

# Announcing our CPA result

*By John Bonney*

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Firstly, thank you for coming here today. I appreciate that some of you have come some distance, some of you have just walked out of your offices, and some of you have come from different workplaces. I appreciate you coming and I appreciate particularly that you understand how important it is that you come and hear this today. For managers in particular, some of what I want to talk about today I will be looking for you to share with your staff directly. It's important for us as an organisation to hear this news together, so thank you firstly for that.

What I want to do, before we talk about the score and how we've done, and how we compare with other people, is set the scene. It's very important for us to understand what Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is all about, and what it means for us a fire and rescue service. We also need to know what it means across the public sector more generally.

The National Framework pushes the modernisation agenda. It makes very clear the expectations on the British Fire Service, and in Hampshire, West Sussex, and wherever you go, the National Framework talks about change and about performance improvement.

What it also describes is the way that we will be assessed, and that will be through CPA. CPA is a check for central Government, and for ourselves, that we are making progress with this enormous change, and it is something that we are all involved in. It talks about an assessment, particularly about how well the authority is run - as both an Authority and as a Service – and looks at the perspectives of both elected members and staff.

Before I move on to the next point, one thing that has changed fundamentally for us in the last three and a half years is a wholesale removal of all the central prescription we used to have. We've got prescription coming out of our ears, but in terms of central Government, standards of fire cover, the expectations that we used to see in the "Dear Chief Officer" letters, much of it is disappearing. So one of the checks that we have

locally, is to see that what we are doing is in fact *Making Hampshire Safer*. That's a check for the Government as much as it is for us.

The assessment itself is audit-based and evidence-based, which means it's not enough just to tell people what you're doing. We had to *show* the assessors what we intended to do, in detail, and they went off and "triangulated it." What that means is they went off and checked that what we said we were doing was actually what was happening. So they would check with other managers, they'd check with staff, just to get a double count to make sure that what we were saying was actually what was happening.

All the fire authorities across the country were CPA assessed in the first half of this year. We were the second tranche if you recall. The first tranche was very late January, and we were assessed in mid February. They were with us for five days in total. There was five of them - a couple of senior assessors, an elected member, a financial assessor and a fire service secondee. And they interviewed over 100 people whilst they were here in those five days, so it wasn't just a very quick snapshot. They spent a lot of time digging around the organisation and in fact the amount of material we had to send them *prior* to their arrival was enormous. And I have to say they were skilled in what they did. They were, I believe, one of the more competent teams that were operating around the country.

What they provided for us was a baseline for improvement, and we'll talk about that in a minute. But what they're doing is they're providing 'where are you now' snapshots. This is very, very important for us, given that we've only just started on the modernisation process. You could ask "well why is it important to do well?" or "it's largely irrelevant to us?" or "it's just a management badge isn't it?"

There's a long list of things we are assessed against, however the one thing that I would say is, forget the management list for a second, and go back to July 7th in London. All of a sudden, public reassurance and public confidence in its emergency services has become much more important. Our reputation is very, very important. Not just because it's nice to have a good reputation, but because we are one of the major pillars of providing the public not just with safety itself, but with a **sense of safety**. Reputation, therefore, for today's fire and rescue services, is vital.

If you do well in CPA you get freedoms and flexibilities from central Government. They reduce the burden on you in terms of further inspection, in terms of other things you are expected to do to prove that you're good. You're more attractive to people, and people want to stand next to you. I don't mean personally, I mean from an organisational point of view; they want to engage with you.

Now, you may say "well okay, so what's important about that?" But think, how many of you are dealing with other bodies to develop our service? Whether that be a local community group, the Audit Commission, or another fire and rescue service. Whoever it is, partnership has become very, very important for us in terms of delivering our business.

Furthermore the most important commodity of all is you. Doing well at CPA will make us more attractive to potential employees - people who are going to bring more talent into the organisation and want to stay with us because of that. This is incredibly important.

The one thing that CPA doesn't cover, and we need to be clear about this, is the operational front end. CPA never looked at fire engines. It never looked at our schools education team, or technical fire safety officers doing their inspections. The reason why it never did that was because it concentrated on the organisational system. It looked and said: "If you're well managed and well governed, that's what we're interested in. The other bits your business, you need to get that right."

Tomorrow we will put out a statement announcing our results, but at the same time we will also talk about our operational assurance, because I think the public need to hear that we're satisfied with what we're doing, that we are right at the front end just as much as we are with the organisational processes we have.

### **Why now for the announcement?**

So why now for the announcement? Why, given that we had it in February, is it now? Well there are a number of reasons for that. The first one is you can't do all the assessments at one time, and they were very keen – the auditors and central Government - that all results come out at exactly the same time.

So we've been through a six month period where everybody has been assessed, their results have been shared with them, and there's been negotiation on that - because there are some factual inaccuracies that people have to address. They've then been moderated so it's a level playing field for everybody. Now everybody's finished or just about - there are two or three outstanding I think - now is the point at which they announce. They've also made it clear that they want to announce all the results together.

Whether we like it or not it's a league table - it puts us somewhere in a list. They never said that so treat this with some candour if you will! But I think it is a league table, there's no bones about it. Now I don't know about you, but I am competitive when I'm put in a list with other people. And as an organisation that we're proud of, I want to make sure we're near the top of that list.

So the announcements tomorrow are not going to be just Hampshire-based; they're going to be right across the country. We know what's happened to the Ambulance Service in Hampshire in the last couple of days. The first the question the media asked was: "okay, how did you do?" Then they wanted to know: "how did you do compared with everybody else?" So exactly that has already started to happen with our results.

### **What did CPA look at?**

So what did CPA look at? Well, it looked at three main things. It looked at **what we are trying to achieve as an organisation**. Now that's important. Three years ago we'd have said, just refer to the Home Office manual. It doesn't say that anymore, it says look at our IRMP. We're all grown up now, we're having to do this ourselves, so what are our priorities, how are we leading, what are we going to deal with first, what's our direction of travel? The five corporate aims were the things that we were constantly talked about. Interestingly, everywhere they went they saw those corporate aims. That's our direction of travel.

The second area was **how have we have gone about meeting those aims**. We have marshalled our resources and they've put those into a number of categories. Finally they asked **how much have you started to achieve?** What has the Fire Authority achieved, and in light of that, what are we going to do next?

It isn't without some significance that they came, I believe, halfway through the first year of major modernisation in the British fire service, so they were looking for progress.

Breaking down those three main categories, we were given individual scores for nine areas - scores of 1 to 4 where 1 is well below minimum requirements and 4 is exceeding minimum requirements.

The sum of these nine scores led to an overall assessment, and I'm providing a big build up to this!

### **We did "good"**

So had we done? Well our overall score was "good", and this is excellent as far as I am concerned. I know the language is a bit strange but I think that's excellent for us as an organisation beginning that process of change.

"Good" is a very good place for us to build on.

How did our scores break down? We were incredibly consistent in our scores. They were all 3s or 2s. In fact the majority were 3s, so that's working consistently above minimum standards and performing well. There were two areas where we were "adequate", so let's touch on those now.

What they said about us is, you've got performance management systems in place, but what you're not doing is paying enough attention to what it's telling you and using that information to improve. We gather the information, and we think about it, but they weren't quite sure of the link between the intelligence we collect and how it drives performance.

The other area they wanted us to improve was internal communications, and how we engage staff with the process of change.

A good score, to get a "good", requires no "1s", so we needed to be consistent. We got at least 7 "3s", so we're in the "good" category, but only just. But "good" is still a "good", and whilst we have plenty of room for improvement we have made a great start.

This is how the Audit Commission describe “good”, and enjoy it because it's built on your efforts.

### **What does “good” look like?**

- *We have strong performance overall.* We know where we need to go. We're good at self reflecting and in truth when the report landed on my desk and landed on senior managers desks, none of it was a surprise. There are things that we know we need to do. These things take time, these are not easy things that you can do just like that. So we understand where we need to make those improvements.
- *Effective leadership and management.* Effective leadership and management doesn't mean just at the most senior level. Leaders are right through this organisation, right through every row of seats here. Everybody has a leadership role to play. Do not believe anymore there's one leader in this organisation, there isn't; everybody needs to lead change.
- *We're ambitious for modernisation.* If I translate that in Hampshire, we're proud of some of our ambitions and some of our innovations. I don't think that's a new view, I just think that's been recognised - perhaps for the first time. Not only are we proud of what we do, we're more confident about those things that we believe we're good at. We've sold that better.
- *We are focussed on what matters for local people.* I think that's true. More and more of what we see is focussed on local people.
- *We provide value for money.* Relative to others we have a good cost per head of population. It breaks down further than that but we've more to go there.
- *Capacity and skills to improve.* What that means is there's more in there, you can achieve more, even with what you've got at the moment. You can achieve more in terms of your resources, your people, your technology.
- *Engagement of councillors and elected members.* This is a very, very important issue and I think elected members and officers have worked hard to achieve this in

recent times. This is very, very important. The IRMP is not just the Service's, it's the whole Authority's.

- *Can offer best practice to other fire and rescue services.* How many times have you walked down that corridor, down here or upstairs, and not recognised the people wearing the uniforms? There's been more people coming through these doors from different fire and rescue services in the last six months than I've ever seen before. And they're here because we're doing something right and we're willing to share it with them.

### **How did other Services do?**

Right, OK, how did other people do? This is the bit I always like. We are pleased with how we have done ourselves, but what does the regional picture look like?

I'll just go through this. This is our region. This is the spread. There's an "excellent" there, so there's a pacemaker we're after and that's Kent. There are only two "excellents" in the whole of the country - one is Merseyside and one is Kent - so we've got a pacemaker in our back garden.

I like that. I don't know about anybody else, but that gives us something to go for. The region as a whole has done reasonable well relative to other regions. There are four "goods" - ourselves, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey.

There's a "fair" in terms of East Sussex. West Sussex have raised a red flag - they're appealing their mark, and are one of only two in the country to do so. So we have no idea of what they've got at the moment. There's a "weak" in Buckinghamshire and there's a "poor" in the Isle of Wight. Now we can speculate all we like about what's going to happen with the "poors", particularly the "poor" in this case because it's a neighbour. But whatever happens will happen, I would say don't waste your effort. My focus is on moving us from "good" to " "excellent."

So that's the regional picture, and it's quite a strong region. Now let's take a look around the country. I'm not going to go through all the results, but I'll make a couple of observations. The British fire service should be eminently proud of these results. When the first group of local authority CPA results came up they formed a perfect bell curve -

lots in the middle, and a few either end. Our national CPA results do not form a bell curve, but are skewed down the right end, and that's great. The British fire service should be proud of its results here.

There's work to do, there's no question about that, there are "weaks" and there are "poors". But in a time of massive change, in times of enormous disruption following industrial action, with everything that's happened, with all that change, this is a credit to every single person that works in the British fire service whether they wear a uniform, whether they're operational, whether they're non-operational, whatever. That's to be applauded and I'm proud to be part of an industry that's able to do that on the first pass.

### **What are our strengths and weaknesses?**

Let's talk very briefly about our strengths and weaknesses, identified by the Audit Commission.

The first thing I would say is that they missed one off. None our achievements happen without people! Every single person has contributed to the strengths and indeed the weaknesses in some way. It's the old adage, you go to NASA and there's a guy sweeping up and they say "what's your job?" He says "I'm learning to put a man on the moon". He doesn't say "I'm sweeping the yard". That's what we have to engender in our own people. Everybody has contributed to these results, these strengths and weaknesses, and that's actually what the assessors missed off and I think they should have said that. The first thing that they should have said is we have a committed, motivated workforce that wants to do the right thing by the Service. They may not always agree, but they do want to do the right thing for the Service.

### **So, to the strengths.**

- *Clear leadership from senior managers and members.* I buy that as far as they understood what leaders were. My view is every single person's the leader here. There isn't just one anymore and I doubt if there ever was.
- *Longstanding commitment to prevention.* We've not just invested heavily in prevention and protection activities but we've got a lot of experience, we're veterans at it. You go elsewhere, you look, they're five years behind in some

areas. To be honest I want to keep it that way. Not that I want them to stay five years behind, but would like us to stay ahead.

- *Good people management.* Believe it or not, you may not feel like it in terms of motivation, change is bloody and agricultural. It's never easy for people to cope with. But what we do in terms of staff, the investments that we make in them, is recognised and that's important. And we have good plans in place. We're clear about what we're trying to do in the communities.

### **And the weaknesses.**

They don't call them weaknesses, they call them areas for development. Choose whatever term you want to, for me it's a weakness. But there is nothing wrong with weaknesses, and recognising a weakness and dealing with it is in itself a strength.

- *Internal communications with both staff and the community.* We need to take people with us. That appears in just about everybody's CPA result and so it should. This is not easy. Engaging people, telling people that their jobs are going to change is not easy. The world that they joined has changed, the expectations on them have changed, and just telling people that doesn't mean it's going to happen and there's lots to do there. But it's something we know we need to do. Engaging people, getting buy in. None of this is easy.
- *Performance management.* I explained before that it's not enough for us to monitor our performance – we have to use that intelligence to actually make improvements, and that is what we plan to do.

So that's what they told us. We then had to produce a plan to address that. And I think I've said to many of you before, "how many plans do we want?" There's only one thing worse than no plan on a fireground, and that's two plans. The same applies when you're running a business. We need to keep it simple for people.

## **How will we improve?**

So the themes that we're going to talk about in a second form part of our corporate plan. There is no separate plan. What are these themes?

### *Engagement of staff and the community*

The first one has to be about engagement of staff and community. Getting plans in place is what the first six months up to Christmas and a wee bit beyond was about - being clear about what we want to do, and putting some of the systems in place. Now the job is to engage the people in that direction, wholeheartedly engage them. And we're seeing that.

### *Improving management capacity*

This is about our ability to do more work but also our skills to do it. These are times of change, and the one thing the assessors did spot was many managers rising to the occasion, but others understandably finding it difficult. It's a different world now. I'm not saying they can't do it, it's that they're going to have to learn, they're going to have to be supported, and they're going to have to be developed to get the best out of them. And we shouldn't be surprised by this in view of the changes we are seeing.

### *Raising our game*

Some of the work we need to do to "raise our game" is systems-based, helping us to better understand what's going on in the organisation. This includes understanding what impact our decisions make, how well certain projects are going to deliver, and how much somebody's work contributes to the corporate aims. So there's some systems work in there. But there's also a cultural challenge. There's a cultural challenge to ensure people believe they are actually part of improving the service. One of the things that we aim for, as you know, is the 8/80 target across the Service. We want 80% of all emergency calls answered, as a Service average, in 8 minutes or less.

If you're at a retained station, there's no way on God's earth you're going to get close to that target. So we need to develop an indicator which makes retained staff feel they can make a contribution, by shaving off some seconds of what might be a very long

attendance time. But they are contributing to 8/80, even if they are not aware of it right now, so metaphorically they're contributing to putting that man on the moon.

### *Risk management*

We've started the process of risk management but we've got a long way to go. I'm not talking about risk on fire stations, or on operational grounds - I'm talking about corporate risk, and understanding how we manage that much better. This is a very new game for us, and we're having to get help to do it.

### *Living our values*

Being true to our values is really important. This means living and believing in what we say, being openness in our service to the public, and our commitment to each other. That doesn't mean saying: "if people don't like it, we won't do it". It's about supporting people and it's about recognising their value. It's not about saying we want to keep this very tidy and simple and we don't want to upset anybody, that's not what this is about. It's about living values, being open, honest, brutally honest with people on occasions, and believing in diversity, not just giving lip service to it. And that's not just at the most senior level, that's every single one of us. It's also about how we treat anybody that walks through the door that we don't know.

### **What happens now?**

So what happens now? Well, we didn't want to wait. We're one of only two fire and rescue services that have said we'll have our improvement planning meeting with ODPM, with our assessors, with HMI and with our local business change manager, before the national results come out. We want to get on with this. So we've had that round table meeting with them already, and agreed our improvement plan. We've said to them if you think this is a separate plan you're wrong - this is a signpost back into our IRMP. All of this that we've just talked about feeds back into the IRMP. I don't want a second plan and they've agreed that and they're happy with it. In fact they're more than content with it. As I say, we only have one plan, the improvement plan is just a signpost.

## **What role can you play in CPA, now and in future?**

You have a role here as well - in two ways:

*Feeding back to your staff about CPA.* It's very easy to say to people: "well, it's a bit complicated, so don't worry about it." But I ask you to make it meaningful to your people. They've made a contribution, so don't deny them that moment of quiet satisfaction that they've contributed to this. It's very easy in workplaces that are a long way from here to think CPA is something to do with somebody else. It isn't, it's every single one of us doing this. Don't deny them the opportunity to bask in some of that glory and contribute.

The other thing that I'd ask you to take away, apart from just this information, is a sense of your responsibility in terms of further improvement. But bear in mind the hill will get steeper; if you get a "good" you're in base camp Two, but if you want to get to the summit, as we do, it's harder between base camp Two and the summit than it is from 1 to 2.

It gets steeper, and the only way we will achieve an "excellent" - I don't know about you, but "good's" good but "good's" not good enough - is to actually commit to this, to actually believe in what we're doing and believe in ourselves that we all have a contribution to make. However minor you might think your contribution is, the quality of service that you offer to people within the Service and outside is vitally important.

OK, I'm going to finish there, but what I am keen to do is, now I've talked for some time, is take some questions.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Is the CPA weighted in particular areas?**

No, it shouldn't have an effect. Part of the moderation process was to ensure that different sizes of organisation, with different budgets, weren't disadvantaged by the process. Smaller authorities have tended to not do so well, however, so you may read something into that, but this is not an official position.

### **How do you think the regionalisation agenda will impact our ability to achieve value for money and confidence in local people?**

I think personally regionalisation of fire brigades is a long way off, if not dead now, after what happened in the North East. In terms of Regional Control Centres (RCCs), I and the Authority echo some of your concerns. Where is the full business case, and the delivery side of it? The moment is see it all and am not satisfied, I will stand up as well.

Remember though that you can deliver local services with local control, and we are doing that now.

The battle for RCCs is about to get a lot tougher with the recent bombings in London, and there will be increased pressure now re resilience. Whether it is right or wrong, 7/7 will make this issue much more about resilience and ratchet up this project.

### **When is the next assessment?**

Good question, but the timeframe is yet to be determined. My feeling is that next year we will have a light touch but along the same lines. It is unlikely to be the full job next year, but the auditors will want to see our improvement plan and how we are doing. Our external auditors may take on a reviewing role.

This is very much in public domain now, not like the old HMI report. We are in a race and in a race with others. Whether we like it or not, we have to move forward. Molly Bickerstaffe said if you got "good" and you stay still, you will be "fair" next time round. This is a very telling statement!

If in doubt, if we stay still we go backwards, and I don't want to see that and I don't think you do.

**Can every fire service theoretically be “excellent”, or must there be winner and losers?**

I'd say they would probably change the rules of the game if that turned out to be the case.

Out of the internal communications survey there was one massive thing that came out - people were very proud to work for HFRS, and that is not common across the whole of the public sector. This means we can be a victim of our own success - because we are proud we set ourselves high standards.

We all benefit with a good CPA score, because we feel better, but who really benefits? The people receiving HFSCs, those on the end of our responses to fires, ultimately the public, and our job is to make Hampshire safer and that itself is worth being on the treadmill for.

**What obligations do we have to help out the IOW?**

I think we have an obligation to share good practice with everyone – in areas where we are strong we have a national obligation. An improvement team will go in to the “poors” and “weaks”. We have been there before with the IOW, and my view is we wait to be asked. We don't want to be seen to be rubbing people's noses in it.

That said, if something is going to happen, it will be in the next two months.

**Are there any obvious areas where the “excellents” have outperformed us?**

Kent have outperformed us in performance management. David Howells is off to see them to see what they are doing. They have a long history of performance management embedded in their organisation.

Merseyside are very different. They think the unthinkable and that's where they are strong. Charlie House has been up there already. And Mark Rayner. They will get a lot of attention now. But there are no quick fixes though, or boxes to plug in. Base camp to summit is not an easy win - it will be a good hard slog!

**It is reassuring to hear you say that you are not afraid of talking about the areas where we need to improve. But how are we going to address that issue of weak staff communications?**

Not by one thing, but a whole process of things, some of which have already started. The recent arrival of a dedicated marketing and communications team shows we see it as a professional business. We were adequate at it before, but it is a very different world now, and we will engage staff through a number of different initiatives, including opening up managers' seminars to wider audience, launching a new staff suggestion scheme, a newsletter, looking at the role of managers in communication, and a whole host of other things.