

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Organisational Assessment

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Provided under embargo



for an independent overview
of local public services

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Overall, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	3 out of 4
Managing resources	3 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

The FRA has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve. Objectives are based on a sophisticated risk planning (IRMP) process, and good knowledge of local communities. This enables effort to be focussed where it can have maximum impact. The FRA's performance has consistently improved across all priorities in the last three years. There are many examples of the FRA working effectively with partners from the public, private and third sector to deliver successful outcomes and improvements. The FRA is operationally effective, and continually reviews its capacity and resources to improve outcomes. There is a formal strategy in place to ensure high levels of service, including a commitment to maintaining very quick response times to fires. This has a significant impact on the FRA's costs, and there is scope for a more detailed discussion with Members and stakeholders about this in the context of the FRA's response to 'Rising to the Challenge'. However, efficiency savings have exceeded Government targets. Real costs have reduced by 6% over the last five years, through reducing staff numbers and revising crewing levels. There has been significant investment in preventative work, using intelligence from partners to drive more accurate targeting of home safety checks, which are then delivered in partnership and often address multiple needs. Work with the voluntary sector to tackle arson and improve life chances for children and young people has achieved national recognition. Leadership is strong and effective : Members and officers work together to tackle difficult issues, and the FRA has appropriate levels of balances and reserves. There are no known capacity weaknesses or financial risks that would raise a concern about the future delivery of outcomes.

About Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue

Authority

Tyne and Wear Fire Authority (The FRA) serves a resident population of 1.09 million, divided amongst the five constituent Councils of Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, and Sunderland. Of this population, 3.1% are from a black and minority ethnic origin. The area covered by the service includes the North East's two major cities and accounts for 43% of the North East's population in just 6% of the total land area.

Organisational assessment

Effective in identifying and delivering priority services and outcomes

The FRA has a clear vision for what it wants to achieve. The FRA vision addresses the needs of the area and its communities and reflects local risks and opportunities. Strategic aims are translated into service, district and station level objectives. These objectives are based on an increasingly sophisticated Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process that reflects the national framework and local priorities. Operational response and community safety work clearly aim to address the quality of service provision and the reduction of risk factors that make people vulnerable to Fire related accidents and injuries.

The FRA knows its communities well and this enables it to focus its efforts and resources where they can have maximum impact. Using its own data, partners' data, and good local knowledge from its outreach workers, advocates and station crews; the FRA builds accurate risk profiles that can be used at district, station, Ward, street and individual property level. Priorities set at service, district and station level are based on extensive community engagement and from April 2009, also reflect wider LSP priorities. Improved communication has clearly resulted in improved front-line understanding of priorities, and greater representation at LSPs.

The integrated risk management plan (IRMP) is continually improving with better intelligence and additional software that supports the original but improved FSEC system. Tyne & Wear FRA is making improvements across its priorities.

Performance has consistently improved in all key priority areas over the last three years and was assessed as improving well in the 2008 direction of travel assessment. Trends over the last three years for all key indicators show positive improvements, for example very strong reduction in primary fires from 2006 (400 per thousand population down to 250). There has been a significant reduction in deliberate fires in the last two years. However, performance in the first quarter of 2009/10 shows that targets for this year might be missed. This is partly due to particular instances of arson by two known, and now convicted, perpetrators. The Fire Authority is confident that despite this, overall performance by the end of 2009/10 will continue to show improvement. Much of this improvement is down to a significant improvement in partnership working at both strategic and operational levels.

This has been as a result of a conscious restructuring by the Fire Authority to align its management structures with the responsibilities of the LSPs. Examples of the difference this has made include working in neighbourhoods with police and community wardens, and work with landlords and housing associations.

The FRA is reducing false alarms from automatic fire equipment through close working with hospitals and department stores. There has been a significant reduction in the number of deliberate false alarms. This year's first-quarter results show a 48% reduction compared to the same period last year and the overall trend year-on-year is down. There are also examples of the FRA working effectively with partners from the private and third sector to deliver successful outcomes and improvement. For example the facilities management contract with the private sector covers more than half of the Authority's fire stations; and work with the Prince's Trust to improve life chances for troubled children and young people, which has received national recognition.

Better engagement, evaluation and intelligence is allowing for greater flexibility in service delivery meeting the needs of diverse communities. There are a range of referral mechanisms for partners to instigate prevention activity. Social landlords are actively involved and this ensures that the majority of highly vulnerable adults and children are given appropriate advice and assistance. Risk assessment of properties ensures that high-risk families are referred directly to the community safety team and those of a lower risk are assigned three, five, or eight year revisits depending on perceived risk.

A comprehensive approach to Home Safety Checks (HSC) targets those at most risk. Many checks are delivered through partnerships or commissioned from other agencies including the third sector. Referrals address multiple issues and there is evidence that intelligence collected and greater understanding of issues is assisting in more accurate targeting of activity.

The FRA is improving the services and outcomes for which it is responsible

The FRA has a consistent track record for improving priority services and this improvement, relative to other metropolitan areas, has been achieved while making significant efficiency savings and maintaining a very high level of operational response. The FRA has consistently achieved some of the fastest response times across the Fire service nationally, whilst also reviewing and reducing the crewing levels on each appliance. Ridership factors are low compared to other FRAs.

There is clear evidence that the FRA has maintained response times whilst other FRA response times have generally increased. However, maintaining such rapid response times has a cost implication for the Authority. There has been some discussion with members about the balance struck between response times and cost. However the debate could be more clearly set out in key documents such as Authority minutes, performance reports and the IRMP.

The FRA has demonstrated effective response to performance issues. There is a more extensive use of benchmarking, more sophisticated performance

management systems, and a more reflective culture of project appraisal and evaluation. For example, issues were identified around recruitment, with the positive action programme, and high attrition rates amongst women and minority ethnic entrants to the FRA. Actions have been taken but it is too soon to see whether this has been successful. Positive outcomes have been delivered in response to historically high levels of sickness absence. The FRA is seen as performing well by its partners. Its influence has improved significantly in the last few years and it works in increasingly consistent manner across all council areas. The FRA is effective at identifying where partnership activity has helped boost performance, and the FRA now concentrates on these partnerships in particular, rather than more general partnership dialogue. For example the FRA works hard with all housing associations to improve safety in rented accommodation. Best practice is shared across the area but is applied locally and appropriately. The FRA clearly contributes to Tyne & Wear's resilience to large-scale emergencies, with the FRA being a regional leader in preparedness for large-scale emergencies. Specialist skills are maintained within regular fire fighting teams including Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), swift water rescue, rope rescue, mass decontamination etc. Preparedness is tested regularly and was proven during recent major flooding in neighbouring Northumberland.

The FRA has an effective approach to the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO). It works well with partners on risk assessments and enforcement. Joint work with police and councils on the 'Best Bar None' initiative has helped to reduce fires in non-domestic buildings from 560 in 2007/08 to 386 in 2008/09. This included a campaign to highlight the dangers of using scented candles in licensed premises, which has increased as a result of the smoking ban. Inspections are prioritised according to risk so that high 'life risk' premises that provide sleeping accommodation including houses of multiple occupation, hospitals and care homes are audited more frequently. Where risks and requirements are lower the FRA achieves compliance through agreed action plans. In more serious cases, it issues formal notices or successfully pursues prosecutions, particularly where there is a clear risk to life in high risk premises. This robust approach is reducing commercial fire losses and protecting some of the poorest residents. Enforcement is used where necessary and at the end of June 2009, the service had issued 144 enforcement notices, 30 prohibitions, and had four successful prosecutions.

The FRA contributes to wider community outcomes through shared priorities set out in local area agreements and sustainable community strategies. The FRA has a good track record of working in partnership and this has significantly developed in the last year and all districts and stations have agreed objectives set against those contained in local strategic partnership plans. There is clear evidence that this is resulting in improved activity at a local level and District level performance is now incorporated into the quarterly performance management arrangements of the senior management team and authority.

Partners understanding how the FRA contributes to wider community outcomes. Feedback from partners shows that involvement in issues such as alcohol abuse, care for the elderly, and positive activities for young people is valued and how this relates to the FRAs own priorities is now better understood. Effective evaluation ensures that this involvement is productive and that best practice is shared across the area and beyond. This development has been very rapid and is now the subject of a review to ensure

that the approach is fit for purpose for the future.

The FRA is an active contributor to road safety partnerships. Despite a lack of clear leadership within many road safety partnerships, the FRA ensures that it contributes to road safety education programmes and incorporates road safety awareness in its more generic engagement with young people. The FRA is able to clearly demonstrate that it uses effective community and stakeholder engagement to assist in delivering wider community outcomes. Front-line staff, including specialist advocates, were able to clearly demonstrate a broad understanding of a very wide range of communities and business/organisations. This engagement clearly relates to the delivery of effective fire safety activity that is having a clear impact on accidental fires. It is less well understood what impact this is having on deliberate fires.

The FRA targets its work with young people where it can have most impact and is achieving good outcomes. There is a wide range of interventions for vulnerable young people. The Phoenix project - a five day work experience course - is a longstanding and very successful project.

The Phoenix Plus Project offers young people further engagement with the Fire service provided that they remain out of trouble for a fixed period. Evaluation has clearly demonstrated that this has a significant positive impact on their behaviour. In addition to structured programmes, the FRA uses its facilities and staff volunteers to provide a range of activities for all members of the community. 'Safetyworks' is a building where models, videos and simulations explain to a range of audiences the dangers of household fires, road safety, bonfire night etc; and ways in which these risks can be reduced. This facility is used extensively by the FRA and also local authorities, schools and other agencies; with 1,998 delegates attended courses at this facility in five months during 2008.

The FRA is tackling inequality and disadvantage and has very clear ambitions to deliver fair and equitable services. Community Advocates, recruited by the FRA from within local communities, are employed to help talk to hard to reach parts of the community and use a variety of innovative methods to gain access. For example advocates have built relationships with local rabbis to ensure that fire safety messages reach Orthodox Jewish communities that had not been receptive to other means of contact. There is a good and rapidly improving understanding of the complex needs of local communities. Work with transient immigrants has been undertaken through a variety of methods including working with the local Polish community newspaper. Effective evaluation ensures that working practice is continually improved and best practice is shared across the area.

The FRA is beginning to reduce its impact on the environment, which historically has not been seen as a priority. A sustainability strategy is in draft form and environmental performance management systems are being developed that will allow the FRA to monitor major emissions from both its own utilities and fleet, and from incidents it responds to or prevents. It is working with the Carbon Trust and the Energy Saving Trust on these initiatives, but they have yet to have a significant impact. However, the introduction of a building management system suggests that savings will begin to be made. Local people have a range of opportunities to comment on, and influence plans. The FRA has achieved good satisfaction levels and this is improving. The recent Place Survey has shown significant

improvement in satisfaction with the service. The dense population patterns of Tyne & Wear mean that no communities are significantly disadvantaged due to location or geography. There is evidence that those people isolated due to language, disability or other circumstances are effectively identified and targeted for assistance. However, the recruitment and retention of target groups is mixed. The number of women employees has increased, as has the number of women fire fighters but high attrition rates for minority ethnic applicants' remain an issue. The FRA is assessed as having achieved level three of the equality standard and is now self-assessing as having reached level four.

Does the organisation have the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future improvements?

The FRA has the leadership, skills, capacity and capability to sustain the significant improvements it has made. It has an impressive track record of making a positive impact on people's quality of life. Members and officers are confident about the future. The prospects for further improvement are good. There are effective relationships between Members and officers and communication with front-line staff is very good. There is a consistent message from the Authority and senior management and this is well understood at station level.

There is clear understanding of capacity and resources. There are a number of examples that demonstrate the continuing drive for improvement and reduced cost. The Authority set the lowest precept of any FRA last year and is working to maintain this approach for 2010/11. Leadership is strong and effective. Members and managers work together to tackle challenging issues. Sensitive issues such as removal of appliances and firefighters are debated openly with staff, unions and service users. As a result the management team has maintained the support of the workforce through some difficult and challenging periods of change. Members of senior management are also highly visible within the community and particularly supportive of events.

Prospects for future improvement are good. There are no known capacity weaknesses or financial risks associated with any current activity. Good financial management has allowed the FRA to maintain finances in a healthy state.

Partnership working continues to develop and mature and this is reflected in station and district plans that contribute to LSP objectives relevant to each area. Examples include contributing to positive activities for young people and assisting older people to live independently at home. Intelligence from partners is adding to the increasingly detailed understanding of neighbourhoods and household risks and this is driving more accurate targeting of preventative activity which often addresses multiple needs.

Many initiatives clearly demonstrate improved life chances for those involved. The FRA continually reviews its capacity and resources to get the best outcomes. It takes carefully considered action to move resources when new risks emerge. Efficiency savings have been achieved and real costs have been

reduced by 6% in the last 5 years. Efficiency savings of £5.1 million efficiency have been claimed in the past four years through reduced staffing levels, crewing, and shift changes. Performance management has improved and drives continuous improvement and innovative thinking. Efficiencies have been achieved whilst improving performance and reducing cost relative to other authorities. Increased capacity for dealing with major incidents has been achieved through integrating specialist skills into existing Fire crews. Recent improvements to district and station plans are increasing the local relevance of actions and ensuring that activity is prioritised against local need rather than Tyne & Wear-wide objectives.

The FRA is managing the transition to a Regional Control Centre sensitively and well. A regional delivery team has been established to ensure that there is a collaborative and consistent approach to this move. Communication with staff during this time had been carefully managed. The development of a training suite at fire headquarters and the early move to the regional control centre should ensure capacity and capability continued to improve.

The FRA has demonstrated its ability to cope with large-scale civil protection issues. Responses to recent flooding and multi-agency exercises have been successful. There is a clear and positive health and safety culture, with a specific objective on health and safety in the community safety plan. Sickness and accident levels are improving and this includes road traffic accidents involving appliances. The FRA has been awarded the RoSPA Gold award five times in the last six years. This is based on reducing accidents and improving health at work and tests all aspects of the organisation's health and safety culture. The total number of accidents within the Authority has reduced by over 50% since 2000.

There is also been a significant reduction in sickness levels and early retirement although sickness levels remain only just better than average. The FRA has a good track record of collaborating with local services. The regional recruitment and positive action programme is cost effective and there are numerous examples of collaboration with neighbouring FRAs and local authorities. Working relationships with Northumberland are particularly good, with clear benefits for both authorities.

The FRA uses public views positively and collaborates with other partners on consultation. This includes contributing to data warehouses to allow for a better understanding of local issues, including neighbourhoods and families that are a causing concern for a number of agencies. Improved knowledge of its diverse communities is directly driving improved community safety activity. Changing demographics are understood, including the likely impact of an increasing proportion of the population that are elderly and an increase in housing stock despite falling population.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>



for an independent overview
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