

8. Findings and recommendations arising from the Operational Assessment 2012

Purpose of report

1. To inform Members of the outcome of the Operational Assessment (OpA) conducted in 2012 and provide key findings to address the identified collaborative areas for improvement. Members are asked to note that a similar report is being presented to Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority.
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Recommendations

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that:

- a) ***the findings of the Operational Assessment be noted;***
- b) ***the findings are incorporated within the Fire and Rescue Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance;***
- c) ***a detailed action plan to address the report's findings be presented to Audit Committee for approval and subsequent monitoring of implementation; and***
- d) ***the Fire and Rescue Authority endorse the principle of further collaborative working with Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority and note that senior officers and the Chairman will be meeting with their counterparts to discuss how best to take this forward with a view to bringing back further recommendations.***

Introduction and Background

2. The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 requires that robust mechanisms should be in place to provide independent assurance to communities and to the Government around financial, governance and operational matters and to show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in the National Framework. In order to provide this assurance, Fire and Rescue Authorities must publish an annual statement of assurance.
3. The OpA assessment is an important part of that process of assurance. It provides an independent peer assessment of this Authority for the benefit of Members and for our communities.

Overview of the OpA Process

4. The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) developed the concept of OpA in 2009 in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. The OpA process is designed to form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the nation's Fire

and Rescue Services (FRSs), and provide FRAs and Chief Fire Officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

5. Self-assessment against the OpA Toolkit is recommended at least every three years. With the exception of one or two FRAs, all English FRSs have now scheduled (or completed) OpA peer reviews.

Approach to OpA

6. Recognising the potential for sharing expertise and identifying further collaborative opportunities, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) commenced (in the spring of 2012) preparations for a formal OpA peer review.
7. The collaboration led to the publication of two FRA/S specific self-assessments, both of which included improvement action plans identifying areas of further co-operation.
8. In the autumn of 2012 an LGA led OpA peer review team visited both SFRS and HWFRS to undertake two independent four-day reviews. The review team included senior FRS officers, an elected FRA Member, a West Mercia Police officer and a professional chief executive from the private sector. The team's activities were coordinated by a LGA facilitator.

OpA Findings

9. The findings of the OpA Review Team are presented at Appendix 1, but in summary, the review team reported that:
10. *The Service continues to move forward positively, has made considerable improvements in many areas, and that overall performance has been good.*
11. *Among the key strengths identified were:*
 - a) *the open, confident and approachable leadership style and culture of the Chief Fire Officer and his senior managers, with a clear direction and professional focus, which is well understood and supported by staff;*
 - b) *the clear commitment to health and safety and its focus on continuing improvement, which ensures that all aspects of safety and safe systems are well embedded at every level;*
 - c) *the investment in operational training and development focused on key risk areas, including capital investment in new facilities such as the strategic training facilities to support and improve training capacity; and*
 - d) *in those service areas that have undergone significant change and restructuring like Fire Control and Human Resources, staff are keen, involved and highly motivated.*
12. *Nevertheless, while the assessment identified many strengths, it also raised some areas that need to be examined further to make sure that the Service can keep improving as a service and as an employer.*

13. Some areas to be addressed were:

- a) the need to ensure close and continued management of the risks associated with financial planning in the light of current and future budget reductions;
- b) the need to ensure that the management of major projects and cross cutting programmes is mainstreamed into 'business as usual'; and
- c) the need to fully embed Member involvement and public consultation in strategic planning and decision making.

14. The overall conclusions that can be drawn are positive. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is a well-run, organised and motivated Fire and Rescue Service. It benefits strongly from its highly competent and enthusiastic staff and its sound relationship with its Members. While the financial uncertainties facing the Service will continue to be challenging, there is a confidence that officers and Members will work together to realise opportunities for improvement, including collaboration.

Improvement through Collaboration

15. The OpA review process has identified several areas within both HWFRS and SFRS that have the potential for further collaborative working. The areas, as illustrated within Figure 1 below, represent six strategic thematic areas that may benefit from a partnership approach thus leading to:

- a) Enhanced public safety
- b) Improved firefighter protection
- c) Robust operational resilience
- d) Shared expertise and knowledge
- e) Increased capacity
- f) Reduction of duplication of effort
- g) Promotion of intra/inter-operability
- h) Harmonisation of policy and procedure
- i) Creation of efficiency savings through joint procurement
- j) Delivery of quality public services

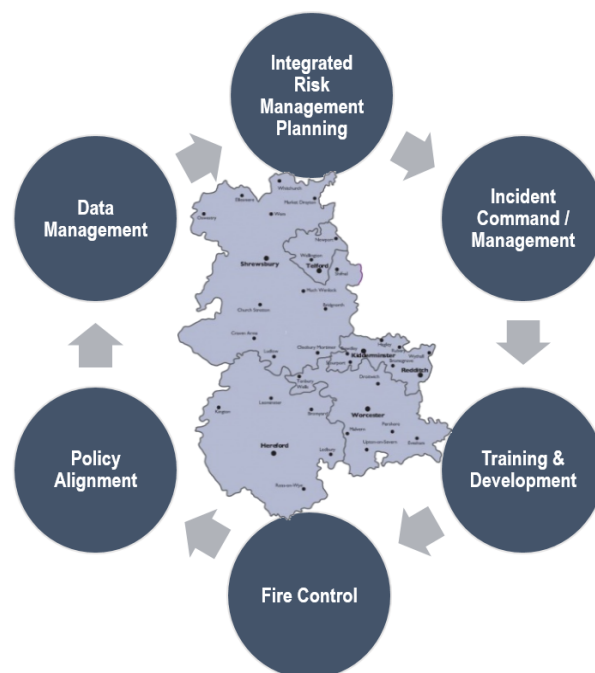


Figure 1: Strategic Areas of Collaboration

A more detailed description of the strategic areas is provided at Appendix 2.

Conclusion/Summary/Next Steps

16. Subject to Member approval, the next steps will be to:

- a) incorporate findings from the self-assessment, together with the OpA Review Team's findings, within the Fire and Rescue Authority's Annual Statement of Assurance (to be published later this year);
- b) prepare a detailed action plan for implementation of the OpA findings for consideration by Audit Committee; and
- c) with Fire Authority approval, Officers and the Chairman will enter into a determined dialogue with Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority (SWFRA) to establish how best to deliver collaborative working in the key strategic areas set out in paragraph 16.

Financial Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are financial issues that require consideration	N	(Any financial implications necessary to support the implementation of the proposed OpA programme of work, should the principle of further collaborative working with SWFRA be endorsed, will be reported in due course.)

Legal Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are legal issues e.g. contractual and procurement, reputational issues that require consideration	N	

Additional Considerations

17. The table below sets out any additional issues arising from the proposals contained in this report and identifies the relevant paragraphs in the report where such issues are addressed.

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
Resources (e.g. Assets, ICT, Human Resources, Training & Development, Sustainability).	Y	Service Delivery, Assets, Training & Development, Service Support, Human Resources
Strategic Policy Links (e.g. IRMP, Authority Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships, Environmental Impact).	Y	CRMP, FRA Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships
Risk Management / Health & Safety (e.g. risk management and control measures, risk register score).	Y	Health & Safety
Consultation with Representative Bodies	Y	Engagement and consultation

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 LGA/CFOA OpA Peer Review Team Report 2012

Appendix 2 OpA Thematic Areas of Collaboration

Background Papers

DCLG (2012) Fire and Rescue Service National Framework

LGA/CFOA OpA Toolkit

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