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This circular is	<b>For information</b>	No response required	
This circular is	<b>Relevant to the National Framework</b>		
Status	<b>This circular informs Fire and Rescue Authorities of the publication of the Operational Assessment Toolkit.</b>		

# Operational Assessment Toolkit

## Issued by:

**Sean Ruth**

**Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser**

## 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**

## Please forward to:

## Summary

This circular is to inform Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and staff in the Fire and Rescue Service of the publication of the Operational Assessment Toolkit, following consultation.

## For further information, contact:

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### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) Toolkit was developed in 2006 and used to assess and score FRAs' operational performance. The results were provided to the Audit Commission and formed one component of the service assessment score for FRAs. The OASD scores remained valid for three years and are still in place.
- 1.2 The Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and a Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) working group (20 Fire and Rescue Services have been represented) have revised and refreshed the newly titled Operational Assessment Toolkit. During this process extensive liaison has taken place with the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 1.3 As a result, a new process has been designed for undertaking operational self assessment and peer review from 2009/10 onwards. This process links into the Audit Commission's proposals for Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), and the need for sector-led improvement support processes outlined in the Local Government White Paper – Strong and Prosperous Communities.
- 1.4 The new arrangements reflect a move away from externally imposed assessment towards a mechanism designed to assist FRAs in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement.
- 1.5 The main changes to the Toolkit since the 2006 version can be summarised as follows:
  - There is no longer a formal scoring mechanism. The Toolkit describes what might be considered as developing, established or advanced performance in relation to each key area within the key lines of enquiry. The intention is for FRAs to use this information to gather evidence, and subsequently support the development of improvement plans
  - Key lines of enquiry (KLOE) are broader in focus and provide a more strategic, outcome based approach. This is consistent with the direction of the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment
  - The Toolkit contains seven key lines of enquiry. Two new KLOEs covering Health and Safety, and Training and Development have been introduced, and assessment criteria relating to these areas have largely been removed from other KLOEs in order to reduce duplication
  - Exemplars of notable practice have been included. These will assist the FRA and peer review teams to highlight areas of notable practice that can be developed for use across the FRA or shared with other authorities
  - The Risk Analysis KLOE has been renamed Community Risk Management, the Prevention and Protection KLOE has been split into two distinct KLOEs and the Operational Preparedness and Emergency Response KLOEs have been combined into a single Response KLOE
  - There has been a shift away from the HS(G) 65 model in order to reduce repetition and to make each KLOE more specific and relevant. The new structure provides three or four key areas to each KLOE and a framework for each one to be examined in a well rounded manner

- Briefing sheets have been provided to support each KLOE in order to assist the assessment teams (self and peer) to focus on key issues.

### 2.0 Consultation Process

- 2.1 The proposals for Operational Assessment were subject to consultation; this closed in March 2009. There was a very positive response to the Operational Assessment consultation process and the findings will be published shortly. During the consultation period, extensive self-assessment piloting was conducted in nine FRAs, in addition to one peer-review pilot.

### 3.0 Status of the Operational Assessment in relation to Comprehensive Area Assessment

- 3.1 The Audit Commission strongly support the introduction of Operational Assessment and have agreed for the first time to draw on evidence from a sector-led process for CAA. The intention has been to provide a close fit between Operational Assessment and Organisational Assessment (CAA) to enable the Audit Commission to reduce regulatory work and reduce the time spent with FRAs undertaking assessment work. By working closely with the sector, and aligning assessment methodologies, as much duplication as possible has been removed and therefore the burden on FRAs can be reduced.

- 3.2 Operational Assessment has been developed to heavily focus on outcomes and the impact of activity, in order to be consistent with the approach being taken by the Audit Commission within CAA.

### 4.0 Using the Operational Assessment Toolkit

- 4.1 Information is provided within the Toolkit to support FRAs in carrying out a self-assessment. The Toolkit has been designed to support FRAs in assessing prospects for improvement and to identify clear outcomes for each area of activity. The focus on outcomes is fundamental to the process of ensuring that the FRA is working effectively with partners, achieving success linked to local priorities, and impacting on local quality of life. An outcome-based approach is essential in identifying areas of improvement and this supports the requirements of the Audit Commission, providing a close fit between Operational Assessment and CAA's Organisational Assessment.

- 4.2 The Toolkit is available to Fire and Rescue Authorities at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/opatoolkit>. Hard copies will be available on 22 April and these will be sent directly to FRAs.

### 5.0 Further Information

- 5.1 Any queries with the contents of this circular should be addressed to Sean Ruth, Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser.

**Sean Ruth**

**Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser**