



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Tyne and Wear Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Report

January 2014

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Introduction, Context and Purpose

Introduction

This report presents the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) which took place in September-October 2014.

The sector led peer challenge process is an element of the LGA's approach to self-regulation and improvement, which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionize the way they evaluate and improve services. Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by, and delivered for, the sector through the use of peers as 'critical friends'. It is not a form of sector-led inspection but rather, a mechanism to provide fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it meets its operational purpose, is efficient and effective and provides value for money.

Structured into what the peer challenge team considered to be either key strengths or areas for exploration, the report provides the team's findings against the three key strategic questions:

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

The report also provides a focus on the following Operational Assessment (OpA) Key Areas of Assessment (KAAs):

- Health and Safety
- Training and Development
- Community Risk management
- Response
- Prevention
- Protection
- Call Management and Incident Support

Within this framework, TWFRS specifically asked the team to focus on:

1. **Protection** – with a particular focus on how the FRS engages partners and stakeholders effectively in its protection activities. Key question: How well does TWFRS support and enforce?

2. **Response** – with a particular focus on operational effectiveness and improving performance to ensure fire fighter safety and improve operational response.
3. **Training and Development** – looking at the way that TWFRS delivers whole organisational training including organisational development, leadership and succession planning

The Fire Peer Challenge (FPC) is an element of sector-led improvement. The TWFRS FPC took place from 30 September to 3 October 2014 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, observations, focus groups and visits to fire stations and community projects. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, staff, volunteers, front line firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

Throughout the peer challenge, the team were given every assistance and all requests for further information were fully satisfied. Everyone the team met was fully engaged with the process and appeared open and honest. This should be recognised as a significant organisational strength outside of that which would normally be captured during the OpA. Prior to the on-site visit, the peer team undertook background reading to familiarise itself with TWFRS. This included the TWFRS OpA self-assessment and other supporting documentation.

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 aims to help Fire Authorities strengthen local accountability and support 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

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 TWFRS was:

Chief Fire Officer Simon Pilling (West Yorkshire FRS)

Councillor Darrell Pulk (Chair, Nottinghamshire Fire Authority)

Assistant Chief Fire Officer John Roberts (South Yorkshire FR)

Area Manager Steve McLernon (Derbyshire FRS)

Ernest Opuni (LGA Peer Challenge Manager)

3. Executive Summary

Tyne and Wear FRS clearly focuses on understanding risk and planning to ensure that resources are targeted effectively and efficiently. This is reflected in the Service's IRMP where there is a clear commitment to ensuring that any changes to the shape and operation of the Service recognises the importance of investing in prevention and that the organisation has a clear commitment to maintaining a high level of response in terms of quality and speed.

The Service can demonstrate clearly how its work with partners and communities is based on achieving common goals and adding value. There is a consistent backdrop for this aspiration, which is firmly founded on continuing to improve performance and efficiency whilst valuing the Service's staff and keeping them safe. The stated vision for the Service is 'Creating the Safest Community' and it is evident that this provides the reference point for all it delivers.

The Service demonstrated that it uses its knowledge of its diverse communities (and risk) in targeting campaigns and resources towards the most vulnerable. TWFRS is highly regarded by its partners who welcome the opportunities to work with the Service in delivering the best possible outcomes for communities in a collaborative fashion.

There is high regard for the political and professional leadership of the organisation and there is obvious synergy in how these two elements of the organisation's leadership drive the organisation forward. The relationship is very much a supportive one and the stability in the political leadership allows for the Service to plan for the future with some certainty. The relationship with the Fire Brigades Union is a positive one based on pragmatism and a willingness to work collectively in the interest of what is best for the Service moving forward.

Staff attest to the positive experience of being employees of TWFRS and there is effective buy-in to the future direction and the choices which have to be made along the way. This has been achieved in no small part due to the proactive efforts to communicate as clearly and effectively as possible with all staff about the stages of the journey. TWFRS is very self-aware and enjoys capable and engaged middle management input to the organisation's future direction. Community risk management and Fire Protection are particular areas of strength for TWFRS

The Authority has shown a willingness to take difficult decisions, based on options developed in an evidence based way. Given the future challenges facing the Authority, this approach will continue to be needed and developed further, through a strong collective focus on the longer term strategic direction. The Service will continue to benefit in the Authority developing the strategic direction and options at an early stage

In relation to Community Risk Management, the team would encourage TWFRS to ensure that in addressing its capacity to continue delivering and maintaining performance it continues to encourage new ways of working.

There remain some challenges in accessing and sharing data with key agencies such as Health and this would be an area for focus moving forward.

Whilst there is a clear commitment to communicating with staff as clearly as possible, it will be important to ensure that key messages from the leadership are readily understood by staff. There may be more to do to fully engage senior management outside of SMT.

4. Leadership, Governance and Corporate Capacity

4.1 How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?

Areas of strength

- There is good evidence that TWFRS is using its knowledge of diverse communities and risk to target campaigns towards the most vulnerable, which aligns to the corporate aim 'Creating the Safest Community'.
- The 'Safetyworks!' project has enabled TWFRS to engage with local citizens from the ages of '5-85' in an exciting and innovative way.
- The Service supports and is supported by a number of local partners who hold TWFRS in high esteem. They value the contribution of the Service in the achievement of their own organisational outcomes as well as improving the safety of local people.
- Clear evidence of pride and commitment in all aspects of community safety work that is clearly embedded at an operational level.
- Creative use of operational resources to optimise operational response and resilience

TWFRS's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) takes full account of the national situation in relation to reducing resources across the public sector and the impact this will have on the future finances of the organisation. Additionally, the Service is very clearly aware of the various local factors which it needs to consider going forward. The organisation's ability to address these challenges is enhanced by the close and inclusive relationship which exists between Principal Officers and Area Managers of the organisation.

This interface is characterised by the encouragement of the generation of diverse views in a culture of constructive challenge.

Members of the Fire Authority are involved in consultation and fully understand that options will need to be considered. They play a significant part in developing and implementing the timetable of actions identified as appropriate for TWFRS moving forwards and it is clear that they are involved in the proposal construction process by being informed throughout.

The Fire Authority has taken a number of difficult decisions in recent years, linked to the need to balance available resources and community risk, in times when the Authority has been faced with significant budget reductions. Members make decisions based upon evidence and engage in dialogue with officers around the options available. This approach needs to continue and develop as new challenges emerge.

The Fire Authority monitors the implementation of the IRMP including the 4 phase action plan for changes to the operational response.

The Chief Fire Officer is a visible and well-regarded face of the Senior Management Team and the Service overall, one who demonstrates positive commitment and presence.

TWFRS has a long standing history of 'Listening Events' which are viewed by all in the Service as being both helpful and productive elements of the change process for the organisation.

There is a strong performance management culture in TWFRS bolstered by effective practices developed against key indicators. Performance Action Groups (PAGs) provide a key component of the performance management system

Areas to explore

- Is TWFRS actively pursuing means to influence all of the outcomes that it would be well placed to deliver for communities? (e.g. wider Health and Well being)
- Continue to explore ways of improving access to vulnerable people data to further enhance targeting of resources.
- Further explore opportunities to make better use of latent capacity through new ways of working at an operational level.

The Senior Management Team (comprising Principal Officers and Area Managers) appears to be keenly focussed on both strategic and tactical matters. The team would encourage the Service to consider whether a reconfiguration of this group would enable Principal Officers and the Fire Authority to become more strategically aligned. This could involve/enable Area Managers and Group Managers working more closely together to take more of a lead in tactical and operational matters. Such a relationship may lead to a more active and continuous role by middle/senior management in identifying future opportunities for greater operational efficiencies across the Service.

4.2 How effective is the leadership and governance?

Areas of strength

- Supportive relationship between Members of the Authority and the professional leadership of the Service (e.g. 4 phase action plan).
- Authority benefits from being led by an experienced and respected Chair supported by an influential and prominent Vice-Chair
- TWFRS benefits from strong professional leadership which engages at all levels of the Service.
- Plans for the future reflect a good awareness of the financial challenges which the Service faces and needs to manage.
- The IRMP contributes to 'future proofing' of the Service in challenging times.
- TWFRS is a self-aware organisation which is committed to better understanding what it can improve and how best to achieve this.
- Clear visible leadership is demonstrated by the CFO and the rest of SMT - valued by staff (e.g. Listening Events)
- Close and inclusive relationship across SMT (typified by the generation of views through constructive challenge)

There is strong political leadership demonstrated by Members on the Fire Authority and their support for the IRMP is clear. There is strong sign-up to the future direction from the top of the organisation and the Authority strongly support the Chief Fire Officer and the Senior Management Team, which allows for the leadership to present a strong and united front.

The team found recognition that there are further opportunities to develop these relationships (to ensure full utilisation of the talents of FRA members) and consideration could be given to how this might be achieved. It was also noted that the Fire Authority have not constitutionally formalised a Chief Executive role linked to the operational command position of Chief Fire Officer.

The view across all levels is that TWFRS is a good organisation to work for and that the Authority is considered to be a good employer. Service Reviews are all about 'doing with, rather than doing to' and crews feel well informed, reflecting positively on the practice of the leadership proactively communicating with staff through a number of mediums such as personal emails.

The Fire Authority is stable and settled and this offer benefits to TWFRS in its ability to take forward longer term planning options. The CFO and Principal Officers are a diverse and talented team who place great emphasis on good communication underpinned by an approach of clearly valuing their people in all they do.

Moreover, they remain optimistic and confident that they can find solutions going forward and are fully focussed upon addressing challenges by taking all parts of the organisation with them in their future direction. The consideration of being more involved with the new Combined Authority might present an opportunity for the FRA to become more strategically involved in collaborative opportunities.

The introduction of new local officials of the Fire Brigades Union presents opportunity to continue to reshape the relationship with the Fire Authority in a positive fashion.

Areas to explore

- Consider the benefits of formalising the Authority's involvement in longer term corporate planning at an earlier stage.
- Explore opportunities for Principal Officers to formally operate more strategically.
- Consider formalising the role and responsibilities of a Chief Executive & Chief Fire Officer position to better reflect Member-Officer arrangements and relationships operating in other Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Whilst engagement with staff is well-received it is important that communication and/or consultation is clear and effective (e.g. TRVs and 15 hour days).
- Continue effective industrial relations with newly appointed officials.

The team encountered some strongly held views among some frontline staff and the FBU that the FRA continues to implement Government policy with significant impact to front line service provision. There is a recognition and acknowledgement that the narrative relating to the reasons for decisions being made needs to be fully shared across the entire organisation to ensure that no part of the workforce is unclear about the new context in which the Service is operating.

There was some evidence that Fire Station personnel views are being shaped by their communications from and engagement with the FBU in relation to the change agenda and the IRMP. It will be important for a more balanced view of the reasons for future direction to become embedded in order to allay some of the nervousness which seems to exist about the future (for example some uncertainty about how TRVs will work in practice)

There may be more to do with the workforce of TWFRS to allay any feelings of 'review fatigue' or splintered views due to Industrial Action.

4.3 How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

Areas of strength

- TWFRS has a strong people focus which is reflected in the positive attitude of staff, which helps to enhance organisational capacity
- The Service remains focused on the management and resourcing of community risk in difficult times.
- The Service is managing community risk in a more targeted way which will contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.
- Current and future resource and capacity appears sufficient to reflect the downward trend of incidents and reducing community risk over the medium term
- TWFRS can be confident that operational resources are sufficient to maintain and improve firefighter safety.

All aspects of organisational resourcing appear to be well aligned towards progressing broader strategy and improved performance development and it is clear this is taking place with strong ownership and drive from SMT.

The Area Manager tier of the organisation describe a very strong and unified SMT and they recognize that they would be able to contribute further to the leadership of the organization without impacting or compromising their relationship with principal officers.

TWFRS is very self-aware and cognisant of the need to further engage senior managers beyond SMT in formulating and delivering key messages and plans to the workforce.

Areas to explore

- Moving forward the Service could consider the development of more on-call firefighters
- The Service could explore new ways of working for operational provision as part of implementing the review of operational response.
- The Service may wish to further explore opportunities to maximise efficiency and increase capacity through greater collaboration with partners.
- Review the first and second call command arrangements to better reflect Gold (strategic) and Silver (tactical) resourcing.
- Review the provision of FDOs and better utilise the capacity of Day Duty station managers

Whilst a lot of work has taken place to include and engage with senior managers beyond SMT, it is also acknowledged that there remains more to be done to fully include this tier of the organisation in driving forward future direction. There was a view expressed by some at this level that their voices could be better heard and considered and that they felt disconnected from the senior levels of the organisation at times and who appeared to not always have a full appreciation of the pressures faced by middle managers.

There may be some negative impacts at Watch level resulting from the freeze on promotion and progression. There is a feeling amongst some staff members at this level of the organisation that their efforts and views are not being recognised fully causing some frustration. There may be more to do in better communicating the reasons why this is a necessary part of the overall plan.

KAAAs

5.1 (i) Community Risk Management and (ii) Prevention

Areas of strength

- Authority Members and Principal Officers are seen to be strong leaders of the prevention agenda.
- The FRS Prevention team are highly thought of by external partners.
- Staff are fully committed to and value the targeting of resources to address the vulnerable people and places agenda.
- TWFRS improves its targeting by proactively challenging its approach where lessons are learned from incidents.
- The success of the Regent Court project is evidence of effective protection and risk management at a local level.
- TWFRS is highly valued and respected within the LRF community
- The Service and LRF partners exercise against the Community Risk Register and National risk register to ensure interoperability.

In relation to Community Risk Management, there are positives in the Service's response to continuing to improve performance in the face of reducing resources which are being achieved through robust organisational reviews focused on making TWFRS more sustainable into the future. There is clear evidence-based working and smarter targeting being brought to bear on this work.

As regards the Prevention agenda there is strong focus on post-fire multi-agency reviews which is strengthening the quality of case studies and information gained during Partnership interviews. This enhanced delivery of prevention activity is contributing positively to the achievement of better outcomes for the citizens for whom TWFRS work.

The Service continues to make positive progress with data sharing and is fully aware of what still remains to be done. The Service's strong ethos of partnership working provides improved and more effective access to the most vulnerable. It is also very clear that the operational workforce has fully embraced community safety principles and that this drives all that they do. As regards prevention and protection operational crews are fully committed, and sufficiently trained, to better deliver wider protection and prevention activities.

The Safety Works! community education initiative, which covers a broad number of generations (from 5-85 year olds) is an excellent facility. It deserves even greater effort to further explore funding opportunities in order to preserve what is clearly a very valuable asset for the communities of Tyne and Wear.

There is a clear shared ownership across the Service's Prevention, Response and Protection functions of the drive to continually improve performance (as assessed against clearly identified performance indicators). This work is very effectively coordinated and as a result of this linked up approach resources are being optimised whilst risk is being driven down.

Areas to explore:

- Consider ways of strengthening the communication across the private rented sector accessing the most vulnerable.
- Explore greater use of volunteers as part of the longer term community safety strategy.
- Continue to explore ways of improving data sharing protocols to enhance the targeting of the most vulnerable in community.
- Consider further engagement in the wider Health and Wellbeing agenda across all districts.
- Quantify and qualify the actual risk based work load associated with prevention activity over the longer term.

In relation to Community Risk Management, the team would encourage TWFRS to ensure that in addressing its capacity to continue delivering and maintaining performance it continues to encourage to new ways of working.

There remain some challenges in accessing and sharing data with key agencies such as Health. Addressing this issue will involve closer collaborative working arrangements which would be mutually beneficial in building a richer picture of the vulnerable communities the Service is committed to focusing its resources.. This should further enhance TWFRS's ability to identify and present evidenced based actions moving forward.

In seeking to address barriers to receiving information from partners, TWFRS could look at national work involving the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and NHS England where better information flow has contributed to improved outcomes for communities (the national home safety committee) elsewhere.

There may be alternative ways of working which could release further 'latent' capacity and the team would encourage TWFRS to continue to explore such options.

As regards the Prevention agenda there may be opportunities the Service wishes to explore whereby it engages FRA Members and Local Authority officers to look at selective licensing schemes for private routes to include CFS interventions.

TWFRS is engaging with the Health and Wellbeing Boards in its area of coverage but it was not always clear as to how significant a priority this work is to the Service. There may be opportunities for the Service to have a more positive and profound impact on the wider community safety and health and well-being agenda through stronger engagement on these Boards – the Service may wish to further explore opportunities to do this.

There may be more the Service could do to engage with tenants in privately rented accommodation. There are opportunities TWFRS could explore relating to changes to the Energy Act and also further build on opportunities for installing smoke plus alarms in private rented properties.

5.2 Protection

Areas of Strength

- Highly effective and well-resourced Protection function.
- Protection officers are effective in reducing the burden on business (including SMEs) hence supporting economic growth
- TWFRS's Protection Team is highly regarded across a wide range of partners and the business community (e.g. Housing providers, Hospital Trusts, commercial sector etc.)
- Excellent examples of sharing operational intelligence between Protection, Prevention and Response (first person over the threshold).
- Effective use of operational crews in Protection activities enhancing community and fire fighter safety (health checks).
- Intelligence-led risk based approach informs the deployment of resources.
- Good examples of cross departmental cooperation in engaging BME business community in applying the FSO.

This represents an area of particular strength for TWFRS. There was evidence of some excellent productive relationships with the business community and local hospital trusts. Alongside the significant reduction in UWFAs, the impact of some of this activity is to reduce the burden on business by using Protection activity as a means of supporting growth. A strong example of this was clear through the effective partnership with Sainsbury's.

The Service demonstrates a very good focus on business engagement and good connectivity to national working groups within the Chief Fire Officers Association, which is leading to better outcomes for the business community and the public. The Service has a clear focus on supporting economic development by ensuring the burden placed upon businesses through regulation is minimised wherever possible. There are also good examples of the Service seeking to proactively engage with the BME business community especially through Voluntary and Community sector groups.

TWFRS has good policies and procedures in place along with robust Risk Based Inspection Planning (RBIP) arrangements. The Service's officers are extremely skilled with strong technical knowledge. The team also found good evidence of the Service sharing intelligence gleaned from RBIP via analysis of data between its Response and Protection staff and in doing so effectively informing future direction.

With regard to the Fire Protection competency framework, TWFRS is making good progress in collaborating with others to migrate existing inspectors to the new framework via Accredited Prior Learning

Areas to explore:

- Continue to develop the process of migration to the new competency framework for Protection staff.
- Continue to monitor and challenge the risk based inspection programme to ensure efficient use of resources

Whilst staff who are involved with Protection were mainly Grey Book, there may be an opportunity to further utilise even more Green book staff without losing competence or experience. The team would commend the Service on its work to develop a blend and mix of staff in this area of the business. The Service is well placed to further explore the benefits that a mixture of Grey and Green book bring to protection and the team would encourage the Service to further take this diversification forward.

There may also be opportunities to further enhance TWFRS's work with businesses by engaging with the various Chambers of Commerce in order to explore the possibilities of utilising their communication channels as a means of reaching the business community.

5.3 Response

Areas of Strength

- Current operational resource affords TWFRS effective operational response arrangements
- Subject to implementation, a more flexible Response resource will maintain an effective operational response and will free up capacity for safety critical training thereby improving firefighter safety
- Current operational assurance procedures (Performance and Review [P and R]) ensures the standard of Response is maintained and improved as required
- Day Crewing Close Call (DCCC) provides a more efficient and flexible approach to deliver operational response where appropriate.

TWFRS's review of its Response function is a good example of ideas being shared and developed with the workforce through staff engagement and communications.

The Service undertakes robust task analyses in order to assess what resources and skills are required at a wide range of incidents. Live exercises are run to test concepts and this provides good evidence for requirements (for example the appropriateness and viability of deploying 4x4 and Targeted Response Vehicles [TRV]).

There is also clear evidence that input from crews is being utilised well via effective feedback during the early stages of the period following any incidents. This is contributing further to embedding the Service's ambitions for delivering a risk-based Response function.

The Service currently has many good response procedures for operational assurance and maintains a high level of speed and weight of attack. This was acknowledged during strategic and operational managers' meetings.

The introduction of extended day shifts on 2 stations will allow 8 people to complete safety critical training at the Training and Development Centre. This will assist in achieving the aim of 'safer firefighters'.

There has been a positive response to the introduction of Day Crewed Close Call (DCCC) in spite of there being some resistance earlier in the process of considering the model. This is symptomatic of the positive attitude and pragmatism of station personnel who recognise the current and future challenges facing the Service. Operational staff appear to understand the reasons for changes being suggested and how this needs to happen.

Areas to explore

- Persistent issues with MDTs are appearing to undermine crew confidence
- P and R process may need to be reviewed in order to reduce duplication and capture potential gaps (e.g. overlap with training and development, does P and R inform training and policy development?)
- Future changes to operational response may require a revised command and control philosophy, P and R process, and Incident Command Training

TWFRS is aware that there is more to do to further understand what is required as regards dynamic mobilising and optimal resource deployment. This is due to the desire to maintain their speed of response and attendance at incidents. The Service is encouraged to assure itself that it fully considers and addresses any risk that emanates from this approach.

There is a good level of awareness at TWFRS about the work that still needs to be done in relation to wider engagement and consultation regarding the introduction of TRVs and longer working days on two pump stations. The team would encourage TWFRS to continue with its efforts to communicate effectively with the work-force.

5.4 Health and Safety

Areas of Strength

- Exercise and personal development programme constructed to reflect learning from local and national incidents (e.g. National Critical Incidents and P and R).
- Appliances, equipment and personal protective equipment are of a high standard.
- The Service is providing IOSH training for operational managers, and is working with IOSH to develop a fire specific IOSH training package that is both progressive and innovative
- The introduction of AVLS and attribute-based mobilising underpins firefighter and community safety.
- The introduction of fire safety 'health checks' conducted by operational crews on commercial premises should improve the H&S of staff and give them greater knowledge of: local risks, building design and construction and fire engineered building solutions.
- The proposed changes to service delivery and the 'freeing up' of 8 people per day for training should improve operational H&S.

It was evident that the Health and Safety function of the organisation is well resourced and that its major components are integrated and working well. Occupational health provision appears to be very effective and joined up, for example the Trauma Support Service. Once again data and intelligence is being used to good effect with regard to sickness management and the prevention of injuries and accidents.

It was noted that there is an absence of experienced and qualified senior accident investigators that could be required should an adverse major accident occur.

Areas to explore

- Consider the introduction of senior accident investigators, and/or a regional approach to providing this level of investigative skill and knowledge.
- Consider the formal adoption of a policy statement on operational risk philosophy regarding (i) risk appetite and operational discretion and (ii) provide appropriate training and assessment

5.5 Training and development- HR

Areas of Strength

- Extensive evidence of excellent IIP practice across the organisation
- HR lead officers have a clear vision for the people aspect of organisational development
- Holistic approach to OD including people, leadership, processes, systems, structures led across departments (HR and Strategy/Performance)
- Operational core skill competency is strong across the Service. TWFRS enjoys the benefit of a well-equipped state of the art training centre.
- Firefighters recognise the provision of a comprehensive development programme prior to acting up to level one command

There is a clear message that the team picked up from its time at TWFRS and its communication with staff that they feel the Service is a 'good place to work'. Furthermore it was articulated on numerous occasions that the organisation operates the principle of 'one team, one culture' and the team found good evidence of this.

The Service takes a holistic approach to organisational development including people, leadership, processes, systems and structures which are anchored within the Service's HR and Strategy and Performance functions.

Leadership training is based on the principle of supporting officers developing from being 'good to excellent'. The direction of travel in this area maintains a positive trajectory and is equipping the organisation's leaders of the future with the necessary technical and non-technical competencies

An integral part of the Service's culture is a commitment to collaborative leadership. This is underpinned by a strong focus on coaching and mentoring. Further to this the Service is undertaking exchange activities with other bodies, which is further helping to build leadership capability. This approach has clearly been thought through by the Service's strategic leadership and they are confident about the value this adds.

There is a real passion for the 'job' among staff responsible for learning and development programmes. It is also evident that they have a clear pride in their Service and the contribution they make.

Operational core skills and competencies are strong across the board at TWFRS, a firm view held by strategic, middle managers, and operational crews alike. As a result the organisation is very confident about firefighter practical competence, knowledge and understanding. There appears to be good synergy between watch level and the corporate centre. Three stages of competence validation are used together with effective incident monitoring.

JESIP training has been delivered to all that require it and in the timeframes set for delivering this. It is clearly embedded as the crews have come to recognise this as

very much being a matter of routine. There was confidence of TWFRS' 'JESIP readiness' across all of the service and that this had been achieved in time for the deadline of 30 September 2014.

Crews are benefiting from the offer at the Training and Development Centre to cover bespoke training areas. A clear result of this is the level of enthusiasm and motivation across TWFRS.

All 800 operational staff attend the incident command suite and the feedback from this is extremely positive. The suite benefits from a strong team using IT to best effect in delivering comprehensive programmes.

The success of spot checks provides assurance to the senior management team that the recording of operational competencies is good and continues to improve.

The rationalisation of level three strategies will provide greater clarity and understanding within the workforce. The process streamlining and bringing them together is a positive approach by the Service

Staff bore testament to the exceptional welfare support and occupational health facilities and arrangements that TWFRS has put in place over many years.

Operational staff who attended the Incident Command (IC) Suite were very positive about the learning experience. IC training benefits from a strong team using simulation equipment to best effect in delivering comprehensive command development. It was evident that effective Learning and Development programmes are delivered for all staff.

Areas to explore

- The implementation and acceleration of robust succession planning as an effective means of maintaining organisational capacity and service resilience should be considered.
- Ensure an appropriate programme of realistic operational training continues to be provided against the backdrop of reducing incidents.
- Consider marketing opportunities and challenges when developing any future trading company

There remain opportunities to improve clarity and direction in how various strategies link to the day-to-day work of staff. The Service may wish to look at this more closely, by integrating Workforce Development Strategy, L and D strategy, and Equalities strategy into an overarching people strategy.

TWFRS is not unique in needing to continually explore opportunities for creating more efficient structures and ways of working. The team would encourage the Service to assure itself that there are minimal possibilities of overlaps regarding operational assurance. There is an opportunity to 'horizon scan' and there may be some value in utilising member networks and connections to develop joint approaches with neighbouring authorities.

The team would suggest that a focus of this would be to remove risks of duplication of supply. This point was illustrated by the scenario in which a neighbouring FRS has embarked on developing their own training facility at a time when TWFRS was able to offer opportunities through greater utilisation of its facilities.

As part of the previous point TWFRS may wish to consider any opportunities which may exist for providing courses and training for other services and businesses.

5.6 Call Management and Incident Support

Areas of Strength

- Introduction of a new command and control system has allowed a more effective and flexible approach to deploying operational resources (AVLS, attribute mobilising, dynamic mobilising)
- The availability of operational intelligence at the scene of operations via appliance MDTs should improve operational H&S, and ease the traditional pressures on control staff whilst dealing with operational incidents. Joint working with Northumberland FRS offers potential efficiencies and resilience once fully developed.

The introduction of AVLS should make the Service more operationally efficient and should improve attendance times and enable dynamic mobilisation and the use of stand-bys at times of peak activity.

MDTs have provided better operational intelligence and information on the incident ground therefore making firefighters safer and more effective.

Areas to explore

- Explore opportunities to optimise available capacity (e.g. internal and external opportunities).
- MDTs and communication – outstanding technical difficulties need to be resolved as a matter of priority.

The team would encourage TWFRS to consider closer working with other authorities and agencies to realise mutual benefits. This may be helpfully underpinned by TWFRS considering how it might utilise any spare capacity in any formulation of future staffing structures.

While the introduction of MDTs is viewed, overall, as being positive crews do feel that benefits are yet to be fully realised due to recurrent reliability issues. This is hindering operational communications.

As regards the future delivery of an optimal service, there are some additional expectations of the new system. The Service is acutely aware of this and the team would encourage the continuation of the system being reviewed with regard its ability to deliver any future change (for example loss of pumps, TRVs, dynamic mobilising etc).

6. Conclusion and contact information

TWFRS is a justifiably proud organisation and is well placed to continue to deliver its commitments to its own people and the public and business communities it serves. It is a determined service that remains focused on achieving positive outcomes through continued improvement of performance against its service plan targets.

It is well placed to deliver on its ambitions because it is well regarded by a wide range of partners as a highly performing organisation, one which adopts a risk based, intelligence-led approach to all it does.

Not unlike other services, the challenges facing TWFRS will require continued strong political and professional leadership.

That said, TWFRS remains well placed to adapt and respond to the continued uncertain financial climate and social change and the team feels confident that TWFRS can continue to manage performance whilst identifying and achieving significant efficiencies.

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

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