

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 8 NOVEMBER 2010

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT PEER REVIEW OF OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE 2010

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) has undergone an operational peer assessment overseen by the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA) and led by the Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, Des Tidbury. He was supported by a group of experienced individuals ranging from elected members to local government and development review staff (formerly the IDeA). Following the removal of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process, this report is likely to be the most authoritative independent review of the Service for a prolonged period.
2. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) requested an Operational Assessment Peer Review. The current performance framework for the fire and rescue sector has a strong focus on within-sector peer review and the development of the Operational Assessment Peer Review was key to establishing these arrangements.
3. The Fire Services Management Committee of the Local Government Association approved a partnership approach between the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) and Local Government (LG) Improvement and Development that includes developing the already established LG Improvement and Development local government peer review process to fully meet the fire and rescue sector's requirements.
4. The peer review process is designed to help a fire and rescue service (FRS) assess its current achievements and its capacity to change. It aims to help a FRS identify its current strengths, as much as what it needs to improve.
5. With the abolition of the CAA process, it is not yet known how these arrangements will evolve. As a result, this report is likely to be the most authoritative independent review of the service for a prolonged period. The Service is supporting the continuation of the process and has two trained peer assessors who have undertaken reviews in their services.
6. The basis for this review is the toolkit for operational assessment. The key lines of enquiry (KLOE) are:
 - Community risk management
 - Prevention
 - Protection

- Response
 - Health and safety
 - Training and development
 - Call management and incident support.
7. The overarching outcome statement is that OFRS is providing a good, low cost, effective service and is striving to continuously improve. The report identifies that the Service has made the most of being an integral part of the county council and is well led, with staff having pride and feeling valued. The review team were particularly impressed with the positive culture and the “can do” attitude of the Service. Specific positive comment was made of the Service’s involvement in the Safeguarding agenda.
8. The strong support from the Chief Executive, CCMT and politicians was noted, along with a widespread organisational awareness and commitment to the 365 Alive vision.

Summary of Report

9. Several areas were commended and work is underway for “areas of notable practice” to be provided to local government and development review for sharing with other Services. These include:
- progress on equality and diversity;
 - preparations for the transfer of the current call receipt and mobilising function to a regional entity; and
 - the Service’s performance management framework.
10. The review commended the service for operating at low cost and maximising resources, whilst continuing to provide a high performing service. It has been praised for making efficiency savings that have not impacted on service levels.
11. The reviewers were impressed by the 365 Alive programme, which is a ten year initiative aiming to:
- reduce serious injury road traffic collision numbers by 10%
 - reduce non-domestic fires by 15%
 - reduce domestic fires by 20%
 - deliver a safety message to 840,000 young people and adults
 - achieve savings of £100,000,000 for Oxfordshire.
12. The review says this innovative programme is on target and demonstrates a strong commitment to community wellbeing.
13. Oxfordshire was the first Fire and Rescue Service in the country to receive the Customer Service Excellence Award in March 2009, and was nominated for 'Brigade of the Year' at this year's national Spirit of Fire awards. Hook Norton Fire Station won the Fire Station of the year award.

14. The Fire and Rescue Service has been praised for working well within Oxfordshire County Council, making good use of resources, whilst developing effective internal partnerships. This Council's Chief Executive described the service as a seamless part of the council which acted as its "ambassador".
15. Road safety is a priority of the Fire and Rescue Service, and one of many successful partnerships has resulted in the 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive' campaign. The Fire and Rescue Service has been involved in the Thames Valley Police Road Safety Partnership, working with the Driving Standards Agency and the county council's Road Safety Team. This work has contributed to a reduction in road traffic fatalities from 68 in 2006, to 28 in 2009.
16. Two key issues were highlighted as areas requiring active management. These are:
 - **High turnover of senior officers** – The review team reported a high level of projected turnover of senior officers in the next 18 months. As noted by the team, this is being well managed by the Strategic Leadership Team, with good succession planning arrangements in place. Since the review, approximately half of the projected retirees have left the Service and new appointments have been made, inducted and are now performing strongly in their new roles.
 - **Ongoing resilience of the Retained Duty System (RDS)** – This area is being progressively addressed through the Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) supported appointment of Wholetime Watch Managers to Retained stations over the next two years. Effective monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to assess the impact of these officers.

Key Recommendations

17. Key recommendations have been made based on each of the "Key Lines of Enquiry." The most significant of these are identified below:
 1. Make further arrangements to monitor the capacity of the workforce so that it does not reach the point of overstretch¹;
 2. Build on the firm platform of equality and diversity to embed this in all aspects of the organisation and direct specific activities to vulnerable at risk groups in the community;
 3. Make more extensive use of OFRS, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and partner agency data systems, using risk profiling to target themed community safety initiatives in geographical areas ;

¹ This area has been reinforced by the outcomes of the recent OCC staff survey and is being addressed by the OFRS action plan.

4. Develop the current response strategy with reference to targeting increased protection activities for those areas with known longer response times;
5. Use the Watch Manager deployment at Retained stations to address local community safety initiatives;
6. Continue work to improve Retained Duty System staff resilience and competence.

Financial and Staff Implications

18. Many of the above issues are challenging, particularly sustaining the RDS. The increasing focus on localities, use of data to identify and target at risk groups and the opportunities created by closer working with Social and Community Services are all areas that will assist in responding to the challenge.
19. An overarching action plan will be developed and actively discharged to address the report's key recommendations. Several items already feature in this year's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. **The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report and task the Chief Fire Officer to deliver an action plan to close out the key recommendations.**

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Background Papers: Operational Assessment Peer Review Report for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service 2010 (available from Members' Resource Centre or contact the Chief Fire Officer).

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October 2010