report

meeting	**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**	
date	**29 July 2005**	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORTING
(INCLUDING FIRST QUARTER RESULTS APRIL- JUNE 2005)

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

    The purpose of this report is to firstly explain the principles that are being followed to ensure the Service has an effective performance measurement system as part of the overall improvements required in performance management. It also includes an explanation of how the Service will highlight performance issues by colour coding and presents the results of performance against the mandatory Best Value performance indicators for the first quarter of 2005/6.

2. **BACKGROUND**

    2.1 Following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment work has commenced to deliver improvements in the overall management of performance at all levels in the organisation. An action plan is being created to detail these improvements with clear analysis of the expected impact of any changes.

    2.2 Although the Service has a method of measuring its performance significant changes are required to ensure it is appropriate for a modern public service. For measuring performance the improvements will be built around the following principles:

    - **Clarity of purpose** Ensuring the Service understands who will use information and how and why it will be used. Stakeholders with an interest in or need for performance information will be identified and indicators devised, which help them, make better decisions.

    - **Focus** Performance information will be focused in the first instance on the priorities of the authority – its corporate objectives and services needing improvement. This will be complemented by information about day-to-day operations where appropriate. It is considered essential that the Service knows how indicators effect behaviour and build this knowledge into choice and development of performance indicators in the future.

    - **Alignment** The performance measurement system will support objective setting and performance review for the authority. There will be clear links between performance indicators monitoring performance and those used by managers for operational purposes. It will be made clearer why managers and staff should accept the validity of corporate or national targets.

- **Balance** — The overall indicators set will give a balanced picture of the authorities performance, reflecting the main aspects including outcomes and users perspectives. The Service will also ensure the set reflects a balance of cost and value of data collection.

- **Regular refinement** — Performance indicators will be kept up to date to meet changing circumstances. A balance will be struck between by having consistent information that tracks performance over time, and taking advantage of new or improved data and reflecting current priorities.

- **Robustness** — The indicators used will be sufficiently robust and intelligible for their intended use. Independent, internal or external scrutiny will help to ensure that data collection systems are sound.

2.3 The aggregated targets at Service level have now been colour coded to highlight specific areas of performance (Appendix 1). Each area of performance will track progress against target along a trajectory with a upper and lower limits or tolerances on either side. Outside these tolerances performance will be considered either good or poor and consequently require action.

2.4 For this report a copy of the 'front sheet' is attached detailing performance against in the first quarter for the mandatory Best Value indicators (Appendix 2). As can be seen from this report there are 9 significant areas of poor performance against set targets and 5 significant areas of good performance against set targets. Exception reports from the relevant managers have been attached for information (Appendix 3).

2.5 These corporate level measures will now be posted in each working establishment in the Service, to be followed by the posting of district indicators and performance information as it is developed. A copy of the first quarterly results poster 'performance matters' is also attached (Appendix 4).

2.6 Future reports to Members will be improved significantly with an emphasis on the clarity of information and ensuring that it is appropriate for decision making at the corporate governance level.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications to report at this stage although improvement in the performance management systems will have an impact on the medium term financial plan.

4. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct personnel implications from this report at this stage.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An initial Equality Impact Assessment has revealed that there are no direct equal opportunity implications from this report although Members' attention is drawn to BVPIs 2a/2b/11i/11ii/11iii/16i/16ii/17 and 210.

6. **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

All reported performance coded 'red' have a high risk of not achieving target.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1   That Members acknowledge the processes being established to improve performance management.

7.2   That Members consider the reports attached with regard to performance against BVPIs and the activities being proposed to address the shortfalls.
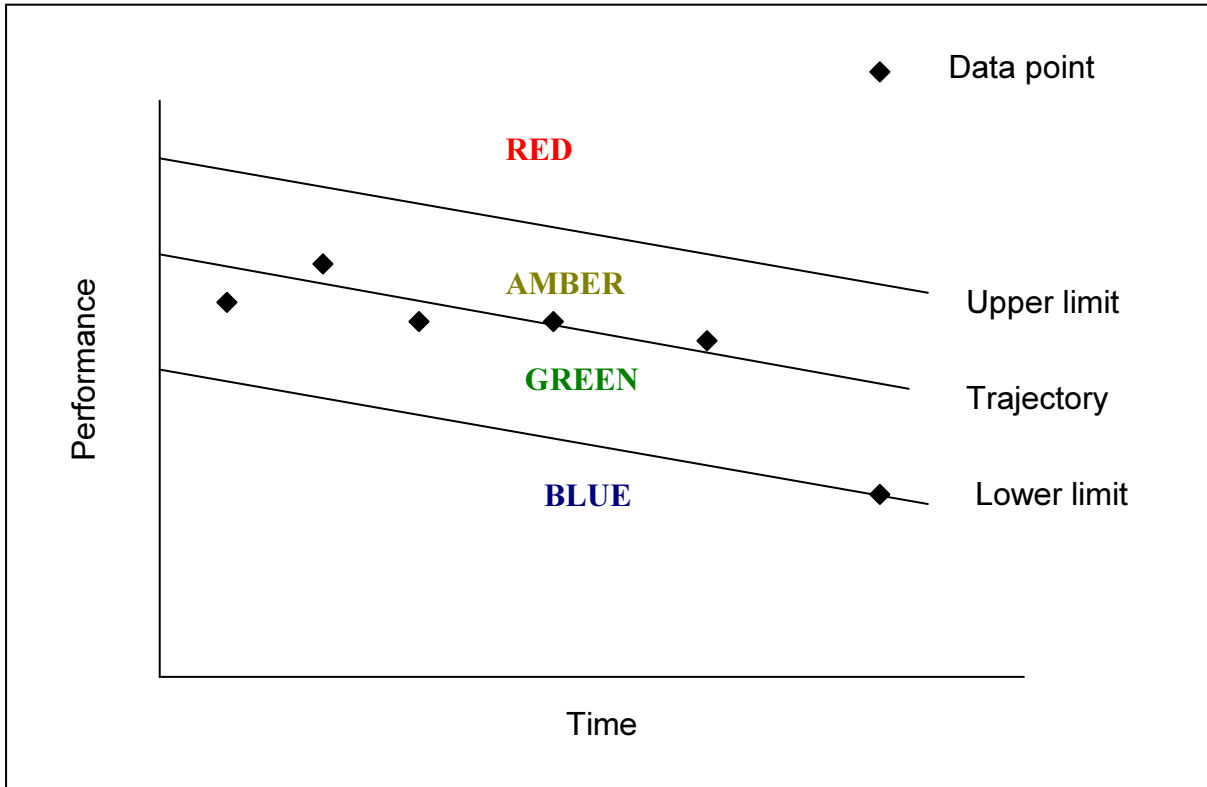
8. **BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION**

None.

Paul Woods
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Appendix 1

Measuring Performance – New colour codes

This example is using a performance area where a reduction over time is desirable for example in absence. Hence any performance in the red would be poor and represent a high risk that the organisation or section will not achieve its target. The amber is above the trajectory or target line and could means that performance is within the expected tolerances and a fluctuation in this area could be due to for example seasonal trends however it is where managers must closely monitor its variation. The green is on target and requires no action. Finally in the blue performance is exceeding expectations and questions should be asked as to why this has happened, for example it maybe down to a Service wide strategy or excellent performance within a distinct area in which case good practice should be identified and shared.

Where an increase is expected over time the colours will be reversed, as is the graph however the coding is obviously the same.

BVPI	DESCRIPTION	PERFORMANCE OWNERSHIP	05/06 ANNUAL TARGET	04/05 ANNUAL RESULT	04/05 Q1 TARGET	04/05 Q1 RESULT	Q1 TARGET	Q1 ACTUAL
BVPI 2a	The level of Equality Standard for Local Government	Equalities	2	1	2	1	2	
BVPI 2b	The quality of Auth.Race Equality Scheme and improvements	Equalities	95.0%	94.70%	95.0%	94.70%	95.0%	
BVPI 8	% of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days	Finanace	95.0%	89.5%	95.0%	93.70%	95.0%	85.32
BVPI 150	Expenditure per head of population	Finanace	39.85	Awaiting	Annual	Annual	NA	NA
BVPI 11i	The percentage of top 5% of earners that are women.	Personnel	4.0%	2.4%	4.8%	2.4%	4.0%	
BVPI 11ii	The % of top 5% of earners from minority ethnic communities	Personnel	2.0%	0.0%	0.0	2.4%	2.0%	0
BVPI 11iii	The percentage of top 5% of earners that are disabled	Personnel	2.0%	New Target	New Target	New Target	2.0%	0
BVPI 12i	Proportion of days/shifts sickness by WT uniformed	Personnel	8.0	12.55	2.00	3.46	2.00	2.98
BVPI 12ii	Proportion of days/shifts lost to sickness by all staff	Personnel	8.5	12.15	2.10	3.36	2.10	2.73
BVPI 15i	Whole time firefighter ill health retirements as a %	Personnel	1.035%	0.50%	0.275%	0.0%	0.170%	1.3%
BVPI 15ii	Control and non-uniformed ill health retirements as a %	Personnel	1.035%	0.70%	0.200%	0.0%	0.170%	
BVPI 16i	The %of W/T & Retained employees with a disability	Equalities	review 09/05	New target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 16ii	The % of control and non-uniform employees with a disability	Equalities	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 17	% of ethnic minority uniformed staff	Equalities	2.73%	1.08%	2.66%	1.16%	2.73%	1.10%
BVPI 210	The % of women fire-fighters	Equalities	4.50%	New target	NA	NA	3.60%	
BVPI 157	The % of types of interactions enabled for e-delivery	I-T-C	65%(eFire?)	57.0%	NA*	NA*	NA*	NA*
BVPI 142ii	Number of calls to primary fires per 10,000 population;	Safety Services	40	40.85	9.99	10.73	10	9.40
BVPI 142iii	No of calls to accidental fires in dwellings per 10,000 dwellings	Safety Services	15	16.24	4.01	4.00	3.75	
BVPI 143i	No of deaths from acc fires in dwellings per 100,000 population.	Safety Services	0.19	0.29	0.16	0.19	0.049	0.19**
BVPI 143ii	No injuries(excl pre-checks)acc fires in dwel per 100,000 pop.	Safety Services	10.5	10.26	2.93	2.83	2.62	2.25
BVPI 144	% of accidental dwelling fires confined to room of origin	Safety Services	92.0%	90.0%	94.0%	90.70%	92.0%	
BVPI 146i	No of calls to malicious false alarms not attended per 1,000 pop	Safety Services	212	New Target	NA	NA	0.05%	
BVPI 146ii	No of calls to malicious false alarms attended per 1,000 pop	Safety Services	700	New Target	NA	NA	0.17%	0.10% ****
BVPI 149i	False alarms caused by AFA per 1,000 non-dom. Prop's	Safety Services	146	149.88	32.86	33.70	32.7	37.82
BVPI 149ii	False alarms by AFA, no of properties more than 1 attendance	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 149iii	False alarms by AFA,% of calls to prop more than 1 attendance	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 206i	No of deliberate primary fires (excl vehicles) per 10,000 pop	Safety Services	9.9	New Target	NA	NA	2.56	
BVPI 206ii	No of deliberate primary fires in vehicles per 10,000 population	Safety Services	16	New Target	NA	NA	4.85	3.32
BVPI 206iii	No of deliberate secondary fires (excl vehicles) per 10,000 pop	Safety Services	45	New Target	NA	NA	13.43	
BVPI 206iv	No of deliberate secondary fires in vehicles per 10,000 pop	Safety Services	1.1	New Target	NA	NA	0.32	
BVPI 207	The no of fires in non-dom premises per 1,000 non-dom premises.	Safety Services	15.5	New Target	NA	NA	3.9	3.58
BVPI 208	% of people escaped unharmed accid. dwel fires without FRA)	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 209i	% of fires attended in dwellings- smoke alarm had activated	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 209ii	% of fires attended in dwel-smoke alarm fitted, did not activate	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA
BVPI 209iii	% of fires attended in dwellings - no smoke alarm fitted	Safety Services	review 09/05	New Target	NA	NA	NA	NA

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* equates to 2 women			Over-performing (Identify best practice)
** awaiting for new reporting mechanism (eFire)			Performing within target (no action)
*** equates to 2 deaths.			Performing just under target (monitor)
**** equates to 43 calls not attended (40%) of all malicious calls			Under-performing (analysis / action plan)
***** equates to 107 malicious calls			

BVPI 12i - Proportion of days/shifts lost to sickness by whole time uniformed staff

Comparison to last years result.

A total number of 1693 working days was lost due to sickness absence in the last quarter, an average of 2.98 days per person. As a comparison, the same period in 2004 saw 2113.5 days lost, at an average of 3.47 days per person. This represents a decrease of 420.5 days. It is encouraging that the level of sickness absence has shown a significant reduction on the equivalent period of 2004.

However it also represents an increase of 51.5 days on the previous quarter (Jan – March 2005). There has been an increase in absence amongst watch-based personnel (+59.5 days), flexi duty officers (+54.5 days) day duty staff (+35.5 days). However there was a reduction of 98 days amongst Control staff. With the exception of day duty staff, the increase has been in reported long-term absence (28+days). For day duty staff there has been contrasting increase in short-term absence.

In terms of the quarterly targets (average per person), the following results apply:

	Target	Actual	Difference
Upper threshold	2.125	2.98	+0.855
Target	2.0	2.98	+0.98
Lower threshold	1.815	2.98	+1.165

Despite the reduction in year on year comparisons, the Service has not met the target thresholds during the review period.

Reasons why this performance area has not met the expectations

In terms of the operational workforce, the increase has been primarily in terms of long-term absence of more than 28 days (+195days). The short-term absence figure has actually reduced by 45.5 days. The Control section has seen a fall in both long and short-term absence rates.

The increase in absence compared to the previous quarter is unexpected, as you would normally predict a fall in seasonal illness compared to the previous quarter. The fact that the increase is predominantly accounted for by long-term illness would indicate that the reasons for absence are accounted for by serious incidents of illness or injury rather than for minor ailments. If this trend continues into the next quarter, it may be an indication that the emphasis placed by the Service on managing short-term absence is proving successful in driving down ad-hoc days off work due to minor ailments.

The improvement in the figures for Control primarily relates to the return to work of 4 individuals who had been on long-term absence for a number of months.

The barriers to achieving/improving this area of performance

Achieving a reduction in long-term absence is more difficult to achieve than managing a reduction in short-term absence, as the reasons for the absence are likely to require a period of recuperation from serious injury or illness.

The short-term and long-term plans to achieve success in this performance area?

Given the upward trend in long-term absence, an assessment of reasons for the increase will be undertaken by the Head of Human Resources. This is particularly relevant to the Watch Based and

Flexi-duty Officer group where the most significant increases have been seen. Increases in the short-term absence figures for Day Duty staff will also be investigated.

The Service manages those on long term absence primarily through the intervention of occupational health support to those employees with long-term medical conditions to achieve a return to work within a shorter timescale. This includes regular assessment by the Occupational Health Physician and Nurse/Advisor. The OH team achieve this by linking into relevant GP or specialist advisors, planning individual rehabilitation programmes, and advising on modified duties which allow the employee to return in a non-operational capacity for a short period of time.

Additionally, the provisions of the Westfield Health Scheme can offer fast-track access to private consultations, to MRI, PET and CT scans to assist in diagnosis and to counselling services where these are appropriate.

The Personnel section maintains an overview of those on long-term sickness and ensures that interventions, when appropriate, are arranged.

In addition to this, the Service monitors all absence against the trigger points established under the Absence Management Policy and managers interview those whose sickness record is causing concern, either placing them in a review process and/or obtaining advice from OH advisors. Individuals with a history of poor attendance are referred through the Discipline Procedure; this has recently led to the issue of written warnings in specific cases.

The existing Absence Management Policy is currently being reviewed by the Head of Human Resources and will be presented for consultation with the Representative Bodies.

The Service are currently considering the introduction of an out-sourced absence monitoring service provided by FirstCare which will provide access to nurse consultation in diagnosing and treatment of illness/injury. The company have indicated that this should achieve a reduction in absence of between 10-40% . It is likely that this will be introduced for a trial period. The information provided will assist in managing absence at an early stage.

A training programme on Managing Attendance for Watch Managers, District Performance Managers and other line managers in on-going.

BVPI12ii – Proportion of days/shifts lost to sickness absence by all staff

Comparison to last years result

A total number of 1933 working days was lost due to sickness absence in the last quarter, an average of 2.76 days per person. As a comparison, the same period in 2004 saw 1963 days lost, at an average of 3.32 days per person. This represents a decrease of 30 days. It is encouraging that the level of sickness absence has shown a slight reduction on the equivalent period of 2004.

However it also represents an increase of 34 days on the previous quarter (Jan – March 2005). There has been a reduction in absence amongst non-uniformed personnel (-17 days), which indicates that the increases set out in BVPI12(i) for uniformed personnel have affected this figure. The figures for non-uniformed personnel indicate that there has been a reduction in short-term absence (-50 days) but an increase in long-term absence (+33 days).

In terms of the quarterly targets (average per person), the following results apply:

	Target	Actual	Difference
Upper threshold	2.25	2.76	+0.51
Target	2.125	2.76	+0.635
Lower threshold	2.00	2.76	+0.76

Despite the reduction in year on year comparisons, the Service has not met the target thresholds during the review period.

Reasons why this performance area has not met the expectations

Please refer to BVPI 12(i) for analysis of the figures for the operational workforce.

The number of days lost to absence for non-uniformed personnel has decreased by 17 days overall, although the figure for long-term absence has shown an increase of 33 days. The short-term absence figure has actually reduced by 50 days.

The expectation for this period of the year would be a reduction in absence compared to the previous quarter, due to a fall in seasonal illness. This expectation has been seen in the figures. However the fact that there has been an increase in long-term illness would indicate that the reasons for absence are accounted for by serious incidents of illness or injury rather than for minor ailments. If this trend continues into the next quarter, it may be an indication that the emphasis placed by the Service on managing short-term absence is proving successful in driving down ad-hoc days off work due to minor ailments.

The barriers to achieving/improving this area of performance

Achieving a reduction in long-term absence is more difficult to achieve than managing a reduction in short-term absence, as the reasons for the absence are likely to require a period of recuperation from serious injury or illness.

The short-term and long-term plans to achieve success in this performance area?

Given the upward trend in long-term absence, an assessment of reasons for the increase should be undertaken by the Head of Human Resources as set out in BVPI 12(i). Additionally the increase in long-term absence amongst non-uniformed personnel will also be investigated.

The Service manages those on long term absence primarily through the intervention of occupational health support to those employees with long-term medical conditions to achieve a return to work within a shorter timescale. This includes regular assessment by the Occupational Health Physician and Nurse/Advisor. The OH team achieve this by linking into relevant GP or specialist advisors, planning individual rehabilitation programmes, and advising on modified duties which allow the employee to return in a non-operational capacity for a short period of time.

Additionally, the provisions of the Westfield Health Scheme can offer fast-track access to private consultations, to MRI, PET and CT scans to assist in diagnosis and to counselling services where these are appropriate.

The Personnel section maintains an overview of those on long-term sickness and ensures that interventions, when appropriate, are arranged.

In addition to this, the Service monitors all absence against the trigger points established under the Absence Management Policy and managers interview those whose sickness record is causing concern, either placing them in a review process and/or obtaining advice from OH advisors. Individuals with a history of poor attendance are referred through the Discipline Procedure; this has recently led to the issue of written warnings in specific cases.

The existing Absence Management Policy is currently being reviewed by the Head of Human Resources and will be presented for consultation with the Representative Bodies.

The Service are currently considering the introduction of an out-sourced absence monitoring service provided by FirstCare which will provide access to nurse consultation in diagnosing and treatment of illness/injury. The company have indicated that this should achieve a reduction in absence of

between 10-40%. It is likely that this will be introduced for a trial period. The information provided will assist in managing absence at an early stage.

A training programme on Managing Attendance for Watch Managers, District Performance Managers and other line managers in on-going.

BVPI 15i Whole time Firefighter ill health retirements as a percentage

Comparison to last years result

At the same point last year, no employees were retired on the grounds of permanent ill-health. The latest figures (7 retirements) show a significant increase on the comparable period of 2004. This accounts for 1.3% of the wholetime workforce.

This outcome had been predicted in the previous return.

Reasons why this performance area has not met the expectations

The retirement of 7 individuals who had been absent on long-term sickness or redeployed onto temporary modified duties reflects the recommendation of an independent Occupational Health Physician that the individuals were permanently incapable of undertaking operational duties under the provisions of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. On the basis that none of the individuals chose to seek redeployment into non-operational roles, the Service agreed to their medical discharge.

The barriers to achieving/improving this area of performance

The options open to the Service once it has received advice that an employee is permanently incapacitated from undertaking their normal duties are limited. If the employee does not wish to undertake a non-operational role (which may be on different terms of employment) then the only option is to retire from service with enhanced pension benefits.

The short-term and long-term plans to achieve success in this performance area?

The continued management of long-term absence by the Personnel and Occupational Health teams should result in a higher number of employees returning to work through rehabilitation and modified duties.

A greater number of non-operational roles will increase the opportunities to redeploy personnel who may otherwise be retired from service and the Service will increasingly seek to offer alternate working arrangements wherever possible and appropriate.

BVPI 17 The percentage of ethnic minority uniformed staff

Comparison to last years result

There are currently 10 employees from minority ethnic backgrounds employed within uniformed roles.

Whilst the total figure remains unchanged compared to the previous quarter (Jan-Mar 2005), there have been some adjustments arising from a reduction of 1 Wholetime Firefighter from an ethnic background of "Other Asian", and the re-classification of a Firefighter conditioned to the retained duty system as from a non-White British ethnic background. Overall, this means that there has been a reduction of 1 employee from those recorded as from a minority ethnic background during the period.

In terms of the quarterly targets established, the following results apply:

	Target (%)	Actual (%)	Difference (%)
Upper threshold:	3	1.1	2.1
Target:	2.73	1.1	1.63
Lower threshold:	2.5	1.1	1.4

The Service has not met the target thresholds during the review period.

Reasons why this performance area has not met the expectations

The reduction of 1 person employed is from the wholetime staff group. This is due to dismissal from the Service.

Additionally, there has been no wholetime recruitment campaign since 2003 and therefore no possibility of recruiting new recruits from minority ethnic groups.

In terms of the retained section, there were 8 appointments made in this review period. All appointees classified their ethnic background as White-British.

In terms of the Control section, there were 3 appointments in the review period. The appointees classified their ethnic background as 2 x White British and 1 x White Other.

The barriers to achieving/improving this area of performance

 Encouraging appropriately skilled candidates to apply for vacancies with the Service.

The short-term and long-term plans to achieve success in this performance area?

To achieve the target of 2.73% of the uniformed workforce from minority ethnic backgrounds, the Service would need to employ 25 persons, which is an increase 15 personnel.

A Wholetime Recruitment campaign commenced on 13th July. It is hoped that a number of applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds will apply for Trainee Firefighter vacancies. The Equalities Officer has been working with local community groups and the Employment Service to promote the fire service as a career to those from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Continue to work with local communities to raise the profile of the Service and encourage greater interest in potential vacancies.

Undertake a pro-active campaign to increase the number of women and those from minority ethnic groups applying to become Firefighters on the retained duty system.

The Equalities Officer to undertake a review of current recruitment and selection practices to establish whether there are any intrinsic barriers for applicants for minority ethnic communities and how these may be overcome., and report to Ad-Hoc Equalities Panel.

BVPI 8 – The percentage of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days.

Comparison to last years result

Last year the Performance Indicator was at 93.7% for the same quarter. This year it is 85.32%, making a reduction in performance of 8.38%

Reasons why this performance area has not met the expectations

There is the continual issue of late GRNing of goods that have an order attached to them. In addition to this, there are normally delays in the forwarding of invoices, to finance, where the invoice needs to be sign for payment.

The period that is covered in this report is the same period that the year-end process takes place. This year the deadline was tighter and more emphasis was placed on yearend issues.

The barriers to achieving/improving this area of performance

The main barriers to achieving this performance indicator is the timing of Stores receiving GRN information and Finance receiving the signed off invoices.

Looking at this quarter there have been invoices held (seeming unnecessarily) by budget holders. The late return of these invoices has an impact on the performance indicator.

The short-term and long-term plans to achieve success in this performance area?

The short-term plan is for the Finance assistants to monitor the distribution and return of the invoices that need signing. This way Finance can highlight areas off concern and take action.

The longer-term plan is that of the full implementation and rollout of the financial system.

BVPI 143i – Number of deaths from accidental fires in dwellings per 100,000 population

Please note that the 2005 / 06 annual aggregated target for fire deaths is 0.19 deaths per 100,000 population equating to 2 deaths, with the quarterly target referring to 0.5 fire deaths. It must be borne in mind that fire deaths are relatively infrequent events and thus statistically they do tend to skew results and performance, particularly when considered in the context of a small sample size i.e. service results and short time interval i.e. quarterly or annual period.

The 2 deaths from accidental dwelling fires within the first quarter of 05 / 06 follow almost immediately a fire death in March 05 (outside of this reporting period). All 3 deaths have been subject to a full fire investigation by competent fire investigators as is normal practice. Additionally, for the first time, 'profiling' was undertaken of all three victims in order to establish facts about the individuals, their lifestyles and other factors to provide analysis to fuel future preventative and community safety work.

As a result of this profiling a number of factors were found to be common for all three fatalities, many of which may not have been previously considered or aggregated.

Unfortunately all 3 deaths are subject to coroner's enquiry, which have yet to take place, and thus the findings of both the fire investigations and the victim profiling are currently sub-judicy.

Once these 3 cases have cleared coroner's court, the service will approach relevant agencies, and working in partnership with them, use the findings to produce strategies, action plans and tangible outcomes to reduce the risk for the community and to reduce the number of accidental fire deaths.

The PSA target is based on a combination of deaths and injuries, and the 3 deaths in this quarter will not adversely affect the PSA target as the number of injuries has reduced.

BVPI 149(i) False alarms caused by automatic fire detection per 1,000 non-domestic properties

There were a total of 1131 false alarm calls for the first quarter compared with 1089 for the same period in 2004/5.

Investigations have shown that the target was not met due mainly to environmental conditions, in particular adverse weather conditions with abnormally high temperatures and resulting electrical storms where the cause of false alarms was reported as **Environmental effect – other**. Out of a total of 265 false alarm calls caused by environmental effects, compared with 236 for the same period last year, at least 4 were due to adverse weather conditions between 19.37 hours and 19.55 hours on Sunday 19th June, and 14 between 21.22 hours and 22.32 hours on Tuesday 28th June. There were 178 false alarm calls where the cause was undetermined, compared with 133 for the same period last year.

These environmental conditions are known to effect the reliability of any electronic equipment, e.g. automatic fire detection systems. Notably, false alarm calls have been received from premises with no previously identified history. The industry conservatively considers that the number of new fire alarm systems being monitored by Alarm Receiving Centres increases by 7% per annum. Of these new systems, false alarms within the initial settling down period can be high if control measures are not put in place.

BS5839 Part 1 2002 recommends that in systems that incorporate more than 40 automatic fire detectors, if the average rate of false alarms exceeds one false alarm per 20 detectors per annum, an in-depth investigation should be instigated by the user. The recent CFOA Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm Systems model agreement is currently under consideration.

As a preventative measure, the "Off-line" Policy leaflets campaign for Districts has recently been re-launched to encourage premises owners / occupiers to take proper responsible action when environmental conditions prevail which could predictably cause false alarms from AFD systems, e.g. cooking fumes, steam, workmen on site and adverse weather conditions etc.

Additionally, false fire alarm calls from premises, in particular Courts, inhabited by older or socially disadvantaged residents continue to occur, a problem that has to be addressed in a realistic, risk-assessed approach. It must be appreciated that there are certain areas in the community where the dwellings covered by automatic fire alarm systems require careful consideration because of the vulnerability / needs of the occupants. Some false alarm situations therefore have to be tolerated to a certain extent to achieve a balance, but without compromising safety in allowing complacency to develop.

Initiatives and approaches to help Districts reduce unwanted fire signals have been produced, including:

- **Raising the public awareness** and providing advice on corrective action to prevent reoccurrence, using a **False Fire Alarm report procedure**, promoting follow-up contact actions and visits as necessary by the Fire Alarm Advisor.

- **Introduction of the alarm monitoring "Off-Line" policy** in February 2002, in order to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals received from typical situations prevalent during the working day period, followed by the **"Off-Line" leaflet initiative** in conjunction with the AFA Response policy.

- **Introduction of a new Automatic Fire Alarm Response policy** in July 2004, where the response to a call from an AFA results in an attendance of one pumping appliance as the generic norm, with a minimum of two pumping appliances mobilised to premises where there is a life risk. This policy also incorporates a more focussed adoption of the existing "Off-Line" policy, involving Districts action down to crew level.

- **Self-assessment of residential care homes and nursing homes** has been promoted in conjunction with the implementation of the AFA Response policy, to promote coming off line during specified hours in the day. This has entailed sending an explanatory letter and self-assessment sheet to all registered care homes and establishments in the county under the authority of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, with queries handled by Safety Services HQ staff.

Actions within the next quarter aimed at meeting the targets set for 2005/6:

- Greater liaison between Safety Services and Community Safety sections is planned to ensure that the available "tools" to reduce unwanted fire signals are being used more effectively by Districts, commencing with immediate effect.

- Continued pressure on known premises offenders to make changes where possible to their management procedures and everyday environment conditions where false fire alarms are predictable. Contacts to be made by end of July '05.

- Continue to offer and provide technical advice on fire alarm matters based on experience of similar situations in the reduction of false alarms as necessary.

- Extend general awareness of premises owners / occupiers of the typical causes of false alarms from automatic fire detection systems and their consequences, and the preventative measures that can be taken through Community Safety activities with immediate effect.