

Hereford and Worcester Fire And Rescue Authority

Organisational Assessment

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Provided under embargo



for an independent overview
of local public services

Hereford and Worcester Fire And Rescue Authority

Overall, Hereford and Worcester 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 performs well and scores 3 out of 4 for its organisational assessment. This is because the FRA is achieving its main priority - to keep people safe from fire. The risk from fire is low. Fires and fire deaths and injuries have been reducing at a rapid rate and last year the FRA recorded the lowest number of fires ever. The FRA responds to incidents quickly and is making a difference to the lives of vulnerable people who are at risk. It promotes equality and diversity in what it does and is reducing arson and road casualties. It is providing value for money as it is low cost and achieves high performance. It manages its finances well and links funding to priority services. It is self aware and is well placed to make further improvements with plans and funds in place.

The FRA performs well and scores 3 out of 4 for managing performance. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority manages performance well, because it is providing an effective and improving fire and rescue service to communities and provides value for money. It is also well placed to make further improvements.

People in Herefordshire and Worcestershire are at low risk from the dangers of fire and last year the FRA attended the lowest number of fires ever recorded in the two counties. Accidental house fires, fire deaths and injuries have been reducing rapidly for a few years - at one of the fastest rates nationally.

The work of the FRA is helping to make people safe in their homes. The FRA

has a good understanding of communities and visits the most vulnerable people to improve safety. Arson is not a widespread problem in most parts of the county and the work of the FRA has lessened the occurrence by half in the last 3 years.

It works closely with other agencies on a wide range of community issues. For example, while ensuring vulnerable individuals and families are safe from the dangers of fire it helps to ensure they can live independently in their own homes. Youth work includes a Young Firefighter Association and talks to schools about arson and malicious calls as well as fire safety. This is helping to improve levels of home fire safety, reduce arson and ASB. The FRA is improving safety on the local roads where deaths and serious injuries are fairly high.

The FRA is among the best services in the country for promoting equality and diversity. It has gained a high standard - level 4 - on the national local government equality standard and a high score of 95% for the duty to promote race equality. Customer service, engagement and care are also good. It has gained a nationally recognised award - the Charter Mark - with twelve important areas which are national best practice.

The FRA is responding quickly and effectively to emergencies. It is achieving attendance standards to attend fires and other emergencies anywhere in the two counties within a time limit of 10 minutes.

The FRA is aware of where it can get better. For example, by further reducing attendances to unwanted fire alarms and malicious fire calls which, although improving, are rather high. Sickness levels are also high and levels rose and fell over recent years. There are also a few staff new to their current posts and therefore grappling with new areas of responsibility. Despite these minor shortcomings which the FRA is tackling, is well positioned and has the capacity to make further improvements.

The FRA scores 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources.

The FRA is providing value for money in the way it provides and improves services to communities and it is achieving safer communities. It is low cost and is high performing. It is good at making savings and has made above average levels of efficiency savings some from more efficient staffing arrangements at stations.

It looks for opportunities to reduce costs by buying essential equipment with others and has made many efficiency savings over recent years.

The FRA manages its finances well. It links money to its priorities such as community safety. It is improving performance and does not under or overspend its budget. The FRA has also got extra money for itself and Worcestershire by meeting its targets to reduce arson in high risk areas.

Financial arrangements are effective and the 2008/09 accounts completed, audited and approved well in advance of the required date of September. However, during the auditing of the 2008/09 accounts some errors were found.

The FRA is in a good position to improve further. It is displaying leadership, by influencing partners and supporting a wide range of community activities. It is clear about what is important to local people and what needs improving. It plans well for the future, regularly checks and manages how it is improving.

About Hereford and Worcester Fire And Rescue Authority

Hereford and Worcester FRA covers the counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire in the West Midlands. Both areas are largely rural although Worcestershire's population mainly live in the towns of Worcester, Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Evesham, Kidderminster, Malvern and Redditch - these towns are also where the main wholetime or day-crewed fire stations are placed. Worcestershire has the largest population and the highest population density, whereas Herefordshire is more sparsely populated. The proportion of older people is higher within both areas compared with the regional and national average. The area is dominated by a White British population although the black and minority ethnic population is higher in Worcestershire. The area is well-off, although some areas within Worcester City, Kidderminster and Redditch are within the top 10% most deprived areas nationally. Unemployment is low but wage levels are lower than the regional and national average. Flooding is a risk across the area, with four major rivers running through the two counties. Housing is unaffordable for many. The health of people in Herefordshire and Worcestershire is better than the England average, although there are inequalities across the area, particularly in Redditch, Wyre Forest and Worcester City.

This year Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service had a peer review of its Operational Assessment (OpA) self-assessment by accredited peers from the fire sector. The findings of this evidence-based review are used in this organisational assessment.

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority vision for local communities and priorities are: Vision - 'To make Herefordshire and Worcestershire safer from fire and other hazards and to improve community well-being

Priorities - 1. Community: We will improve the safety of the community by targeting at risk groups, improving the environment within which we live, and by working and engaging with the people we serve.

2. People: We will ensure the fair and equitable treatment of both our staff and the people we serve, and promote the training and safety of all our personnel.

3. Business Process and Organisational Development: We will develop and implement systems, procedures and structures to improve efficiency and effectiveness, mitigate risk, enable effective response to emergencies and to review, monitor and measure our performance.

4. Finance and Resources: We will ensure the economic use of resources, meeting budgetary challenges and maximising funding opportunities in order

to deliver value for money services

Organisational assessment

Community: We will improve the safety of the community by targeting at risk groups, improving the environment within which we live, and by working and engaging with the people we serve

People in Herefordshire and Worcestershire are at low risk from the dangers of fire. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) has a good record of improving community safety and last year, the FRA attended the lowest number of fires ever recorded. Accidental house fires, fire deaths and injuries have been reducing rapidly for a few years - at one of the fastest rates nationally with currently about 8 accidental home fires and less than 1 injury per week. The work of the FRA is helping to make people safer in their homes. Fire fighters carry out safety checks in homes and fit smoke alarms. They talk to schoolchildren about the dangers from fire and other hazards.

The FRA has a good understanding of communities and visits the most vulnerable people to improve safety. It talks to community groups and agencies to help it to talk to people most at risk. The FRA carries out a rather low number of home visits but is increasing these.

Arson is a problem in some parts of the country but there are only a few cases in the local area. Some towns in Worcestershire have more deliberate fires than the rest of the area, but the work of the FRA has halved these in the last 3 years.

The FRA is making local communities safer. The FRA is improving safety on local roads where deaths and serious injuries are high. It is leading a multi-agency approach to improve road safety. It is raising the awareness of the dangers on the road with young drivers and motorcyclists through thought-provoking programmes such as 'Crash Zone, Bikers Skills and Dying to Drive'. This reduces deaths on the roads. It works closely with other agencies on a wide range of things. For example, the Signposting project is helping to ensure vulnerable individuals and families are safe from the dangers of fire and can live independently in their own homes. The FRA, in partnership, has helped to attract over £1 million of funding to support this work. It is helping young people lead better lives. Some work includes the Young Firefighter Association talks to schools about arson and malicious calls as well as fire safety. This is helping to improve levels of home fire safety, reduce arson and prevent anti-social behaviour.

The FRA is making people in commercial and public buildings safer. Trained staff are visiting these buildings and helping building managers to reduce the risk from fire. They are visiting the buildings that at most at risk first. As a result there is a low and decreasing number of fires in commercial buildings, which are among the lowest nationally.

People: We will ensure the fair and equitable

treatment of both our staff and the people we serve, and promote the training and safety of all our personnel.

The FRA delivers a fair and equitable service to meet the diverse and changing needs of local communities. It is successful because it has a clear understanding of its communities through assessing risk, working with community partners and talking and listening to community groups. This helps it to target its work at the most vulnerable homes and those people most at risk.

It is easy for everyone to use services provided by the FRA. This is helping to provide a more equitable and fair approach to service delivery. It provides guidance, training and good employment conditions for staff to develop and improve the way they provide services to communities.

The FRA is among the best services in the country for promoting equality and diversity. It has gained a high standard - level 4 - on the national local government equality standard and a high score of 95% for promoting race equality. Customer service, engagement and care are also very good. It has gained a nationally recognised award - the Charter Mark - with 12 important aspects which are national best practice.

The FRA's staff are becoming more representative of the local community. Staff closely reflect the BME proportion of local communities and 5 per cent of staff are women which is fairly high nationally. The FRA works hard to recruit staff from these groups, but there is still some way to go to achieve the FRA's diversity targets.

Business Process and Organisational Development: We will develop and implement systems, procedures and structures to improve efficiency and effectiveness, mitigate risk, enable effective response to emergencies and to review, monitor and measure our performance.

The FRA is responding to emergencies quickly and effectively. It has set attendance standards following thorough research. It aims to attend fires and other emergencies anywhere in Herefordshire or Worcestershire within 10 minutes in 3 out of 4 occasions. It does much better than this though. A recent review by fire service experts has judged the FRA to be an effective service. The FRA is learning lessons from experience at emergencies which is improving the way it tackles a wide range of incidents. It is also well prepared to manage major incidents such as flooding and urban search and rescue. It has recently introduced more equipment, better procedures and improved working with partners when it learnt important lessons from a large incident.

Staff are well trained and arrangements for training are effective. The FRA

has introduced competency training and improvements include providing more realistic training facilities, more effective command training and better evaluation. Managers are well qualified in Health and Safety and safety and risk information is readily available to crews at emergencies

The FRA has reliable information to help it manage and improve its services to communities. It has achieved a national standards to ensure that data is accurate and secure. Good data is essential to knowing how a fire service is performing. The FRA manages its performance well which helps it improve. There is a review of the performance of different departments every quarter with reports to senior officers and members.

Finance and Resources: We will ensure the economic use of resources, meeting budgetary challenges and maximising funding opportunities in order to deliver value for money services

The FRA is providing value for money. It is low cost and is high performing. It is good at making savings. It has made good savings from more sensible staffing arrangements at fire stations. It reduces costs by buying essential equipment with other organisations. It considers environmental protection when providing services, for example, specialist foam equipment uses less water than standard systems and there are water saving devices fitted to the FRAs premises. But it could do more in this area.

The FRA has made some changes to shift patterns and duty systems. This has resulted in savings over 5 years similar to other fire services. Fire stations are generally well located. It has decided that the location of stations and the associated duty systems are adequate, but knows there is still further room for more efficiencies.

The FRA is in a good position to improve even more. It is displaying leadership, by influencing partners and supporting a wide range of community activities. It is clear about what is important to local people and what needs improving. It plans well for the future and regularly checks and manages its progress.

The FRA manages its finances well. It links money to its priorities such as community safety. It is improving performance and does not under or overspend its budget. The FRA has also achieved reward grants for itself and Worcestershire by meeting its targets to reduce arson in high risk areas. Financial arrangements are effective and the 2008/09 accounts were completed, audited and approved well before the required date of September. However, during audit of these accounts some errors were found.

Working with partners is helping the FRA to improve community safety and do things more economically. For example responding to flooding which is a serious risk in the two counties. Working with its neighbouring fire services is improving the way it deals with major emergencies and more effective training and development. There is scope for further improvement in the service. For example, by further reducing attendances to unwanted fire alarms and malicious fire calls which, although improving, are fairly high. Sickness levels are also high and levels have fluctuated over recent years .

There are also a few key staff who are new to their current posts and therefore grappling with new areas of responsibility. This needs to be carefully managed. The FRA is well positioned and has the ability and knowledge to make further improvements to the safety of local people.

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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