



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Final Report

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1. Introduction, context and purpose

Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Associations (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) in February 2013.

The report provides detailed information on the key focus areas of

- Culture and the impact on Staffordshire's communities
- Organisational Capacity
- Leadership & Governance
- Response
- Training & Development
- Protection

It also provides overview information on the other areas of:

- Call Management & Incident Support
- Community Risk Management
- Prevention
- Health & Safety

Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement.

The Fire Peer Challenge of Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) took place from the 26 February until the 01 March 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, observations and focus groups.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, officers, staff, front line firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

During the time in SFRS the peer team were well looked after and everyone the team met were fully engaged with the process and open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including the SFRS Operational Assessment (OpA) and key supporting documentation.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and was delivered to a large audience consisting of officers from across the whole SFRS and a wide range of Members. The peer team noted the open invitation to the feedback session and welcomed this approach.

Context and purpose

The OpA self-assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment the sector led peer challenge process is part of the LGA's approach to sector led improvement which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Fire Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector. It is not a form of sector led inspection and is a mechanism to provide fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust

SFRS is a very high performing Service with a very positive and unique culture which is open, honest and challenging. This culture drives improvement and change across the organisation and ensures that everyone is engaged. There is a strong pride from the people who work for SFRS and communication channels are effective resulting in a consistency of understanding of the challenges ahead right across the organisation.

This places SFRS in a good position going forward and will enable it to make some tough decisions.

2. The Peer Challenge Team

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process. They help services with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The peer challenge team for SFRS was:

- Lee Howell, Chief Fire Officer Devon & Somerset FRS
- Cllr Kay Hammond, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Surrey County Council
- Gary Cawley, Director, Business Development, Cleveland FRS
- Keith Brooks, Head of Community Fire Protection, Cheshire FRS
- Helen Murray, Head of Programmes, LGA
- Gary Hughes, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3. Culture and the impact on Staffordshire's communities

SFRS is a very high performing service and is well placed to face the challenges ahead. The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Very positive and unique organisational culture, driving improvement and change – trusting, open and honest engagement throughout**

The unique organisational culture of SFRS cannot be underplayed. The senior leadership have invested heavily and worked hard to engage staff across the organisation to develop a truly open and honest culture which, supported by effective processes and underpinned by the SFRS Cultural Framework and Leadership Message, is driving significant change and improvement.

The culture is built on trust and respect, not hierarchy or status, and throughout the time at SFRS the peer team were impressed by the openness and honesty of staff throughout the organisation and their drive to improve services for their communities.

The peer team recognise this as notable practice.

- **Strong approach to partnership working – Very well regarded and innovative partner**

This culture also extends to partners with senior personnel from a range of organisations providing the following feedback:

“If every partner was as good to work with as the fire service we would make even more progress”

“There is a strong willingness to collaborate and actively engage as partners”

“The people of Staffordshire are fortunate to have such an engaged and involved fire service”

It was clear to the peer team that SFRS is a very well regarded and innovative partner and an example of this, which the team believe is notable practice, is SFRS involvement in the Locality Working Project; an innovative multi-agency initiative, focused around the Northern Locality of the city of Stoke on Trent. It combines the efforts of the Local Authority, Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Health and Voluntary sector organisations to examine ways in which agencies can better assist individuals, families and communities to “live their lives well”. This is based on a ‘systems thinking’ (citizen focused) approach rather than from a traditional organisational (silo) perspective.

There is recognition that many problems (complex or otherwise) are not being successfully addressed by single-agency interventions. Many individuals, families and communities continue to experience enduring, multi-faceted problems. This is resulting in a high demand for services with an associated high cost for all of the agencies concerned.

The Locality Working Project is seeking to find an approach that is able to meet citizen demand at the point of presentation, preventing needs from

escalating into a more complex set of circumstances / crisis, thus reducing the amount of unresolved and repeat demands coming into services.

The project is operating on an unprecedented scale in terms of the number of agencies working together under one roof and the implications of the outcomes, not just for citizens but for all agencies, are far reaching. The significance of this project has not gone unnoticed on a national level, with a visit from Department of Communities and Local Government already completed and a request received for additional information that they can use to share with colleagues in Whitehall. It is anticipated that successful roll out of the model once developed, tested and agreed could ultimately and positively transform commissioning and procurement arrangements, budget setting and service provision for all agencies across the city.

- **‘Improving Together’ is valued and delivering change**
- **Infectious and energetic commitment to change and transformation – Business Transformation Team Secondments, Symposium, Open door policy**

The ‘Improving Together’ Vanguard approach to systems thinking initiative is highly regarded and valued by staff across the organisation and this is creating a highly infectious and energetic commitment to change and transformation.

This commitment is harnessed and developed through a range of highly valued opportunities such as the secondments into the Business Transformation Team, with the recent round of secondments having a significant number of applicants far out reaching the number of opportunities available.

The Symposiums which again are highly regarded and valued throughout the Service and the true ‘open door policy’ of senior leaders provides opportunities for staff from across the organisation to engage in and significantly contribute to change initiatives and service improvement.

- **Achieved Excellent in FRS Equality Framework**

SFRS has recently achieved Excellence under the Fire & Rescue Service Equality Framework. This award clearly demonstrates their commitment to their staff, to protect, support and respond to the needs of their communities and to subsequently make Staffordshire the safest place to be.

Areas to explore

SFRS is well placed for the future challenges ahead. It has invested heavily in developing a 'can do' culture that is open to challenge and debate.

The organisation has implemented a truly innovative 'systems thinking' approach to change and business transformation that is delivering results.

The peer team worked hard to understand this approach and asks SFRS to consider the following challenges:

- **Controls – How you tell the story of steering the direction and moderating change and transformation?**
- **Challenge - Constantly be open and up for challenge and continue to avoid 'group think'**
- **Prioritisation - How can you continue to balance enthusiasm, and maximise resources but say no to staff and partners?**
- **Outcomes – How do you know you are achieving and evidencing your vision for your communities?**

Whilst inappropriate targets drive inappropriate behaviours, the right measures will assist focus increasingly scarce resources. Whilst there is confidence at all levels that different approaches will achieve improved outcomes, there will be benefit in ensuring that good practice is captured, evaluated and shared within the context of allowing staff freedom to innovate i.e. 'double loop learning' to coin the systems thinking phrase.

The service has developed a positive culture, which is to be commended; however, there is a need to ensure that they listen to those who do not always share this positive approach. Diversity in thinking is to be valued and SFRS should always be open and up for challenge and continue to avoid 'group think'.

The positive 'can do' attitude of SFRS and the fire sector in general is valued amongst partners, however, with diminishing resources and a need to prioritise actions the Service needs to avoid stepping in to fill gaps left by partners. It should be clear about the partnerships it should be involved in and ensure it say's 'no' to those partnerships that do not deliver improved outcomes.

4. Organisational Capacity

The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **A clear approach to strategic financial management – Member oversight and Dragons Den notable practice**

Prior to the announcement of the comprehensive spending review in 2010 SFRS recognised that the service would be facing the same financial challenge faced by all public sectors organisations. They took the decision to embark on a transformation journey commencing immediately rather than wait for the cuts. SFRS established a set of financial planning assumptions that provided a clear vision of where the service would need to be by the end of the financial year 2014-2015.

This clear demonstration of leadership and vision set SFRS on their ambitious journey of business transformation employing the Vanguard approach to systems thinking. This has, and continues to enable, SFRS to approach their need for change in a holistic manner. The planning assumption of an 18% reduction in funding has been substantiated and SFRS are currently in the position where they have identified 60% of the £4m reduction. They have already secured £2.3m of their savings as part of the current financial year.

This strong approach to financial management is also understood by Members who have a good oversight of the financial challenges ahead and the work underway to address them.

The peer team also identified the newly developed 'Dragons Den' approach to financial challenge and debate as Notable Practice

- **Commitment to business transformation with dedicated resources and systems in place with Vanguard support**

There is a strong commitment to change and transformation and investment in the systems thinking training for staff using the Vanguard methodology has been rolled out across the Service.

The Business Transformation Team lead this work but there is a holistic approach across the organisation and with partners.

The Service also benefits from a strong performance management culture embedded within the Leadership Message, which clearly articulates the values of SFRS. The foundation of the strong performance culture has been enhanced through the well communicated systems thinking methodology and a more detailed understanding of what drives performance.

- **Effective processes and structures in place to drive change – Symposium, Service Management Board, Service Delivery Board, Task & Finish Groups**

The strong organisational culture and approach to transformation is supported by effective processes and governance structures in place that drive change. The governance arrangements of a Service Management Board, which is underpinned by a Service Delivery Board which is subsequently supported by

Directorate meetings all of which have bespoke terms of reference, works effectively.

There are further task and finish groups to take forward specific pieces of work which ensure there is a golden thread between strategic development and tactical implementation.

The staff symposiums, where the wider efficiencies and austerity agenda is shared with anyone willing and able to attend, enables active engagement across the Service and provides opportunities to contribute to change and shape SFRS

- **Business continuity planning in place and tested**

The Service has plans in place to ensure that critical operations can continue in the event of Industrial Action, Staff Absence and Fuel Shortages. The plans use a simple but effective degradation system, whereby appliances are removed from service in low risk areas as staff are re-deployed into the more critical life risk areas. Although there was some evidence presented for the testing of plans the Service could consider testing its 'planning assumptions' e.g. that some staff would make themselves available for duty and that non-operational staff would volunteer for auxillary fire-fighting duties. There is a requirement within these individuals role that they firstly maintain their competence and secondly are used for high demand situations. SFRS also have the pool of contingency personnel who are trained and available and this is tested through the various silver cell exercises and BCP testing exercises that are run through the course of the year.

- **Excellent partnerships – Prevention, Community interest Company**

SFRS have embraced the culture of partnerships and strongly believes in the principle that prevention is better and more cost effective than cure. The Community Fire Stations throughout Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire really are a part of the local community and are adding value to both the Service and its users.

Olive Branch was developed following the death of Olive Simcock in a preventable accidental dwelling fire in 2006. Through partnerships, SFRS provide training for carers and other persons who have regular face-to-face contact with older and other vulnerable people, to provide them with skills to identify people who may be at risk from fire and refer them to the Service so that a Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC) can be conducted

The Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Safer Communities Community Interest Company (CIC) is an independent partnership between the public, private and voluntary sector with the primary purpose of providing opportunities to improve the health, safety, social and economic wellbeing of the communities of Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire

- **Good examples of shared services – Occupational Health with police and West Midlands FRS Fire Control**

There are some good examples of progressing shared services, such as the provision of occupational health services by Staffordshire Police and the work on a phased approach to the establishedment of a Shared Fire Control Facility with the West Midlands Fire Service.

Areas to explore

SFRS needs to ensure it maximises capacity going forward and ensure that partnerships and shared approaches work for the benefit of the organisation and the communities it serves. With a unique culture and an ambitious approach to change and transformation the Service needs to consider the following:

- **Pace - How can you stop governance issues/partners slowing things down and work for all organisations?**

Examples were provided to the team where there was strategic commitment and drive at the senior levels of SFRS and partner organisations but things slowed down significantly when they went further down the organisation.

This was more prevalent in partner organisations but SFRS needs to ensure that the governance and culture of its partners does not slow it down. It needs to make sure that governance arrangements work for them and that they get the best deal for their communities from any partnership in place.

- **Partnerships – Ensure there is a robust business approach to the sharing services**

This is also true for the sharing of services. SFRS needs to ensure that robust business and contractual approaches are in place, with financial penalty clauses that can be administered if a partner does not deliver.

- **People - Skills audit – How do you know you have the right people in the right place making the most of their talents?**

Throughout the peer challenge the team met a range of enthusiastic and highly skilled individuals who were up for the challenges ahead. The Service values input at all levels of the organisation. But SFRS needs to know it has the right people in the right place. Undertaking a skills audit and assessment would be highly beneficial and will help identify the talent across SFRS.

- **Performance – How will you know you are achieving your vision? Evaluation, Benchmarking, Systems, Corporate Safety Plan and Performance Management**

SFRS understands its demographic make-up and its communities and that it has some different challenges than other fire and rescue services. It has set a clear vision to address these challenges and to make Staffordshire the safest place to be. There is a need to fully understand its journey of improvement and SFRS needs to ensure it is achieving its vision through effective evaluation and benchmarking.

There is a need to ensure that SFRS's corporate safety plan (an amalgamation of SFRS Strategic Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan) fully drives this performance and that data is fully aligned and measured.

- **Prioritisation – Would a framework help avoid duplication?**

As the Service moves forward there is a need to be clear about its priorities and what it can and can't do. The governance structures enable it to focus on key priorities, however, the introduction of a priority framework would further

help this and would also enable it to clearly articulate, to its partners, SFRS priorities going forward.

5. Leadership and Governance

- **Very strong senior managerial leadership – committed to cultural change - Excellent organisational structural model**

There is very strong and very well regarded senior managerial leadership from the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

The commitment to cultural change comes right from the top of the organisation and is supported by an excellent organisational governance model.

- **Leadership message is owned and understood by everyone**

The Leadership Message is owned and understood by everyone and it was clear that this had been well communicated across the organisation as it was visible as hardcopies and on computers.

This communication has worked, as there was palpable pride across the service to make Staffordshire the safest place to be.

- **Excellent working with Representative Bodies**

The working arrangements with the Services Representatives Bodies were of an exemplar nature with each body having a seat at the Service Management Board and open access to the CFO and DCFO.

This mature relationship has enabled the service to make some difficult decisions and put them in a good place going forward.

- **Visible, engaged and committed Members who are great community advocates - Localities Lead Members**

The peer team met many elected Members – Chairman, Vice Chairman, Members of the Audit Committee, Scrutiny and Performance, and other FRA members. Open and frank discussions take place to discuss what works well, as well as posing challenges. Their commitment shone through, fully supporting the service. Members conduct regular visits to stations and are very committed to fronting up campaigns and events. They are always willing to help.

- **Officers and Members work well together with a common aim**
- **Member Development Days provide good opportunities for debate**

Members have full confidence in the Senior Management Team with strong work underway outside the Committee structure. There is a trusting, yet open to challenge culture with Member Development days providing good opportunities for debate.

There were lots of opportunities for Members to see the work of the fire service at first hand for example taking part in exercises, Fire Service College training and full involvement in post-fire debriefs to determine future action.

- **In depth Scrutiny, analysis and challenge across all boards and panels**

Scrutiny is now embedded across Committee Boards and Panels. There is a good provision of data and information to enable Members to make informed decisions and they are responsive to emerging issues with effective use of task and finish groups if issues are identified.

There was also evidence of asking for a rethink and considering different options and drawing on the strengths of individual Members talents to use the best in the Authority structures.

Areas to explore

- **Culture – Can you further develop with Members the strong organisational culture through further training opportunities? One Team approach**

SFRS has transformed itself over the past 4 years. The Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) has understood and supported the top team, but they have not been engaged alongside the officer team to the same degree. The FRA could be strengthened if it aligns itself to the leadership values and structures alongside the corporate aims and priorities.

The FRA is clearly very good at scrutiny and it would make sense to build on those strengths and develop a more interactive and collaborative relationship with officers, moving away from sharing information to co-producing solutions. A Member Away-Day with the top team to discuss difficult issues in-depth, away from the formal Committee structures may be a good start.

- **Structure – Is the time right to review Committee structures and further engage Members to align with corporate priorities**

There is a good opportunity with the elections in May and the development of the next Corporate Safety Plan to review whether the current Committee structure is still fit for purpose. The structures were redesigned in 2011 but they appear busy, and in some cases there appears to be duplication. Although there is regular Member insight throughout the process, the development of the Corporate Safety Plan would benefit from clear, defined Member input at the start of the process to provide an initial steer.

- **Scrutiny and Performance – How can you avoid duplication, look externally, focus on corporate priorities, Member Intranet**

SFRS may wish to look externally for an additional level of scrutiny and providing Members with an Intranet with performance data will help improve performance management across the Service. Although scrutiny is strong, SFRS may wish to consider streamlining of committees and clearer terms of reference to ensure no overlap. The Lead Localities Panel runs through all of the Member Boards and Panels so should be given sufficient profile to highlight that role rather than at the bottom of the hierarchy.

- **Development – Look to external elected Members/champion roles to help you think ahead and tackle cross cutting issues**

Members may wish to consider the introduction of Member champion roles as there is currently a limited use e.g. older persons champion. These themed champions can really drive activity across an organisation. Members considered the possibility of a younger persons champion.

- **Partnerships – Maximise the opportunities with other public sector reforms e.g. PCC and H&W Boards**

The FRA will wish to take the opportunity to maximise benefits from wider public sector reforms e.g. Police and Crime Commissioners, Health and Wellbeing Boards. Members thought it would be a good idea to invite the Staffordshire PCC to a full Authority meeting and consider joining up budgets to deliver shared outcomes for the community. An underdeveloped area for SFRS is understanding how community budgets work and deliver reward and benefits.

6. Response

The peer challenge team identified a range of positive and innovative examples of practice and identified the following:

Strengths

- **There is a clearly defined strategy for response in place**

There is a clearly defined strategy for response in place, the strategy considers all key mandates and specifies how the constantly changing risk profile within the Authority geographical areas will shape the service in the future. Reference is made regarding the requirement for more flexibility and the need for fit for purpose resources to be configured to respond to this constantly changing risk profile

- **The Strategic Cover Review has a clearly defined purpose of ensuring the right appliances are at the right place with the right equipment at the right time**

The Strategic Cover Review (SCR) has a clearly defined purpose of ensuring the right appliances are at right place with the right equipment at the right time. The introduction of reporting performance using statistical process control is being used to analyse information more intelligently to ensure resources are best targeted at keeping the community safe. The SCR has identified new ways of working to deliver the required future efficiency savings but has a number of red lines including

- No compromise to community safety
- No compromise to firefighter safety
- Protect as many livelihoods as reasonably possible

- **The Service Delivery Group provides the leadership to coordinate activities within their local area**

Recent reviews have led to re-structuring of the Service in a wide range of areas to create a Service Delivery Group which has the responsibility at a senior management level to coordinate the range of services for their district to ensure a focus on the customer and to enhance their safety

- **Operational Assurance (Active Incident Monitoring) is capturing internal and external learning to inform improvement action plans**

The leadership of SFRS demonstrate a strong commitment to Operational Assurance capturing internal and external learning to inform improvement action plans. Active Incident Monitoring processes directly influence safe and effective operations recording safety critical activities in active operational settings

Tactical Advisors attend operational incidents to support, monitor, review and debrief operational activities. Clear evidence exists that feedback is used to evaluate and improve performance of incident command competence and ensuring that monitoring systems lead to improvements for individuals and the organisation. The outcomes and evolution of operational service policies are also reported through the Fire Authority via the Service Development Panel.

Areas to explore

- **Use the PORIS guidance to improve the provision of operational risk information to front line crews – Management System and Mobile Data Terminals**

Responding operational crews are provided with information on premises and occupancy risks with front line vehicles having access to data via mobile data terminals (MDT's). PORIS guidance should be used to compare existing arrangements and identify ways to improve the management system and existing mobile data terminals that provide operational risk information to front line crews.

- **Ensure you update the impact of prevention and protection activities on the residual community risk profile**

The service undertake an analysis of risk and produce risk profiles for geographical areas, these areas could be better defined using ward or super output levels boundaries, to ensure that teams target resources effectively to deliver improved outcomes for the most vulnerable in their community. The impact of prevention and protection activities should also be evaluated so that the residual community risk profile (high, medium or low) is identified, this will enable emergency response resources to be effectively configured to meet the response category standards for the 1st and 2nd appliance as defined within the response strategy

- **Consider widening the scope of the Strategic Cover Review to include crew size**

The SCR was undertaken in 2012 and this formed part of the Corporate Safety Plan to ensure resources are adequate, in the right place and that any benefits are sustainable in the longer term. The Authority may want to consider widening the scope of the review to carry out a task analysis and associated risk assessment to establish the optimum crew size required to deal safely with all incident types, this will also require a review of the existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for all incidents to ensure the appropriate level of resources are despatched to comply with the SOP i.e. safe system of work.

7. Training and Development

The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Clearly defined strategy for training and development**

The Training and Development Strategy provides a good framework that helps the Service to make decisions about training and development for their workforce, the strategy provides the focus and a number of priorities have been identified including the key requirement needed to develop and maintain the competence of staff.

- **Committed to make improvements to support delivery of the strategy**

In-house training facilities have been recently refurbished, to create a modern learning environment for a range of training and development activities, this investment demonstrates a clear commitment from the Authority to provide the right resources for training to ensure all essential training needs are met within a reasonable timescale.

- **Comprehensive training programme designed to maintain the skills and knowledge of all emergency response staff**

Robust arrangements are in place for the assessment for core skills and suitable training modules are in place to enable the workforce to maintain competence using a blend of development activities; this approach has been successful and is now being used as a template to create a training programme for supervisory management

- **Organisational learning from incidents used to improve operational preparedness and training**

Learning from operational incidents is used effectively to develop new training and development activities, the Stone Boat Yard investigation was a good example of how training for operational staff was improved as a result of a critical analysis of this incident and identification of key learning as part of the operational assurance process.

- **Changes to crewing system has improved availability of staff to attend training programmes**

The delivery of training is designed to meet the needs of staff on different duty systems and recent changes to crewing system has improved availability of staff to attend training programmes. Whole-time and Retained Duty System staff also training together which provides a good platform to strengthen the relationships between these groups of staff and provides flexibility for individuals to attend development training modules at a time to suit them

- **The training department is empowered, passionate and focused**

The staff working in the training department have been empowered to make improvements to the way training is designed and delivered, all staff demonstrated their passion to ensure training is fit for purpose so that the necessary capability is developed to deliver all the corporate objectives.

The peer team also noted that the mixing of Retained Duty System (RDS) and whole time staff on training courses was considered a useful way of sharing experience and learning and also of promoting the 'Firefighter is a Firefighter' message advocated by the Service. This is considered of Notable Practice.

Areas to explore

- **Consider the efficiency case for maintaining operational competence for staff working in prevention and protection roles**

All grey book staff irrespective of role are expected to undertake maintenance of competence training in line with their role and service policy. This provides SFRS a level of resilience, as these individuals are able to provide operational cover when required. This also assists the service in achieving best practice in relation to employment issues. Differing roles have varying requirements however it may be possible that achieving the outcome of the maintenance of operational competence could be achieved in a different way. It may be worth considering whether there is an alternative for these staff in terms of the frequency of their training in comparison to their operational colleagues.

- **Ensure your Training Needs Analysis process is used to inform the corporate training programme**

There is an annual appraisal policy in place linked through to continual professional development, however appraisals could be more robustly used to review and audit development outcomes and inform the training needs analysis process, The training needs identified by the appraisal process should be collated by the training department so that the annual corporate training programme is designed to meet both organisational and individual needs

- **Improve the evaluation of training, so that outcomes can be clearly demonstrated**

Consider making improvements to the evaluation of training, so that outcomes can be clearly demonstrated, training evaluation should be a continual and systematic process of assessing the value of a training course, activity or event. Results of the evaluation must be used to guide decision-making around various components of the training (e.g. design, delivery, results)

- **Consider further training opportunities for volunteers**

Consider further training opportunities for volunteers and elected Members, volunteers expressed a desire to attend more training to develop their knowledge and skills so that they can take a more prominent role in prevention work, Elected members already take an active role in their locality and support the service delivery team effectively however further training to support the more strategic elements of their role could bring a better balance

8. Protection

Strengths

- **Localised area based delivery units enables a strong area focus**

The Service aligns its prevention and protection officers to each of the three Service Delivery Group areas. This approach ensures Protection officers can develop a good knowledge of the local building types and their occupancies; furthermore, it also ensures that businesses can build good working relationships with local officers, building trust and reducing the burden of regulation. Officers use a mix of mobile technology and paper based systems to capture audit data which is then stored in CFRMIS to assist in prioritising local audits according to risk.

- **The business safety support ethos is well established and at the forefront of business engagement**

Recognising that the needs of businesses have changed since the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the Service has responded by providing a variety of tailored support, free of charge, to the business community. This aligns well to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) objective of reducing the burden of 'red-tape' and ensures businesses have the support they need when they want it.

This change places the Service in the forefront of CFOA's own approach to ensuring Businesses receive good quality support and advice, balanced with, when necessary, appropriate enforcement. The Service has also demonstrated its willingness to work in partnership with business on a national scale and has put itself forward for both the FireSafe and Primary Authority schemes.

- **Post fire follow up and unwanted fire signals reduction is embedded**

Protection officers are fully involved in the post incident follow up of fires in commercial premises and in leading the reduction of UwFS in premises with high numbers of false alarms. Both instances allow the Service to help companies stay safely in business, whilst minimising the impacts on both the Service and the economy.

- **Fire engineering officer is adding value and leadership to the Protection team**

The establishment in 2012 of a Fire Engineer post within the CRR team is already paying dividends. The post not only ensures the Service is equipped to process the more technically challenging building regulation applications, the Engineers skills and knowledge were evidently being drawn upon by the wider Protection team. Officers of the Service also recognised the additional value the post presents for the longer term; the organisation's aspirations for enhancing this role will no doubt only serve to increase the already realised benefits.

Areas to explore

- **Develop a central support and management framework for protection staff**

The protect strategy could be developed to clarify how the non-domestic premises risk is to be addressed; more focus as to what needs to be delivered where, why and how could add value by increasing the accuracy and impact of protection activities. A strategy that outlines organisational expectations for each area, (or Service wide), would help managers and officers know whether the structure has the capacity to deliver and assess its effectiveness.

A challenge facing protection staff at HQ was that the SDG managers, who direct the protection officers, are senior to the CRR manager and although the culture enabled them to question and steer risk-targeting activities, this was seen as a local, not HQ role. Where a corporate strategic theme was used e.g. after Rosepark, it was unclear as to whether it was addressing an actual local need or was simply a response to a significant incident. SFRS might wish to consider whether engaging a centralised protection lead to plan, target and direct the protection strategy, would provide increased confidence that resources were focused on the greatest risks.

The SFRS structural model devolves the planning and targeting of risk to SDG level. This has the advantage of local knowledge addressing local needs, but without central oversight of the protect strategy it is hard for Directors to know whether local offices are targeting risk effectively. Central oversight would help managers evaluate and compare local initiatives. However managers were confident that what needed to be done was being done, this was based on their knowledge of colleagues rather than performance evidence.

- **Consider how Protection can better contribute to fire fighter safety. Transfer knowledge to fire fighters**

The PORIS process offers SFRS an opportunity to exploit its investment in its Protection officers by using them to brief and train operational crews about the built environment. For instance, crews at Rising Brook recognised that the Argos distribution centre was their most significant risk and would welcome the added value protection staff could offer in explaining the fire protection measures and building design features installed there to assist them when firefighting

- **Further use of a more risk based programme and robust performance data of protection activities and audits will help reduce risk**

Protection officers expressed some reservations about their ability to enforce at higher levels, suggesting confidence in this area is low. This could lead to a risk where premises are avoided if officers feel they will find problems they aren't equipped to address.

This is a subject that SFRS should explore further and where the safety messages associated with effective enforcement could be maximised with some investment in training and legal support.

- **Consider whether there is additional capacity required to increase the use of advanced levels of enforcement to reduce risk and send a clear message to non-compliant premises**

The Service is involved in the current Primary Authority Scheme (PAS) pilot project and has two very reputable partners in place. There is a realisation that this will impact on protection team resources, directing officers away from local and higher risk activities. This is a developing area for all Services and SFRS are well-placed to integrate PAS into their protection strategy very effectively.

SFRS's involvement in the FireSafe scheme was noted, although the risks associated with that scheme have yet to be understood - SFRS should seek their own legal advice on the risks associated with it.

The free business support service recognises the reality of business austerity and is adding value to the Services protection team.

One area that appears less supported is heritage premises. It was noted that these are a significant asset within Staffordshire's 'Story of Place' and are an important local economic resource. SFRS may wish to consider ways in which its Protection officers can increase the resilience of Staffordshire's heritage building portfolio.

SFRS have fire investigation trained officers however do not have a dedicated team. Fire Investigations at Level 3 investigations are outsourced to and supported by the WMFRS due to the reduction in incidents and the levels of experience of these officers. SFRS could consider operating a smaller but more experienced team, as a potentially more efficient alternative, especially with regard to outsourcing and training costs.

Other areas

9. Call Management & Incident Support

Managers had recognised the extent of the task in hand to both install a new mobilising system and move locations. A thorough training programme and plan was in place for a phased approach to the transfer of SFRS's mobilising to the Shared Control Facility within the WMFRS..

Some staff questioned whether the transfer was really a merger or in fact a takeover. The Service should consider how it can integrate and maintain the best of its current arrangements as the Shared Fire Control Facility progresses.

The scale of the task in hand was understood; staff naturally expressed some reservations as to whether the time available is really sufficient but felt that they had the skills and motivation to deliver.

The Service should plan to ensure the risk of delay is minimised thereby avoiding adverse impacts on its financial plan if this efficiency isn't realised on schedule

10. Community Risk Management

A good approach to community risk management with a dedicated corporate team providing a leading role at the centre to coordinate community and national intelligence which is then used to produce a detailed socio-demographic picture to plan and deliver prevention and protection services effectively.

The risk management process is based on the principles of FSEC (Fire Service Emergency Cover) to gather, access, share and analyse risk information in order to determine trends and allocate resources intelligently to meet demand.

Comprehensive member involvement provides a crucial element in supporting and developing local plans, member engagement with parish councils and the community is used to good effect, by gathering information and engaging with communities at a local level. Staff and members share information well to create a broad and deep understanding of the communities they are part of and the effective use of community fire stations is enhancing the knowledge of local groups and vulnerable community members.

Culture of learning through the operational assurance process is strong; the Service benefits from a strong performance management culture embedded within the Leadership Message through always wanting to get better and reflected within all strategies and delivery plans

The foundation of a strong performance culture is being used to develop systems thinking methodology and a more detailed understanding of what drives performance, consider that there is adequate preparation time to train people in this new approach to ensure the desired behaviours are achieved

Partnership working has been devolved to SDG's and any major partnership working/projects have their own governance arrangements. The shared fire control project (SFCP) with West Midlands F&RS is expected to provide an increased efficiency and effectiveness across a range of areas, however

adequate resources must be invested to meet the target date for the Shared Fire Control Facility and ensure the full solution meets the requirements of the service

Consider adopting a more robust business approach to the mobilising working project, this could create more of a client and commissioning relationship rather than partnership

11. Prevention

Community rooms receive a very high usage with trusted partners gaining maximum benefit from this facility. Clear strategies for targeting resources at community risks e.g. Dementia, older persons, mental health etc are in place and full use of On-call (Retained) staff is being made to enhance the delivery of community safety activities.

Community stations really are a part of the local community and are adding value to both the Service and its users.

The secondment of officers to the City and County Councils has enhanced political and partner engagement; SFRS could now reconsider whether these resources are still providing the anticipated returns as other partners are reducing their own engagement agendas.

The contraction of budgets has meant that gaps are inevitably opening up as partner organisations contract their own services. SFRS may wish to develop a strategy to define its understanding of its' own position and exit strategies, to help clarify which gaps are in its' own interest to fill, thereby avoiding spreading itself too thinly.

SFRS operates an '0800' HFRC offer to all residents; with SFRS's experience and knowledge of risk targeting, consideration might now be given as to whether the costs associated with this 'open to all' offer remains sustainable for the future?

With the development and piloting of community budgets in many local government organisations, SFRS could consider whether it could benefit from such an option and join with partners in reducing community risk

12. Health & Safety

There was good evidence that the Service is open to learning and willing to challenge itself through inter-Service H&S reviews with its regional peers. Clear links to the training department and the Ops Assurance team ensured lessons learnt are understood and shared across each of these areas.

Staff feel that the organisation has a balanced approach to its' health and safety culture. H&S was not put forward as paramount above everything else, its importance was simply understood because it was now engrained into the organisations DNA.

An insightful connection, recognising that the effects of austerity measures will impact on the well-being and health and safety of staff, had been made. SFRS may wish to exploit this foresight at this early stage in order to minimise stress and absenteeism, through the implementation of the Health and Well-being Strategy

As organisational change (both internal and external) impacts on staff and additional stressors begin to affect everyone to some degree, consideration could be given to introducing random drug and alcohol testing as part of the Health and Well-being Strategy with a view to minimising organisational risk and increasing fire-fighter and public safety.

The inter-Service H&S reviews have proved valuable to the participating FRS's; the areas covered have not yet extended to reviewing the fire safety measures in those Authorities premises. SFRS could consider how to widen the scope of these reviews to potentially include other areas of the business where it adds value.

13. Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers and staff. It is clear that Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service is a very high performing service and there is enthusiasm and confidence for the future and the peer team believe that by harnessing this positive culture SFRS can continue on its improvement journey.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge of SFRS please contact:

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