



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Final Report

May 2014

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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 Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS) in May 2014.

The report provides detailed information on the key focus areas of

Risk to Resources – Managing risk in the operational context with a focus on fire fighter and public safety including the KAA's of:

- Community Risk Management
- Prevention
- Protection
- Response
- Training & Development

In addition we have covered the three core areas of:

- How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved - Safeguarding?
- How effective is the leadership and governance?
- How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

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

The Fire Peer Challenge of Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS) took place from the 13-16 May 2014 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 – over 80 people in total.

During the time in OFRS the peer team were well looked after and we would particularly like to thank Richard Smith, Julian Green and other OFRS colleagues.

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 OFRS Operational Assessment (OpA) and key supporting documentation.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and was delivered to an audience consisting of officers from across the whole Service.

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

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 OFRS was:

- Chief Fire Officer Des Tidbury, Cornwall FRS
- Cllr Pauline Helliard-Symons, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- Deputy CFO Gary Walsh, East Sussex FRS
- Deputy CFO Lee Neale, West Sussex FRS
- Kevin Maidment, Independent Consultant, Ex Wiltshire Police
- Gary Hughes, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

3. Leadership, Governance & Scrutiny

Strengths

OFRS is a very high performing and well integrated Service, with very strong and effective political and managerial leadership and a positive 'can do' culture which is open, honest and challenging.

This culture together with a strong approach to performance management, drives improvement across the organisation and ensures that everyone is engaged and aware of the Services Vision of 365 alive.

There is pride in the Service from the people who work for OFRS and open communication channels are effective in providing a consistency of understanding of the Vision and key priorities throughout the organisation.

This places OFRS in a good position going forward and will enable it to make changes in the future should funding become constrained.

The peer challenge team identified that OFRS:

- **Is a well-integrated and valued service within Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and with partners across the County and beyond**
- **Has a very strong and effective partnership between senior managers and political leaders that is driving change and improvement**
- **Senior leadership is approachable, listens and is valued by staff and members across the organisation**
- **People are aware and signed up to the vision of 365 Alive**
- **Leading members are very supportive, engaged and knowledgeable about the service**

OFRS has an internal ambition to be the 'most integrated' County FRS and from the feedback that the peer challenge team received this has already been achieved with clear evidence throughout the organisation, and from OCC, that the FRS is highly valued and making a difference to its communities. This was echoed amongst partners too with OFRS seen as a valued and 'can do' partner.

The senior management is well regarded particularly the Chief Fire Officer and his principal officer team. They are seen as approachable and operate an open door policy. Staff, members and representative bodies stated that they listen and are open to new ideas and suggestions for improvement.

The leadership is seen as a "partnership" between officers and members, with officers acting as trusted technical advisors to both the CFO and leading members.

The 365 Alive vision is fully understood and awareness is strong right across the organisation. People are signed up and provided some good examples of how they have contributed to it.

The peer team were impressed with the knowledge and engagement of leading members, who are seen as both challenging and yet supportive.

Areas to explore

OFRS is well placed for the future challenges ahead. It has invested heavily in developing a 'can do' culture that is open and honest. The Service has delivered some significant successes but now is the time to:

- **Reinvigorate and re-launch the 365 Alive vision for the next 2 years – stretch targets, be specific and focus to fully demonstrate OFRS ambition for the county for the future**
- **Continue the positive work on communication and engagement to ensure a fully inclusive and consistent approach across OFRS**
- **Continue to improve the understanding of OFRS across all members through more formal development**
- **Support Scrutiny to further add value and to challenge performance across OFRS**

The impact of 365 Alive on improved outcomes for the community is clear the Service has exceeded its target with 386 lives saved, over £135 million saved and over 1 million safety messages delivered, this is with two years still remaining on a ten year vision. This is impressive and should be celebrated and communicated.

OFRS should however review its 365 Alive vision. During the peer challenge the team received conflicting reviews on the direction for the next two years and beyond. There seemed to be a gap, that individuals were filling themselves. There was also a desire to move beyond 365 Alive and onto the next important priority. OFRS should therefore review their 365 Alive vision and if it is going to continue to urgently reinvigorate and re-launch it. The vision would benefit from further stretch targets and by refocussing upon the individual contribution to achievement and personalising it. These could include targets such as aiming to reduce the number of deaths of young drivers, or deaths on country roads.

The strong approach to communication is working and delivering positive results. However, this was not consistent throughout OFRS, particularly amongst some on call crews, and OFRS should continue to ensure messages are cascaded on a fully inclusive and consistent basis.

OFRS has a strong approach to engaging with and communicating to members. It ensures that members are fully informed of incidents within their respective wards. OFRS also plays a part in induction for new members, to which existing members are also invited, and many go. There is, however, no formal training programme beyond that, and members are not asked what training or knowledge they might need.

Members say that although it is largely informal, they learn about how the FRS works and what it does through papers that go to Scrutiny, Cabinet and full council, and through some seminars around different issues. For example through limited emergency response standards that come to Scrutiny and an explanation of 365 Alive. This could be made more formal and be more expansive to explain the work and achievements of OFRS.

With the diminishing capacity amongst Scrutiny it is important that engagement is appropriate and adds value. OFRS needs to continue it's positive work to engage Scrutiny and may want to consider a Scrutiny review of this fire peer challenge report and /or establishing more informal 'question time' style panel sessions where scrutiny and other members plus partners and the public could engage the CFO, SLT and leading members in a question and answer session.

4. Organisational Capacity

The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Excellent people and culture with a strong 'can do' attitude throughout the organisation**
- **A very strong approach to performance management**
 - **embedded, golden thread, low sickness absence**
- **The new structure with SLT and TLT is working well**
- **New initiatives to address capacity:**
 - **Retained Station Support Officers (RSSO) and Roving Pump**
- **Positive and constructive relationships between OFRS and the FBU – working well together**
- **Reciprocal support between OCC and OFRS which is recognised and regarded**

The peer team were particularly impressed with the positive culture throughout OFRS and the strong 'can do' attitude of the people that we met. Staff recognised the challenges faced by the FRS and wider public sector but were still positive about their future and saw their role on a much wider basis than the traditional view of the fire and rescue. They welcomed the opportunities provided by being part of the county council and were proud to work for OFRS and OCC.

The services approach to performance management is recognised as Notable by the peer challenge team. The standardised approach to managing and recording 1-2-1 meetings was simple but effective. It covered a wide range of priority areas such as health & safety, equality and diversity, performance, training, sickness welfare, finance and budgets, succession planning and threats and opportunities. It was clearly embedded throughout the organisation and linked to annual and six monthly appraisals. This approach was delivering results with a very low sickness absence figure of 5.34 days lost to sickness (not including on-call staff), which is impressive.

The new structure with Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Tactical Leadership Team (TLT) in place is working well. Feedback was positive and TLT valued the empowerment provided but also the links into SLT through Area Managers attending TLT for the final hour.

The service is fully aware of its key pressures in terms of capacity and to ensure firefighter safety, competence and equipment. It has, therefore, invested in additional capacity to address key risks within the county. The Retained Station Support Officers (RSSO's) and Roving Pump are seen as delivering capacity and improvements.

The positive and constructive relationship between the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and OFRS was evident, despite the ongoing national industrial action. The CFO and his team recognise the role of the FBU and they strive to be

open and transparent. The FBU have positively engaged and contributed to the development of some significant policies and this process should be fully embedded across all policy areas.

Health & safety linked to firefighter safety is a high priority, with investment in Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and other initiatives by principal officers, which is recognised by staff.

There is reciprocal support from OCC, and to OCC, with OFRS making a significant and valued contribution to wider OCC priorities and clear recognition of the value of being a county fire and rescue service from staff throughout the organisation.

Areas to explore

OFRS 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. The Service needs to consider the following:

- **Undertake an annual review and evaluation of the restructure and role names to assess effectiveness, the impact on capacity and understanding**
- **Continue to embed the culture of empowerment and accountability throughout OFRS**
- **Ensure the ‘can do’ attitude is maintained but does not negatively impact on staff welfare**
- **Consider exploring the opportunities for volunteering to maximise capacity and community engagement**
- **Apply a consistent and robust approach to programme/project management to deliver the needs of a modern FRS**

To ensure the restructure is working effectively as possible and to communicate this success the service should undertake an annual review, with a clear communication plan in place to share the findings. There is anecdotal evidence that things are improving but further evidence and the opportunity to ‘tweak’ areas that may need improvement would help embed the culture of empowerment and accountability throughout OFRS.

As referenced the peer challenge team were impressed with the ‘can do’ attitude of staff but there is a risk that people may take on too much. OFRS should ensure it has a strong and balanced approach to Health, Safety and Staff Welfare. The further roll out of welfare training maybe helpful and some formal mechanisms for spotting and recording stress triggers may also be of use.

To further maximise capacity OFRS should develop opportunities for volunteering. It is important to remember that volunteers are not a ‘free’ resource but can add additional capacity and value across a range of activities. Some examples quoted were the work of Cornwall where they have engaged private sector boiler repairs who can identify people at risk and report them and also housing association staff who are trained to deliver HFRC.

The strong approach to project management and collaboration on the Thames Valley Fire Control Project (TVFC), which will be covered in more detail in section 12 of this report, should be applied across OFRS with a robust approach to programme and project management applied to all aspects of business including procurement and asset management.

5. Outcomes for local citizens - Safeguarding

The peer team focussed upon OFRS work on Safeguarding. The Service has a very strong and integrated approach to Safeguarding, which the team recognise as Notable.

Strengths

- **Members of and attendance at a range of multi-agency safeguarding groups**
- **Safeguarding training delivered to staff and resulting in an increase in numbers of referrals**
- **Good levels of awareness and understanding by all staff**
- **Clear process to report safeguarding concerns**
- **Staff making referrals are updated of progress and outcomes where information is available**
- **A single point of contact for OFRS staff as well a partner agencies**
- **365 Alive and positive examples of influencing the fitting of sprinklers – Westgate, Campsfield and Oxford High Rise**

The peer challenge team recognise that whilst not statutory partners, OFRS is represented at multi-agency safeguarding meetings/boards, primarily at a strategic level. This progressive and forward thinking approach ensures that as an organisation, OFRS is current in its understanding and thinking on matters relating to safeguarding. Partners spoke favourably of the positive approach and attitude of OFRS staff and reflected their willingness to participate in and often take the lead in collaborative working. It is also recognised that OFRS staff participate in the work of the various sub-groups as and when necessary, this too is appreciated by partners.

Within OFRS there is universal and positive comment in support of the Safeguarding training which was developed 'in house' but in collaboration with and verified by both the Oxford Safeguarding Children Board (OCSB) and the Oxford Adult Safeguarding Board (OSAB). The training was delivered to staff between 2011 and 2012 in the form of a Powerpoint presentation and was primarily intended to raise the awareness of staff to the prevalence of and indicators of vulnerability, in the broadest sense and how to report concerns.

Staff across the organisation demonstrated a good working knowledge of safeguarding. It was clear that they recognised their obligations to identify and refer safeguarding concerns and the opportunities created in attending both proactive and reactive calls.

A clear referral and reporting process is established and understood by staff. These referrals and reports are administered and managed by two staff members working within the Home and Community Safety Department who have established a reputation as 'safeguarding champions'. They act as a conduit between OFRS and OCC and their effectiveness is enhanced by the data sharing arrangements that have been developed by the partners in recent years.

The 'safeguarding champions' pride themselves in the service they provide and always seek to acknowledge all referrals submitted by staff. If possible, they seek to obtain an update from OCC and feed this back to the staff member initiating the referral or enquiry. It is recognised that in many cases, it is not appropriate to feedback specific details and in these cases, but in all cases, they send an acknowledgement with as much detail as they are able to provide. Operational staff stated they appreciated this system and recognised the restrictions in providing them detailed feedback.

It is encouraging that the excellent collaborative arrangements extend into other departments of OCC such as the planning department. The examples of planned sprinkler systems to be fitted to a number of city council buildings and major city centre underground car park development demonstrate achievements in enhancing safety through partnership working. It is suggested that this approach should be explored further with district councils to create opportunities for using the legislative planning process to influence building design to enhance and 'build in' safety.

Areas to explore

- **Refresh the safeguarding training package to reflect learning from recent cases such as Operation Bullfinch and domestic abuse**
- **Establish a programme of on-going training for new staff and refresher training for existing staff**
- **Consider flagging addresses of previous safeguarding incidents in the address based gazetteer for the information of crews attending subsequent reports at those addresses**
- **Review capacity, resilience and working arrangements for staff providing the advice and contact with OCC Social and Community Services staff**

Since the delivery of Safeguarding training in 2011-12, the work of Operation Bullfinch has received significant publicity in terms of the conviction and sentencing of a number of offenders involved in the sexual exploitation and grooming of young people. It is recommended that OFRS take the opportunity to review this vital training to reflect the learning from Operation Bullfinch so that opportunities to protect vulnerable young people and adults are maximised. In addition, consideration should be given to introducing domestic abuse as an element of this training, as often, safeguarding and domestic abuse co-exist in households.

In interviews, staff demonstrated a good working knowledge of safeguarding and the processes to be followed when reporting concerns. However, there was a desire by staff to develop their working knowledge further thereby enhancing opportunities to safeguard members of the communities. In addition, it was highlighted that staff who have joined OFRS since 2012 only received an introduction to Safeguarding as part of their induction training. It is recommended that more extensive Safeguarding training should become an integral element of induction training as well as part of ongoing refresher training.

It is clear that the delivery of the Safeguarding training has resulted in a significant increase in the number of referrals made by OFRS to the Social & Community Services teams of OCC. The peer challenge team believes safeguarding arrangements could be enhanced further by the timely availability of information about previous safeguarding referrals to crews attending calls and addresses. In this regard, it is recommended that consideration be given to flagging addresses where OFRS colleagues have previously raised a safeguarding concern at a specific address so that crews attending such addresses subsequently would have an appropriate level of awareness.

There is clear evidence of pro-active preventative activity by staff of the OFRS Home and Community Safety Department in responding to safeguarding concerns reported by operational colleagues that may not pass the threshold for referring into the multi-agency arrangements.

Currently, two members of OFRS staff provide a 'single point of contact' function with OCC as well as acting as reference and learning authority with OFRS. The peer challenge team found the commitment and enthusiasm of

these staff members commendable. It is clear that they make significant professional and personal contributions to promoting and supporting staff in furthering the safeguarding agenda and working practices, this extending to providing an out of hours advice service.

Whilst it was clear to the peer challenge team that these staff members are critical to promoting and supporting safeguarding, they were concerned that such working arrangements are unsustainable and recommend that these arrangements are reviewed and revised.

6. Community Risk Management

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

Strengths

- **OFRS has reconfigured its approach to IRMP resulting in an evidence based and coherent long term view of the community risks over the next five years.**
- **Risk is identified drawing from national, regional and local risk assessments to contribute to the overall community risk management process.**
- **The 5 year CRMP and associated annual plan for 2014/15 clearly identify proposals to address the maintenance of response attendance times to secure on call availability whilst using existing resources flexibly within the service to achieve response standards set by the Service**

OFRS has moved effectively from an annual integrated risk management planning, approach to an evidence based five year strategic community risk management plan (CRMP) created with the aid of extensive risk analysis developing a community risk profile and backed up with an annual action plan detailing specific projects for the forthcoming year.

The Service has clear understanding of its risks and has attempted to engage stakeholders and employees in contributing towards the evidence and proposals for the future that address the risks.

The risks in the community are clearly owned by the Service and they are starting to inform their work around prevention and protection.

There is also a clear ownership of the benefits of maintenance and improvement in response to the community and the CRMP identifies innovative areas of work to deal with the risks to these response standards as a result of the pressure on the on-call service in terms of recruitment and retention.

OFRS is trialling a number of initiatives to inform their approach to delivery against their known risks e.g Roving Pump, switch crewing on the basis of a more flexible wholtime workforce to support and address pressures on the on-call service.

Areas to explore

- **Review consultation and engagement processes to ensure that the IRMP/CRM proposals are fully understood to best inform the final decisions**
- **Promote the benefits to community risk reduction and fire fighter safety provided through the protection teams**
- **Ensure there is a balance between Prevention, Protection and Response**

When transferring their approach to CRMP the Service should be careful to communicate the change and ensure that they take staff on the journey. Staff recognise the journey but improved engagement will ensure that the reasons for change are fully understood.

There is room for improvement in the consultation and engagement of staff and stakeholders to understand the community and gather their views as to how the Service can address other risks in the community. The Service should consider more extensive engagement with black and multi-ethnic community groups, housing associations, private health providers and vulnerable persons support groups to develop the fire service offer to the community.

OFRS should work with others to develop a single view of risk and vulnerability from a multi-agency perspective as this would enhance the Service's knowledge of the community and enable a more targeted prevention and protection provision. There is evidence of data sharing with OCC but the opportunity to access others data should be explored with as wide a range of partners as possible.

The Service should ensure that the linkages between the OCC strategies and plans through the CRMP are fully translated throughout the organisation rather than rely on 365 Alive to drive prevention, protection and response.

There is evidence that the CRMP supports the achievement of 365 Alive however the Service should consider the balance across all parts of service delivery, namely, prevention, protection and response identifying how each of these can contribute to this vision.

7. Prevention

The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **365 Alive has been delivered ahead of schedule and all targets exceeded two years before the end of the programme**
- **Combined Care Service: the vulnerable client data sharing arrangement has enabled OFRS to better target resources to individuals in greatest need.**
- **The restructure has increased the opportunity to act quickly in order to deliver better outcomes for residents**
- **Phoenix Project has developed and has been delivered to 160 young people per annum**
- **The value of the Phoenix Project has been calculated in financial terms, which adds an extra dimension to the project outcomes**

As previously referenced 365 Alive has been delivered ahead of schedule and all targets exceeded two years before the end of the programme. 365 Alive is well branded across Oxfordshire, having a dedicated website providing user friendly information.

The Combined Care Service vulnerable client data sharing protocol between OCC and OFRS has enabled OFRS to effectively target resources to individuals in greatest need. The development of this joint approach is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable citizens. This has had a number of benefits;

- Efficient use of OFRS resources
- Delivery of 365 Alive objectives
- Assisted with integration of OCC and OFRS
- Provided a platform for further integration and partnership

Managers and staff feel supported and empowered to deliver initiatives that meet the needs of local communities. The restructure has increased the opportunity to act quickly in order to deliver better outcomes for residents, both independently and in partnership.

Fire crews recognise the benefit of prevention work and utilise post incident visits to engage with local communities to develop a positive relationship with OFRS and generate Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC) referrals.

OFRS are cognisant of seasonal needs such as winter fuel safety for older residents, summer boating safety advice, school holiday initiatives, electric blanket testing and the Firework Partnership and act accordingly

OFRS are key players in a wide range of boards and partnerships across Oxfordshire which will ensure a greater understanding of the OFRS offer and allow resources to be directed where they will add the greatest value.

The Phoenix Project has developed and is now delivered to 160 young people on the verge of exclusion from mainstream education per annum. This joint

venture between OCC Early Intervention Service and OFRS further strengthens integration.

The value of the Phoenix Project has been calculated in financial terms, which adds an extra dimension to the project outcomes

Areas to explore

- **365 Alive provides the vision for what will be achieved, but how activities contribute to achieving the vision isn't clearly identifiable or easy for staff to articulate**
- **Demonstrate a clearer link to how 365 Alive contributes to OCC objectives**
- **Consider OFRS role in building community resilience**
- **Review how existing resources could be used to deliver planned and focused prevention activities**

365 Alive provides the vision for what will be achieved, but how activities contribute to achieving the vision isn't clearly identifiable or easy for staff to articulate. Some staff interviewed referenced 365 Alive as 'old news' and a strapline rather than the OFRS vision or the main driver for a safer Oxfordshire.

Again how 365 Alive contributes to OCC objectives may benefit from demonstrating a clearer link. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) should consider and strengthen the golden thread between OCC objectives and the personal objectives of OFRS staff. As mentioned previously the peer challenge team encourage OFRS to review this vision and to either reinvigorate or develop a new vision for Oxfordshire

Consider OFRS's role in building community resilience. Capacity may become an issue in future years so working with local communities to develop themselves will allow OFRS to focus resources to the most vulnerable residents. There are opportunities with regard to the excellent work on flooding that can be developed and widened. The Emergency Management Team and Local Resilience Forum could play a key role in this work.

OFRS should review how existing resources could be used to deliver a suite of planned and focused prevention activities as a priority. There is a large amount of good work being delivered both independently and in partnership, a clear route map of how these contribute to OCC and OFRS strategic objectives would be beneficial

8. Protection

Strengths

- **Review of the risk based inspection programme completed and implementing actions with clear ownership which will provide benefits for both public and firefighter safety**
- **Sharing of commercial premises data with the Valuation Office has assisted the review of the risk based inspection programme**
- **Provision of premises risk information is delivered in a timely manner**
- **Training has been provided to crew and watch managers to support the collection of information on premises**

OFRS has completed a comprehensive review of its risk based inspection programme as a result of concerns of how it was working to meet both its statutory duty and the needs of the business community. The changes in the risk based inspection programme, which is due to be introduced in June 2014, will ensure that the Service has a process of both dealing with reactive responses from the community in the form of complaints and premises that come to notice and its proactive responsibilities by auditing relevant properties on the basis of risk to audit compliance with the fire safety. This approach has been welcomed by staff this along with a set development programme for the fire safety roles will build confidence to deliver the right outcomes for the community.

The review and progress of the resultant action plan has received external scrutiny from another fire and rescue service to support the process and will enhance the department's ability to meet its objectives. In developing its new approach the Service has built good relationships with the Valuations Office and Oxford Data Observatory to build its new premises database.

The Service has added to its ability to audit premises by training operational staff to complete limited audits and refer issues to the dedicated protection teams in their areas.

OFRS has listened to protection staff and is developing its approach to the necessary enforcement responsibilities whilst building relationships with the business community.

It was clear that OFRS has communicated effectively the impact of incidents such as Lakanhal House and Shirley Towers to drive the understanding of the benefits of sprinklers. As a result staff are beginning to provide business continuity advice to local businesses to support drive to reduce fire and the consequential impact on the local economy.

The Protection team has taken ownership for the premises risk information gathering procedure and is putting in place training and systems to support the introduction of new processes which are aligned to national guidance. This will provide benefits both to operational personnel and the community.

The provision of premises risk information is delivered in a timely manner to support the focus on firefighter safety and response activity and this is recognised by staff as essential and that it shows support from senior managers for a positive health and safety culture.

Training has been provided to crew and watch managers to support the collection of information on premises and this will show benefits in the future as staff become confident in assessing risk premises and developing tactical plans to assist first responders.

Areas to explore

- **Review fire safety training as a result of the recent restructure and forthcoming end of the existing collaborative regional approach.**
- **Consider how OFRS captures information on new risk premises from different sources to ensure that they are provided in a timely manner to operational crews**

The Authority has some 35,000 premises which may be audited under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO - Fire Safety Order) but only a small percentage which were previously inspected under the fire precautions legislation receive regular visits. This approach has been completely reviewed and changes made to its risk based inspection programme.

The outcomes of the restructure and impacts on fire safety enforcement should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the best outcomes in terms of audit, enforcement and business engagement are embedded and deliver real outcomes to support 365 Alive and its statutory duty.

To support the changes made to its risk based inspection programme the Service should take the opportunity to review its fire safety training as a result of the recent restructure and forthcoming end of the existing collaborative regional approach.

The Service is well supported for its IT provision, and has secured financial investment, but they should ensure that mobile data hardware and software systems are fully supported and future developments are clearly mapped to ensure that the organisation can deliver its expectation for the delivery of risk information to operational crews and fire safety inspecting officers proposals for mobile tablets).

The service should consider how it captures information on new risk premises from different sources to ensure that they are provided in a timely manner to operational crews

9. Response

Strengths

- **Joint working and training with South Central Ambulance Service will deliver improvements to the community**
- **Integration of the collaborative partnership standard operational procedures into OFRS confirmed with the testing of understanding through assessment procedures**
- **Flexible use of resources to ensure availability of key on call appliances**
- **Users are involved in the evaluation of new equipment which is recognised by operational staff and supports ambitions to enhance firefighter safety**
- **Resourcing the development of MDT and enhanced working arrangements through tablet technology**

The Service has worked closely with South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) to establish a partnership agreement for clinical governance which will provide additional training in immediate first aid called First Person on Scene (FPoS). This is supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will assist in funding this initiative. OFRS also work with SCAS on joint training approach to deliver the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Programme (JESIP), and at a local level to support emergency services response to road traffic extrication. Although in the early stages this partnership agreement has the potential to be of notable practice.

OFRS are engaged with the collaborative partnership to ensure the adoption of the regional standard operational procedures. The Service has also invested in a dedicated team to deal with implementation of standard operational procedures which results in staff being trained and then assuring confirmation of knowledge through the testing of understanding through assessment procedures.

The Service has introduced the flexible use of wholetime resources to help maximise the availability of key 'on call' stations. This includes using surplus on-call capacity transferred to other on call stations as well as the Retained Station Support Officers who have the flexibility in their working arrangements to travel to maintain crewing levels and support on call officers at incidents.

The above flexible approach, coupled with the Roving Pump, supports the emergency response capability of the Service across the entire county – especially in the more remote towns and villages. It also helps to address the issue of maintaining the Service's response standard targets, which are challenging, set against the context that Oxfordshire remains the most rural county in the South East.

Operational staff, including specialist, are heavily involved in the evaluation of new equipment by the Service is recognised by operational staff and supports ambitions to enhance firefighter safety and improves ability to undertake operational activity

Areas to explore

- **Post implementation review of the Roving Pump should be undertaken, to evaluate the impact on response attendance, training, development and on individuals**
- **Ensure that on-call recruitment, selection and development procedures support local on call requirements and enhance availability and firefighter development in a timely manner**
- **Ensure that core and support teams work more effectively and ensure clarity of responsibility by reviewing the roles and work programmes of RSSO's, ISOs, ICTs and monitoring roles**

It is not clear how the on-call recruitment, selection and development procedures support local 'on call' stations and retained station support officers to maintain on call requirements and to enhance availability and firefighter development in a timely manner. Although there are on-call courses running throughout the year staff feel that the process of recruitment is too far removed from the station personnel and takes too long so that individuals lose interest in joining the Service. This has occasionally resulted in on-call courses not being fully utilised and delays in achieving development of existing staff.

The benefits of the Roving Pump are not fully understood by staff especially those who have to work this new arrangements and there is the opportunity to undertake a post implementation review of the Roving Pump to fully evaluate the impact on response attendance, training and development and on individuals.

It was also noted that there were several support teams established including Retained Station Support Officers (RSSOs), Incident Support Officers (ISOs), Incident Command Trainers (ICTs) and other monitoring roles. OFRS needs to ensure there is clarity of these roles and that they work effectively across core teams. A review of these functions may be timely.

10. Training and Development

Strengths

- **Training and Development is seen as a priority across OFRS. It is well structured and there is a clear and consistent view that T&D is supported by senior managers**
- **Training Strategy, Training Competency Framework (TCF) and Blueprint are clearly understood. The TCF is compatible with Fire Professional Framework and is well regarded**
- **The Incident Command Training process and delivery is strong, with a number of areas worthy of note**
- **Accredited BTEC development levels 3,5 & 7 is part of a clear development pathway for staff**
- **Training is delivered by OCC and promotes integration and networking**

This is an area of strength for OFRS with Training and Development (T&D) seen as a priority across OFRS. It is well structured and there is a clear and consistent view that T&D is supported by senior managers.

Fire-fighter safety is clearly a priority for SLT and this is translated to inputs and outcomes at tactical and operational levels.

The Training Strategy, Training Competency Framework (TCF) and Blueprint are clearly understood. The TCF pre-dates the Fire Professional Framework (FPF) is compatible with FPF and is well regarded by operational staff.

The development of the Tactical Training Group provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to review and discuss all matters with a training related impact.

The Incident Command Training process and delivery is strong, with a number of areas worthy of note;

- ICT process focuses on developing skills and confidence rather than being purely an assessment tool.
- Decision making rationale and understanding is a key factor within the ICT framework which promotes embedded learning.
- Synergy with incident monitoring is beneficial for incident commanders.
- Simulation facilities and the ability to build relevant scenarios and test tactical and site specific plans ensures realism is part of the process.
- Incident command training simulation is available on the Intranet for remote access.
- The incident command RAG system ensures the assessment programme is risk informed and efficient.
- Evening and weekend training to meet on-call needs.
- ICT is well supported by Redkite and Gartan.

Accredited BTEC development levels 3,5 & 7 is part of a clear development pathway for staff.

The training delivered by OCC promotes integration and networking is viewed as beneficial in meeting individuals training and development needs but also provides the opportunity to discuss cross cutting work in other areas such as prevention.

Training and Development managers have a clear vision for the future and are initiating a number of work streams which will further benefit individual and organisational development. These include providing dedicated resources and funding associated with further scenario-based, 'maintenance of skills' training at weekends (to be potentially held at the Fire Service College) to help minimise the impact of such training on the primary employment responsibilities of on-call firefighters.

Areas to explore

- **The view of Redkite is mixed with some staff seeing it as a valuable tool that has streamlined previously time consuming processes while others view it as 'clunky' and not user friendly**
- **Continue to ensure the consistency of operational monitoring to further support the development of incident commanders**
- **Operational training facilities particularly hot fire training and Compartment Fire Behaviour Training (CFBT)**
- **Anecdotal evidence of restructure and introduction of TTG improving training delivery and course attendance, consider evaluation to support this**

The view of Redkite is mixed with some staff seeing it as a valuable tool that has streamlined previously time consuming processes while others view it as 'clunky' and not user friendly. This could be down to a wider issue about IT literacy and capability but should be looked into to ensure that everyone is getting the most out of Redkite.

A consistent approach to operational monitoring will further support the development of incident commanders. The peer team recognise that this work is in train.

Operational training facilities could be improved, particularly hot fire training and compartment fire behaviour training (CFBT) provide some logistical challenges.

There is anecdotal evidence of the restructure and introduction of Tactical Training Group improving training delivery and course attendance, consider data analysis and evaluation to support this and to provide opportunities for further improvement.

Other Areas

11. Health & Safety

Strengths

- **Clear and positive H&S culture throughout OFRS with emphasis on firefighter safety**
- **Evidence of learning from major incidents and results of operational debriefs**
- **Integration of H&S into working groups across the organisation**

Areas to explore

- **Promotion of safety reps to continue to improve H&S culture**
- **Review health and wellbeing arrangements within OFRS**

There was a clear and positive Health & Safety culture throughout OFRS with a clear emphasis on firefighter safety. This was demonstrated and welcomed at all levels of the organisation.

There was evidence of learning from major incidents such as Lakanhal House and Shirley Towers which was then translated into training for staff at all levels. H&S is also well integrated into working groups and performance management across the organisation.

There are opportunities to promote the use of local safety representatives across all OFRS stations which would further improve the H&S culture.

As referenced previously the service could benefit from further reviewing and improving its focus on wellbeing and staff welfare and ensuring there is a clear balance between health and safety and staff wellbeing.

12. Call Management and Incident Support

Strengths

- **OFRS has a strong leadership role and is a well regarded partner in Thames Valley Fire Control (TVFC)**
- **Good approach to project management**
- **Good existing plans for continuity**
- **The planned Suffolk/Cambridgeshire peer review is positive**

Areas to explore

- **Manage the timescales as they are very challenging and ensure the deadline has room for manoeuvre**
- **Ensure effective communication and engagement with staff about the transition to TVFC**

OFRS has a strong leadership role within the TVFC project with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer acting as the 'Senior User'. OFRS are well regarded as a partner and work well with both Royal Berkshire and Buckinghamshire FRS's.

The service has a strong and robust approach to project management and has brought in specific capacity from the county council to address this. As mentioned previously the learning and approach should be applied consistently across all areas of OFRS business.

The planned peer review of TVFC by Suffolk and Cambridgeshire FRSs is positive and will no doubt provide additional reassurance and areas for improvement.

The current continuity plans in place are robust and effective.

There is, however, a need to carefully manage the timescales for delivering this project as the peer team believe that they are very tight. There is a confidence that the timescales will be achieved and the service needs to ensure that effective and regular communication is in place with staff and unions particularly as you get closer to the 'go live' date.

The Service should ensure the framework, working practices and lessons learnt from the implementation and on-going management of TVFCS are utilised as a platform to identify, assess and deliver further efficiencies through additional areas of collaboration and joint working.

13. Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers and staff. It is clear that Oxfordshire 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 OFRS can continue to integrate and deliver a fully inclusive multi agency approach to keeping Oxfordshire's communities safe.

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

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