) or unitary local authorities, their partners and the government to work collectively to either improve services or address problems best tackled at a larger scale. Often focussing on economic development, the skills agenda and/or transport and access issues they were forerunners to the current debate on Combined Authorities. There were 15 signed off multi-area agreements although there was little involvement by Fire and Rescue services or Authorities.
7. There was a significant reduction in number in national indicators and an improvement in the sophistication of individual indicators throughout this period although the potential scope for further improvements was always clear.
8. The core of the evidential base gradually revolved around the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, which had been developing since 2004 but found expression in the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.
9. There were not one 'Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations (QUANGOs)' included on the list at any time, since government by definition did not have control over them. The various iterations of the list consisted of Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and various government advisory groups.
10. Table 3 of Chapter 2 illustrates the nature and scope of this 'improvement' infrastructure. This organisational language was simplified consolidated and strengthened between 2005 and 2010 but was effectively decimated after 2010.

11. The advantage of having all public services in a single geographical area with the same external auditor was quickly acknowledged as a good idea by government, public service deliverers and the Audit Commission.
12. In areas with the two-tier system of Local Government, the Districts were included in the assessment of the county council.
13. Primary Care Trusts as the formal leaders of the local NHS.
14. Police Authorities did not include specialised or national forces.
15. The LAA website no longer exists and a sample from the Audit Commissions 'One Place' website was transferred to the national archives at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101008004702/http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/pages/default.aspx>
16. The Total Place website has been dormant for over 5 years but is at <http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace/>