

22 NOVEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: NATIONAL RESILIENCE AUDIT**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of a recent audit undertaken by the National Resilience Advisory Team (NRAT) which examined the effectiveness of this service's strategies, policies and procedures that underpin the New Dimension programme, with specific reference to the Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) assets in meeting the National Resilience programme expectations for responding to national level incidents.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members are aware the events of 11th September 2001 led to a transformation in how the emergency services of the UK respond to large-scale emergencies through the New Dimensions programme. This programme was designed to enable the Fire and Rescue Services in England to provide an effective response to incidents not just of a terrorist nature, but also to other disasters such as flooding and chemical incidents. This Authority hosts a number of these specialist vehicles.
- 2.2 One ongoing challenge presented by the New Dimension programme is that central government needed an assurance process which validates the policies and procedures in place to support the efficient use of New Dimension assets to a uniform standard across the country.
- 2.3 In order to achieve this operational assurance a National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) was established in June 2008 with the remit to examine how the New Dimension resources are being utilised by those Authorities that host them.
- 2.4 To this end, the national team conducted an audit within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) in June 2010 and their report has now been published. The key findings of the report are set out below for the consideration of Members.

3 NATIONAL RESILIENCE AUDIT TEAM KEY FINDINGS

- 3.1 The assurance team visited several locations, including service headquarters, a community fire station, the technical services centre in Gateshead and the training centre. The overall result of the audit confirmed that the service is well advanced in the development of the USAR capability and the evidence presented provided the audit team with a high level of confidence that TWFRS can satisfactorily discharge its statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue

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Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007 in relation to the USAR capability.

- 3.2 The team also noted that, throughout the assurance process, it was evident that there exists a significant commitment to supporting the USAR capability, which has enabled it to be developed at an impressive rate. As a result of this commitment very robust arrangements exist to support any national request for the USAR capability to be deployed from this service. The development of this capability to an advanced level in so many areas has only been possible through the investment of time, effort and financial resources.
- 3.3 Furthermore, the audit also identified some key areas of notable practice in relation to the subject areas under review. In particular, it was noted that the service has reviewed the crewing model for USAR, this development has resulted in a highly motivated and stable USAR team with attrition rates significantly below the national average. The structured and progressive approach to USAR training was also deemed to be of a very high standard.
- 3.4 The audit team also identified one area of development which relates to specialist training courses for a small number of staff, this is linked to the change in the crewing model and plans are in place to address the shortfall.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The formal findings of the report have been supported by personnel from the team who commented upon the professionalism of the Authority's staff throughout the review
- 4.2 The audit report, assessing the Urban Search & Rescue function in meeting the National Resilience programme expectations, has demonstrated the high standards to which the service operates.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Members are asked to;
- b) Consider the content of this report, and;
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- National Resilience Assurance Process; Final Report for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service; June 2010.