

CABINET– 21 OCTOBER 2014

OXFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE (OFRS) OPERATIONAL PEER ASSESSMENT AUDIT – SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) received an external Operational Assessment Peer Review in May 2014. This is a sector led process which replaced the previous inspection regime carried out by of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Service. It is managed by the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers Association and supported by the Fire and Rescue sector.
2. The Service was required to complete a self-assessment against 7 key critical areas of delivery:
 - (i) Community Risk Management
 - (ii) Protection
 - (iii) Prevention
 - (iv) Response
 - (v) Health and Safety
 - (vi) Training and Development
 - (vii) Call Management and Incident Support
3. The Peer review team then carried out a 4 day visit to review the self-assessment and advise the Service on areas of notable practices and areas for improvement. The team also reviewed the overarching areas of Leadership, Governance and Capacity across the seven delivery themes.

Background

4. OFRS recently participated in a week-long Operational Assessment peer review – headed up by Cornwall's Chief Fire Officer Des Tidbury and Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons (Royal Berkshire Fire Authority) - and supported by Deputy Chief Fire Officer Gary Walsh (East Sussex), Deputy Chief Fire Officer Lee Neale (West Sussex), Kevin Maidment (former Police Superintendent who now specialises in promoting, developing & assuring Safeguarding approaches for organisations) and Local Government Association (LGA) programme manager Gary Hughes.
5. The assessment and review process is part of a nationally agreed and adopted framework for Fire & Rescue Services. The process is sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government, co-ordinated by the

LGA and supported by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), councillors and senior FRS managers.

6. Although the review focussed primarily on how well OFRS manages public and firefighter safety in the face of emergency incidents, it also covered areas such as the broader achievement of outcomes for citizens (e.g. Safeguarding), as well as the effectiveness of the organisation's leadership, governance and capacity to meet both its current and future needs.
7. Overall, the Review Team were extremely impressed with the Service's integrated approach within OCC and with local & regional partners. The Peer Review Team fully recognised the service's direction of travel and successes through working hard to add value across the wider community protection & wellbeing agenda.
8. In terms of leadership, governance and scrutiny, the team drew attention to the strong and effective partnership between senior managers and political leaders that it identified as a key factor in helping the Service to drive through change and improvements during a period of uncertainty. This was further assisted by a 'can-do' approach throughout the Service, supported by a constructive relationship with representative bodies.
9. In terms of outcomes for local citizens, the Service's commitment to supporting OCC in its Safeguarding approach was seen as notable practice and will be shared across the fire sector.
10. Other areas of notable practice were highlighted:
 - (1) the strong performance management ethos and systems that were well-embedded across the Service, and
 - (2) the development of enhanced emergency medical skills (First Person on Scene), in partnership with South Central Ambulance Service.
11. The 'behind-the-scenes' work done by the Service to help to secure sprinkler installation commitments for the major Westgate Shopping development, Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre and Oxford City Council's High Rise Flats were also seen as significant successes in terms of positive outcomes for citizens and the development of strong working relationships with partners in both the private and public sector.

Key Issues

12. In respect to areas of further development, there were a number of key aspects of the Service's work that the review team assessed as requiring specific focus going forward.
13. First and foremost, was the need to re-invigorate the '365alive' vision within the Service, as it had already reached its 10-year targets for lives and money saved two years ahead of schedule, together with the target for the number of face-to-face safety messages that had been delivered. This resetting or

stretching of the targets was seen as vital for keeping the strong momentum and innovation going in the prevention and protection arenas – and could even help to strengthen the Service's role in delivering the wider County Council health & wellbeing objectives.

14. Another area where the review team felt the Service (together with OCC Emergency Planning (EP) Team) could develop was in relation to community resilience - with OFRS and OCC EP team being seen as having the potential to become key players in the future engagement, assistance and promotion of community resilience initiatives, particularly in relation to adverse weather planning and preparation. The Peer Review Team acknowledged the investment from OCC and the progress made through building on the successes and lessons learnt from the floods of 2007 and the winter floods of 2013/2014 across the County.
15. Finally, the review team noted that on-call recruitment, selection, development and retention remained an on-going and mutable challenge (as it is across all FRS's with significant on-call establishments) – and although the Service had put in place a number of innovations in respect to flexible, focussed and pragmatic support and training for the on-call staff (matched by the Authority's continuing commitment in terms of financial investment) – the Service would need to continue to invest and innovate in order to maintain their high operational standards and good levels of availability of fire engines across the rural parts of Oxfordshire.

Proposal

16. The overall finding of the review team was that the Service could readily and robustly demonstrate how effectively and efficiently it is managing its core responsibilities, in respect to maintaining and promoting public and firefighter safety. The review also highlighted how well-placed the Service was to accelerate and diversify its participation in the wider community safety prevention, protection and well-being arenas.
17. In addition, the team noted the Service's growing experience and expertise in making partnerships and collaboration activities successfully work (e.g. Safeguarding, Thames Valley Fire Control Service, South East FRS procurement, Collaborative Partnership on standard operational procedures, Community Resilience during extreme weather events).
18. With both of these factors in mind, therefore, it was identified that the Service could realistically broaden and develop its role in supporting the County Council's wider prevention and community health & well-being priorities, whilst at the same time, creating more effective and efficient 'Blue Light'-specific working. The latter to be achieved by continuing to collaborate further with Fire, Police & Ambulance partners, and in particular, established partners, such as Royal Berkshire & Buckinghamshire FRS's, along with South Central Ambulance Service and Thames Valley Police.

19. The proposal, therefore, is for Cabinet to endorse a twin track strategic approach for OFRS of greater delivery of OCC community protection and well-being priorities (particularly in relation to health & wellbeing, accident prevention and community resilience), coupled with progressing further collaborative opportunities on 'Blue-Light' sector specific initiatives.

Financial and Staff Implications

20. Although not identified in clear financial terms, at this time, the twin track strategic approach offers an opportunity to help reduce the growing financial burden on other OCC directorates, by the Service being commissioned to develop and deliver effective demand management (prevention & protection) initiatives targeting OCC health, safety & well-being priorities.
21. In addition, the collaborative approach with other Blue Light Services offers the opportunity to reduce the direct overall costs of a wide range of sector-specific functions, whilst maintaining frontline services.
22. Such efficiencies will be detailed in subsequent Community Risk Management projects and through the Service Resource & Planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) note the positive overall assessment (including three areas of notable practice) of OFRS by the peer review team, particularly in relation to its integrated approach with other OCC and partner services;**
 - (b) support OFRS Strategic Management Team's aim to further add value to OCC (e.g. continuing to develop its safeguarding and community protection activities with SCS, CEF, E & E and PH);**
 - (c) support OFRS Strategic Management Team's aim to increase specialist resource and asset collaboration with other 'Blue Light' services (i.e. Fire, Police & Ambulance), in line with current government policy and on the grounds of economy, effectiveness and/or efficiency;**
 - (d) agree for the Peer Review report to be made public via the OCC website and through normal communication channels.**

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Background papers: Operational Assessment Peer Review Report

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