



FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY ACHIEVES **'FAIR'** RATING IN FIRST-EVER AUDIT COMMISSION ASSESSMENT

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority has been rated as a **'fair'** Authority by the Audit Commission in the first ever round of Comprehensive Performance Assessments for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment is a rigorous assessment process which looks purely at how well a Fire and Rescue Authority is being managed by senior managers and Authority members – **not on how well it responds to emergency incidents** – and has been introduced by Government as part of a wider programme to drive improvement in the delivery of local services to the public.

In its assessment, the Audit Commission recognised real strengths in Authority's performance, including:

- the commitment of members and staff to protecting and improving the communities of County Durham and Darlington,
- increasing and innovative community safety activities,
- sound performance management,
- a clear vision for the future,
- established partnership and regional working,
- a general trend of improvement, and
- the introduction of new staff development programmes.

The 'fair' rating means the Authority's strengths far outweigh its weaknesses.

The Assessment also looked for areas of improvement, these have been identified as, in particular, the Authority's approach to long term planning, its progress against equality and diversity targets and its Corporate Governance

arrangements (the formal relationship between the Service and elected Authority Members). The Authority has now put in place a plan to drive improvement in all identified areas.

Councillor Charles Magee, Chairman of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority, said: "I feel very proud of the Fire and Rescue Authority and Service staff who worked hard throughout this demanding new assessment process.

"This assessment has provided us with a real opportunity to take stock of the Service, and has also provided us all with an important benchmark from which to build on our strengths and address our weaknesses."

Paul Henderson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer at County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, said: "As a Fire and Rescue Service, we are very much about 'delivering' – we respond to incidents, we get out into the community, we work with the police, local councils and authorities to reduce fire deaths and injuries and fire-related crime. These responses to emergency incidents are continually monitored against nationally accepted good practice and remain highly satisfactory.

"The Comprehensive Performance Assessment process has, however, made us all stand back during our busy working year and look in a new way at where our day-to-day management and planning can better help us to realise our vision to make County Durham and Darlington a safe place to live and work.

"The Audit Commission 'fair' rating is an indicator that we are heading in the right direction but, as always, we will now tackle those areas which have been identified for improvement to ensure that residents can rely on us to be, not only a highly trained and professional firefighting and community safety service, but also a well-run and well-managed organisation."

The Audit Commission has published reports detailing the outcomes of all Fire and Rescue Authority Comprehensive Performance Assessments on its website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Details of the Fire and Rescue Authority's financial and operational performance and future work can be found at www.ddfire.gov.uk or contact Service Headquarters on 0191 384 3381 or at ServiceHQ@ddfire.gov.uk and request a copy of the Authority's 'Strategic Plan 2005-2010'.