



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Final Report

Report Contents:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Introduction, context and purpose | Page 2 |
| 2. The Peer Challenge Team | Page 3 |

Key Areas of focus

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 3. Leadership & Corporate Capacity | Page 4 |
| 4. Community Risk Management | Page 8 |

Other Areas

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 5. Prevention | Page 12 |
| 6. Protection | Page 16 |
| 7. Response | Page 19 |
| 8. Health & Safety | Page 21 |
| 9. Training & Development | Page 22 |
| 10. Call Management & Incident Support | Page 26 |
| 11. Conclusion and contact information | Page 29 |

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 Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service (LFRS) in February 2012.

The report provides detailed information on the key focus areas of

- Leadership & Corporate Capacity
- Community Risk Management

It also provides overview information on the other areas of:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Training & Development
- Call Management & Incident Support
- Health & Safety
- Response

Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement. It is a key component of the LGA's 'Taking the Lead' offer (www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 07 – 09 February 2012 and consisted of a range of on-site activity 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 LFRS 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 LFRS OpA self assessment and key supporting documentation.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a discussion of the findings was delivered to the Services senior managers.

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 self-regulation and improvement which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. 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

LFRS has been on a continuous improvement journey over many years. There has been a strong and sustained leadership of the Service and the Authority.

There is an overwhelming sense of pride from the people who work for LFRS. Staff feel well equipped, well looked after and that LFRS is a good place to work. Communication channels are effective and there is a consistency of understanding across the organisation.

LFRS identified Community Risk Management as a key area of focus for the peer challenge and the peer team concluded that this was exactly the correct area of focus given the findings.

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 LFRS was:

- Susan Johnson – Chief Executive, Durham & Darlington FRS – Lead Peer
- Cllr Peter Abraham – Avon Fire & Rescue Authority
- Mark Cashin – Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire FRS
- Jason Thelwell – Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Buckinghamshire FRS
- Tom Simms – Chief Fire Officer Association Policy Officer
- Gary Hughes – Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association.

3. Leadership & Corporate Capacity

Overall LFRS has been on a continuous improvement journey over many years. The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Continuous improvement journey over many years with a strong 'Partnership of Leadership' and positive officer and member relationships**

There has been a strong and sustained leadership of the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) and the Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) due to the length of office of both the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and the Chair to the Authority. This has resulted in a consistency of vision and direction for the Service and a focus on driving change to achieve improved outcomes.

The CFO and Chair have a positive and constructive professional relationship which is based on mutual respect and there are clear boundaries of responsibility and accountability. The senior executive team demonstrate a shared vision for the Service and a coherent understanding of the strategic objectives

Relationships with partners, particularly local authorities and blue light services is very strong. This will be helpful in the years to come as the likelihood of community budgets and whole place budgets increases. LFRS may want to consider developing this further by leading on some of the partner development where it furthers the FRS strategic objectives e.g. the FRS initiating a serious case review if they have a fire death involving a vulnerable person.

- **People are very proud, well equipped and feel looked after and there is a consistency of message delivered through effective communication**

There is an overwhelming sense of pride from the people who work for LFRS. Staff feel well equipped, well looked after and that LFRS is a good place to work. Communication channels are effective and there is a consistency of understanding across the organisation of the forward strategy and further changes e.g. Day Crewing Plus. Industrial relations are constructive with all changes introduced agreed by consultation and negotiation.

- **Agile organisation helped with flexible staffing arrangements**

Changes introduced over recent years mean that the organisation has built in a degree of flexibility and agility so that it can respond to current and future challenges. This is demonstrated in the variety of duty systems, flexible staffing arrangements and corporate resilience arrangements.

- **Sense of confidence about the future**

There is a sense of confidence about the future and although there is a recognition that the uncertainty of future funding will mean radical changes are necessary, staff are positive and engaged in the process.

- **Positive approach to regional collaboration**

LFRS has a number of ongoing collaborative arrangements in place such as shared control and financial systems. These arrangements with neighbouring services means that there are good foundations for extending shared services and facilitating efficiency gains further.

Areas to explore

- **Uncertainties on future funding**

LFRS has achieved a number of operational savings over recent years and has a healthy reserves position. Future savings are heavily dependent upon delivering the operational improvement programme that is based on the introduction of the Day Crewing Plus duty system. This programme contains a significant estates improvement plan. Given the considerable uncertainty over future funding for FRS nationally, LFRS may wish to model additional worst case scenarios to assist in determining the extent to which revenue savings can be achieved if national grant cuts are worse than envisaged.

The Service has a good approach to devolved budgeting with LFRS driving budget accountability and responsibility down the organisation. To further develop this LFRS may want to explore how to improve forecasting and more detailed budget management through the investment in the financial systems and further training. LFRS may also wish to consider analysing how much individual outcomes are costing them to help in medium term financial planning and where to prioritise.

- **Succession planning over the medium term**

The strong partnership between the Chair and CFO has helped the Service to navigate profound changes to date. Given the stated intention of the Chair to retire from politics at the next election and potential changes in the senior and middle management team over the next 3-5 years, there may be scope to consider the development of a comprehensive and communicated succession plan, at an appropriate time and reassure staff that the changes are planned and will be managed in a transparent and structured way.

The Service may also wish to explore further embedding the Member Development Charter and the delivery of Member appraisals as part of their programme of ongoing development.

- **Systems and processes keeping pace with strategy and structure changes**

Some of the changes that the Service has implemented over the last two years have been at a rapid pace and there has been a downsizing in corporate staff, with changed responsibilities and a focus on key priority projects. However, LFRS may want to consider whether the systems and processes within the organisation have changed fast enough to keep pace with these new developments. LFRS may wish to explore how to accelerate changes in systems and processes to improve efficiency in the short term and whether improving speed of I.T. connectivity across the various sites could increase productivity.

- **Capacity to keep implementing key projects**

Given the extensive operational improvement programme, together with the significant changes envisaged as a result of reducing reliance on the Retained Duty System (RDS), there may be constraints on the capacity to continue implementing these key projects at the pace envisaged, especially if there is an unforeseen loss of key individuals. LFRS may wish to explore how they can build in a degree of corporate resilience to underpin these key projects.

- **Awareness of performance management at all levels**

LFRS has improved in many areas over a number of years; however, there appeared to be a lack of awareness of performance management at most levels in the organisation. Performance monitoring was good, however, staff had difficulty in articulating how they performed in comparison to other parts of the organisation or to other FRS's. Benchmarking was undertaken on a quarterly basis within the context of Family Group performance comparison. In addition, the Annual Report identifies performance against targets on a year on year basis and in relation to the Family Group. However, where performance was strong it was expressed as an internal measure rather than an external benchmark. LFRS may wish to explore how it could improve the awareness of performance management across the organisation and seek out comparators which offer a degree of granularity for staff so that they are clear when performance is good or weak and why this is the case.

4. Community Risk Management

LFRS identified Community Risk Management as a key area of focus for the peer challenge and the peer team concluded that this was exactly the correct area of focus given the findings. LFRS may wish to explore how an integrated and holistic approach to risk identification, management and mitigation could be introduced in the organisation. A holistic risk methodology, with coherent linkages between corporate risk, financial risk, operational risk and community risk, could further help inform future scenario planning.

The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **10 min attendance time well understood, politically supported and popular with communities**

LFRS offers a universal ten minute attendance time to incidents categorised as 'life risk' and deploys its resources according to this standard. Incidents not categorised as 'life risk' maintain an attendance time of twenty minutes. It was clear that this policy was well understood and popular with its staff, representative bodies and Fire Authority Members. It was also stated that this standard was easily explained and understood by the community. It was also explained on a number of occasions that although differential attendance standards had been discussed the geography and demographic spread of communities within LFRS meant that a universal standard was achievable. On a number of occasions analogies such as a "wheel with spokes" or "doughnut" were used to describe how resources emanating from a relatively central position could achieve the universal attendance time.

- **Cat 1- 5 embedded, well understood and good practice**

LFRS uses the Cat 1-5 process for dealing with specific risks. This process was developed as part of a regional collaboration. Operational crews were very supportive of this system and without fail could use it to articulate and describe their site specific risks. The review team were hugely impressed by the standards of the plans and the knowledge and enthusiasm of all the crews with regards the use of the Cat 1-5 systems. All the plans reviewed by the peer challenge team were of an excellent standard and well understood by the crews on all the stations visited.

The purchase and issuing to Flexi Duty System (FDS) Officers of tablets pre-loaded with risk information was seen as a significant improvement on the previous paper based system which also provided a saving.

- **Good multi agency plans, well tested**

The arrangements that were in place for multi agency working with regards to major incidents and business continuity were well articulated. They had been tested at a recent major demonstration involving organisations such as the English Defence League (EDL) and Unite Against Fascism (UAF). It was clear

that LFRS was an equal and valued partner in the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and major incident planning groups. In the planning arrangements for the EDL/UAF demonstration it was clear that LFRS had led much of the planning and had provided intelligence on the potential risks that would otherwise have been missed.

- **LFRS recognises this needs strengthening and focus for peer challenge well selected**

As stated previously, LFRS is a mature and self aware organisation. It asked for Community Risk Management to be one of the areas for the Peer Team to focus upon because it believed there were some areas it needs to refocus. Those that were interviewed about this were very aware and supportive of using this peer challenge as a positive process in order to drive improvement within the Service.

Areas to explore

- **Identify a selection of preferred risk modelling/data sets and invest in shaping it to mesh with local knowledge and joining up the process to bring focus**

The Service has recognised the limitations of the Fire Service Emergency Cover model (FSEC) and largely moved away from using it. At present a combination of response time data, risks, incident type, local knowledge and professional judgement are used to determine risk modelling decisions. LFRS recognises the need to utilise some alternative means of testing its assumptions around risk modelling. It is beginning to explore the alternative products that are available and recognises the need to overlay its own and others data within a defined risk modelling tool in order to test and drive its assumptions and decisions. Local knowledge was one element that is deemed important within LFRS in driving this process. With regards Site Specific Risks and geographical and demographical risks the peer challenge team found this to be well developed.

Consider progressing the process of identifying a product that provides assurance and correlation of data and local intelligence is continued to procure a suitable product.

- **Integration of risk management – corporate, community, financial, health and safety.**

The peer challenge team found little integration between risks identified within Community Safety, Protection, corporate, community, financial, health and safety. LFRS could consider how these relative risk management processes are integrated. It was stated that a previous restructure had been effective in many ways but it had lost a necessary dedicated Community Risk Management (CRM) resource to inform the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The context of these discussions was not one of saying things were better in the past, rather it was identifying one specific element that a number of individuals now felt needed to be looked at. The Service is wholly aware of this and the need for this resource is a specific area for consideration.

- **LFRS is aware of need for risk based methodology and central guidance for 7(2)(d) - consideration of options**

During the visit the Peer Team were consistently impressed with the plans contained within the Cat 1-5 system relating to site specific risks, fulfilling the Service 7(2) d requirements. In addition, operational personnel's knowledge of the risks and their required actions was impressive. However the Service had identified some issues around the process of developing these plans. A specific LFRS report identifies a need for a risk based methodology for developing and reviewing 7(2) d inspections. It also goes on to identify a need for some central guidance.

These comments appear at odds with the excellent plans that the team found. However, although the plans were excellent operational crews were less clear on areas around review and the corporate policy relating to them. The area to

explore here is not the excellent plans; it is to follow the recommendations within its own report to have defined corporate guidance relating to 7(2) d process. This will provide the necessary governance and guidance to the process to underpin what is already an excellent end product.

- **Refining benchmarking to further drive improvement**

Individuals that were spoken to were able to articulate how performance was managed and targets were set. The Peer team, however, found the feedback inconsistent and were unable to determine if this was due to lack of knowledge and understanding. Late in the review the work that is being done with the CIPFA benchmarking club was shared and the Annual Report (year on year) demonstrated further evidence of benchmarking. Furthermore, LFRS is a key member of the National Benchmarking Club and has recently provided the chair to the group, however, this was not articulated by any of the earlier interviewees.

A reasonable knowledge of the standards which people were measured by was displayed. However, interviewees consistently could not articulate how they knew if they were 'good', they could only identify if they met their own standard. When benchmarking was discussed a number of individuals cited the difficulty of doing direct comparisons because of differences in structure and delivery. However, when asked for detail on this most interviewees conceded they were uncertain but had been told it was generally so. There are difficulties in doing direct comparisons between organisations but LFRS may want to challenge some assumptions that comparisons are not possible or meaningful.

Other Key Areas of Assessment

5. Prevention

LFRS provides a range of safety programmes which deliver against a wide area of vulnerabilities and societal needs. These successful programmes have been effective in making a difference to people and communities and have had a positive effect in raising the importance of the service with its partners, key political and officer stakeholders and communities. The influence that LFRS exerts was made clear by a number of its achievements and confirmed by various partners. The peer challenge team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Good value, innovative programmes, well respected, leverages positive profile for the Service – e.g. Princes Trust**

It was evident that the Service had been very effective at achieving really good value for money in delivering a number of its safety initiatives. Many initiatives had been evaluated and shown to add tangible value to the community at zero or very little cost to the Service. Obvious examples of this are Fireskills, Firecare and Firecadets. The work with the Princes Trust was particularly impressive at changing young people's lives, influencing key partners and providing value for money.

- **First Contact strong multi agency partnership with enthusiasm from staff to learn from it**

The First Contact process is an excellent example of a multi agency partnership designed to achieve the best outcomes for vulnerable individuals in an efficient way. The initiative has been so successful that the original target group of over sixty fives has been broadened. There was also evidence from staff that this initiative was positive culturally. Staff are proud of helping people across a broader range of needs. Staff did state that they supported the initiative and their only recommendation for improvement was that they would appreciate feedback on the individuals concerned. They did understand that this would not always be possible due to issues around data protection.

- **Number of culture campaigns that are targeted to culture risks – e.g. Diwali and a deliberate strategy to recruit multi lingual staff**

The Service has strong links with its communities and understands the different ethnic and cultural influences within those communities. A range of evidence on various cultural campaigns targeted at specific cultural risks was found. One excellent example is the Service consciously implemented a deliberate strategy to recruit multi lingual staff for the Community Safety Team. This was done as recognition of the ethnic diversity of the communities within Leicestershire & Rutland. Whilst there were a number of other examples, the work the Service undertakes in driving down risks during Diwali was impressive.

- **Respond rapidly to very vulnerable cases e.g. hate crime, domestic violence**

The Service has a process for targeting vulnerable people. In addition to this it recognises that certain cases such as Domestic Violence, Hate Crime and high risk Police referrals require a different approach. The Service has systems in place to respond to incidents such as these in a much more bespoke and rapid manner.

Evidence of evaluation of a number of Community Safety initiatives was provided. What was evident is that these evaluations are used. The Service is happy to build upon initiatives that work. It is equally happy to stop initiatives that it has demonstrated are not adding enough value. An example of this is Firehouse.

Areas to explore

- **Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) targeting has evolved – options to consider future strategy based on CRM decisions**

LFRS has evolved its HFSC targeting and delivery process over the past few years. It recognised that its original universal offer via a free phone number produced a scattered delivery model not related to vulnerability. This process was then refined to identify vulnerable individuals using Mosaic profiling. This has now moved to an approach of using local intelligence at station level and through partners to identify the vulnerable.

The station visits identified that station personnel were not very clear on specifically where they needed to target within their communities. Personnel did, however demonstrate a good understanding of what lifestyle and demographic factors made an individual vulnerable. The difficulty they had was identifying individuals. In some cases large communities of tens of thousands of people were involved. Operational Crews expressed a wish for more data and specific intelligence to help them target their HFSC delivery.

- **Breaking through the barrier of data sharing with partners**

Data sharing was mentioned in a number of interviews. The Service has a willingness to share data and is frustrated by its partners on occasions. The Service has identified data sources which could improve its delivery and improve outcomes for the community across a broad range. The Service has been frustrated by unwillingness in some circumstances and hugely unwieldy governance processes in others. Whilst all these difficulties are recognised there is an obvious desire within LFRS to get this data and utilise it for a social good.

- **Embedding policy on safeguarding**

LFRS Community Safety Strategy means that it is engaging with much more of the community than it has done previously. As a result of this it has recognised that knowledge and implementation of safeguarding procedures are important. LFRS has a specific process in situations involving safeguarding. When operational crews and other staff were questioned about this process their answers were quite varied and inconsistent. However, whilst individual's answers may have been inconsistent with the policy it was felt by the peer challenge team that the answers given would still have achieved the desired and correct outcome. The Service is planning to undertake further safeguarding training with staff which will ensure the existing policy is understood.

- **Future of universal offer at key stage II?**

At present LFRS delivers an extensive Key Stage II visit programme into schools. There is a debate within the Service whether the offer of visiting all

schools is the right thing to do or whether resources should be focused at more at risk areas. This requires a strategic determination and communicating.

- **Use of social media**

LFRS may wish to explore how social marketing or social media could help them to deliver core community safety messages or do more effective targeting.

6. Protection

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

Strengths

- **Community Safety team trained to identify protection issues e.g. common areas**

LFRS Community Safety Teams often visit premises such as Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs), Flats etc where they provide community safety advice within the flat. The Service identified that often the common areas of these buildings presented more risks than those within the flats.

Consequently, the Service trained its Community Safety Team in order to raise their skill and knowledge levels of the risks associated with common areas and how those risks impact on the residents. This increase in skills has led to tangible enhancements in the protection of such premises and had a positive cultural impact by creating stronger relationships between Community Safety staff and Protection staff. **The peer challenge team believed this is notable practice**

- **Mobile and home working**

LFRS have implemented an innovative approach to home and mobile working of its protection officers. The Service recognises that the initiative is still relatively new but early indications are that the process is providing a more flexible working environment for staff and a more efficient delivery for the Service.

- **Quality checks on audits - A1 assessors**

The Service provided good evidence of how it checks the quality of its protection activities. There is a defined process in place for qualitative analysis utilising both the A1 assessor process and management audits by team leaders.

- **Risk critical training in modern methods of construction – strengthening of links between fire safety and crews**

LFRS has utilised its protection staff to provide training to operational personnel on the risks created by Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). The effectiveness of this training was obvious. Operational Crews were asked about MMC on all visits and their knowledge of the subject, the risks and their subsequent actions were excellent. Furthermore, it was obvious that the operational crews and protection staff had developed a much closer relationship with protection staff as a result of the training.

- **Out of hours cover positively valued by crews**

There was equally positive feedback from operational crews on the introduction of an out of hours service by protection staff. They were universally supportive of the change and provided numerous examples of situations where advice had been given over the phone or where protection officers had attended. There was a confidence that the introduction of an out of hours service improved their confidence and also provided a better service for protecting the community. This change was also seen as having positive cultural benefits. Again operational staff felt they had a closer relationship with protection staff as a result of it.

- **Drop in Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) through call challenging in control**

The number of Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) within the Service has reduced. Initially there was some confusion whether this reduction was due to work with the Alarm Receiving Centres (ARCs) or as a result of challenge from the Services Control. It was determined that work is ongoing with the ARCs but the main cause was the work the Fire Protection Department had done with Control. LFRS Control actively challenges UwFS and as a consequence the number has reduced.

Areas to explore

- **Increasing data and intelligence on premises**

The Service has recognised that there is a disparity between the numbers of premises stored on CFRMIS compared to the number of premises paying business rates. There are approximately 20,000 premises missing. The Service is actively working to identify these premises and build them into their risk based inspection programme.

- **Future role of crews in providing qualitative information to inform protection programme**

The Service has provided some training to operational staff on the subject of Fire Protection. It does not intend to use them to undertake full audits. However, there was some confusion between operational crews, protection officers and senior managers regarding what role they will undertake. Some individuals believed that they were capable of and could be doing basic qualitative checks which informed the protection strategy, others believed this is not the case. It is worth considering a corporate policy on this issue and communicating it.

- **Comparative performance and benchmarking**

As mentioned earlier in this report there was little evidence provided of performance management. Performance measurement was articulated but individuals could not say how they knew their performance was good or not. Managers use the business systems Views and CFRMIS to measure performance but this was articulated inconsistently. It was evident that there was little confidence in regional or national data and this issue was compounded by the fact that individuals did not believe direct comparisons applied. However, no alternative measure of performance was demonstrated.

- **Draw out the protection strategy to show its prominence in IRMP**

It was recognised by a number of interviewees that the existing service protection strategy is brief and in need of refreshing. It was stated that this is due to be undertaken and that the business community will be consulted on the new strategy.

- **Prosecution outcomes – exploring neighbouring FRS's**

The Service has undertaken a number of prosecutions under the Fire Safety Order. Whilst the Service had always been successful, the prosecutions were seen as expensive for the Service and the outcomes often ineffectual in achieving an incentive for businesses to conform and so fulfil the public interest test. It was stated by individuals that other services in the region had been more successful in achieving significant fines and recovering costs. It may be worth the Service looking at how other services have undertaken prosecutions.

7. Response

An area that contained an example of notable practice with the peer challenge team identifying the following:

Strengths

- **Retained resilience team concept**

The retained resilience team concept is an excellent idea, which has brought about demonstrable benefits to the community. This positive idea has had a number of effects, including –

- Increased availability of on call fire appliances
- Helped to strengthen the relationship between on call and wholetime staff.
- The team are seen as very positive and are driven to making a difference in the community.

The peer challenge team believe this is notable practice

- **Investment in equipment and appliances very well received**

The investment in the equipment and fire appliances has been well received by all, with staff recognising the commitment that the Fire Authority has made.

There was a blanket 10 minute response time standard to 'life risk' emergency incidents across the Authority area, this is well understood by all.

Risk information for crews which is determined to be at level 3 and level 4 is available in an effective format, with key actions identified and it provides comprehensive information to enable key decisions to be made in the early stages of an incident.

- **Flexible crewing arrangements and duty systems**

There are good and flexible arrangements for the crewing of appliances across the Service, this was evidenced through a number of interviews.

Partnership work with the Local Resilience Forum is established, with the Service taking the lead in different areas and participating in a number of multi agency events.

Areas to explore

- **Integration of risk management**

LFRS may wish to explore reviewing the re-inspection process for provision of risk information for crews at stage 1 & 2 to ensure that the process is understood by all and there is a standardised policy for the re-inspection of risks.

A number of staff raised issues around the use of information systems in relation to the risk information process.

LFRS could consider how legal rulings in relation to proposed different duty systems will affect their long term plans for the provision of Response services.

The continuity of the delivery of the service to the public is dependent upon a number of key people within the Service, with the number of changes not only to pensions, but other changes LFRS could consider how succession planning could help to improve resilience

8. Health and Safety

Strengths

- **Investment in occupation health has delivered real results**

The investment in the occupational health arrangements has seen real results in attendance management and has also realised financial benefits. This can be seen as a real positive for the organisation.

- **All relevant staff trained in investigation techniques**

All relevant staff are trained in appropriate Health and Safety investigation techniques and all that were spoken to understood their roles and responsibilities.

- **Demonstrable link from analysis of accident reporting**

There is a demonstrable link from the analysis of accident reporting to the training of appropriate staff to ensure that accidents are reduced. There were clear examples given which identified trends in accidents and how these were reduced through a training plan to all staff.

Areas to explore

- **Embedding system to ensure staff receive and understand the messages**

Although the responsibility to relay key Health and Safety messages which relate to risk is devolved to local managers, there is no system in place to ensure that all staff receive and understand these messages. Local managers agreed that they could not guarantee whether or not these key messages had been transmitted or understood by all staff.

- **Improving understanding of near misses and reporting**

The significance of reporting of near miss events is not fully understood throughout the organisation, with staff recognising that work still had to be completed in this area.

9. Training and Development

The peer challenge team were incredibly impressed by the standard of training within LFRS. There are excellent and numerous pieces of evidence demonstrating that the Service training provision is based upon informed risk analysis. Examples of how current training is informed and prioritised by Dear Chief Officer Letters (DCOL's), trends, appraisals, and accidents are clear. Two obvious examples amongst many were the Services investment in Fire Behaviour training after the Britannia Tyres incident and the investment in a cable entrapment rig as a result of Harrow Court findings

The peer team identified the following:

Strengths

- **Hugely positive – evidence of risk identification, training and understanding – quality provision**

Frequently when staff were asked what the best thing about LFRS was they easily articulated how the Service had improved from a poorly funded and equipped service (a number of years ago) to one that had some of the best equipment and training in the country. There was a resounding endorsement from staff that training was good and responded to need and risk. Staff were particularly complimentary of hot fire training, stating that it had enhanced Firefighters perceptions of risk and ultimately improved Firefighter Safety. More than one individual described it as “brilliant”.

There was a tangible sense of confidence across the organisation that it's staff were well trained in risk critical elements and that they would have a good knowledge of risk critical areas. On all visits to stations operational crews were asked to discuss the following areas:

- i. Modern Methods of Construction
- ii. Sandwich Panels
- iii. Risks associated with drug farms
- iv. Cable Entrapment.

The levels of knowledge and understanding demonstrated was excellent at all stations, wholtime, day crewed and on call.

- **Prioritisation of NOS – 3,4,5 and 6 risk critical elements – pragmatic and effective**

Whilst the Service recognises the importance of all of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) it has prioritised and emphasised the importance of risk critical elements of the NOS. It ensures competence in elements 3, 4, 5 and 6 as a priority. This is efficient, pragmatic and produces Firefighters who are safer sooner.

- **Well developed selection process from Firefighter to Watch Manager**

The Service demonstrated a well developed selection process from Firefighter through to Watch Manager. The process was logical and understood and supported by those interviewed. Most individuals were able to describe the process of getting a line managers endorsement, a demonstration of competence, demonstration of formal underpinning knowledge tested through an Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) qualification and a job related test. The job related test concept was particularly well supported. Individuals wanted to be tested on activities related to their role rather than ones that had parallels but was not Fire Service related.

- **Blended strategy for recruitment with no differentiation between Wholetime (WT) and Retain Duty System (RDS)**

The Services 'blended' approach to recruitment was also seen as logical, pragmatic and efficient. Interviewees described the logic of recruiting a third of trainees from inter brigade transfers, a third from on call migration and a final new third of new staff. Staff were easily able to articulate how this approach provided a good balance of value for money, skills retention and new personnel.

- **Simple, innovative practice – drivers and Breathing Apparatus (BA)**

LFRS has a number of prescriptive control measures in place which support Firefighter Safety. A simple red dot on Firefighters helmet indicates that they are relatively new and should not be used as a team leader in a Breathing Apparatus team. The facility also exists to apply this control measure to an individual who is not new but has given concern regarding their ability to lead a team. In addition the Service has a process of prescriptive adherence to completing one day BA training and Fire Behaviour Training.

- **Gold, silver, bronze – well developed and understood**

As stated earlier in this report there was evidence of how the Service delivers its Gold, Silver and Bronze training. Further to this it was shown how this training manifested itself in reality when individuals were coordinated through the Local Resilience Forum, Strategic Coordinating Group and Tactical Coordinating Group during the recent demonstration between the English Defence League and Unite Against Fascism.

- **Policy of watch based instructors and an innovative use of trainers – good value for money and on call**

The Service has an innovative and value for money way of populating the required numbers of instructional staff. In addition to its dedicated full time instructors, LFRS employs eight staff on a part time basis to be training instructors. The individuals are paid at a flat rate and are used in demand and

as needed for approximately thirty days a year. This on demand relationship provides great flexibility and value for the Service. In addition it appeared that there were positive benefits to the stations in having suitably trained instructors based out on stations in their normal day job. **The peer challenge team believe this is notable practice.**

The Service has introduced a really simple procedure which will in time make it more efficient and save time and money. All new Firefighters undertake an LGV medical at the same time as doing their entry medical. The medical takes just a few more minutes but is valid until they are 45. **Whilst this is a very simple thing it is again recognised as notable practice.**

- **15 minutes of fame**

Again another area that the peer challenge team felt was worthy of notable practice. LFRS 15 minutes of fame, where junior officers present on a subject matter to FRA Members prior to the Authorities meetings was an excellent example that would help develop staff across the organisation, cement relationships between officers and FRA Members and add to their understanding of relevant issues.

Areas to explore

- **Scheduling to meet needs of different duty systems**

There were very few areas to explore which were not strengths in training. Staff on the new day crewed system stated that as the system was new the Service needed to appreciate that longer planning was required in order to arrange their training. There was confidence that this was understood and was improving.

- **Sustainability of hot fire training**

Staff were concerned that there was a risk to the site where the Fire Behaviour Training was conducted. They were hugely supportive and appreciative of the training and wanted to ensure its future.

- **LFRS training academy**

Finally, staff believed that the training in LFRS was better than commissioning it from other services and asked the Peer Team (on many occasions) to say they wanted their own Training Academy. They did realise that there were many financial constraints in the current climate but still believed this would improve the Service.

10. Call Management and Incident Support

The peer challenge team were positive around the area of Call Management and Incident Support and identified the following:

Strengths

- **Staff are fully engaged in the change process and are committed to delivering an excellent service to the community.**

Staff in this area were overwhelmingly positive about the changes that are being implemented; there was an enthusiasm and aspiration to be the best control room in the country, which is admirable. The managers in the control room were clear that their role was evolving and they were being listened to in terms of the change process.

- **There has been an increase in the standard for call handling times.**

The team were able to validate that the standard for call handling times had got better, with managers explaining the process and also identifying a number of issues which would influence future performance.

Managers and staff all saw the benefits in this improved standard and had used the long period of uncertainty relating to the national Fire Control project in a positive manner. However managers questioned the validity of the national standard and expressed concern about raising standards in the future when compared to the national CFOA standard.

- **There are arrangements in place for ensuring that communities who's first language isn't English can still be responded to**

Staff were able to identify the different challenges surrounding taking calls from people who couldn't speak English and explained the steps that were in place to ensure that this issue was overcome to enable the mobilisation of fire appliances to emergencies.

- **Work done with other departments to reduce the number of automatic fire alarms**

There has been a reduction in the number of mobilisations made to alarms caused by unwanted fire signals and hoax calls, this is due largely to the work done between control staff and prevention staff. Managers had the desire to reduce this burden further and suggested that more work be done with the Alarm Receiving Centres to ensure a consistent approach is established.

- **The quality of calls is regularly audited with measures put in place to improve individual performance.**

The team was given evidence which highlighted how the control management team were auditing calls and how this had improved performance.

There was evidence to show how managers had tackled poor performance to ensure that the standards attained were at the highest possible level. There was good evidence of performance measures being monitored and steps to rectify issues were taken at an appropriate time.

Areas to explore

- **Consider resilience of staff to deliver new shared control system**

LFRS may wish to consider the resilience of staff for the future delivery of the new control room, particularly in relation to sharing progress with others to reduce any risk. Issues were also raised about the reporting structure for the project, although this was not seen as a high risk, the organisation may want to consider reviewing this to ensure that it is appropriate and that communication is maintained to allow for the delivery of the control project.

- **Consider how training for control staff can mirror provision for ops crews**

The previous arrangements for the training of staff was considered to be effective and the removal of the training position was seen as a retrograde step.

LFRS may wish to consider whether training systems and support such as Electronic Performance & Development Reviews (EPDR's) which are available to operational staff, should be available to control staff. This system would help the control managers to further improve performance.

- **Options for training suite for new control**

The idea of a separate training suite for the control room could be considered within the new control project, this was identified as a real positive in the now defunct Fire Control project. Control staff also highlighted that this could be an additional source of revenue in the future.

11. Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers and staff. It is clear that Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service has come a long way and made significant improvement. There is enthusiasm and confidence for the future and the peer team believe that by harnessing this and by applying prudent planning assumptions LFRS can continue on its improvement journey.

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

Gary Hughes – Programme Manager

Local Government Association

E-mail - gary.hughes@local.gov.uk

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

www.local.gov.uk