



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



# **Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report**

**November 2012**

**FINAL**

## **Report Contents**

1.	Executive summary	2
2.	Introduction	3
3.	The peer challenge team	4

## **Areas of Focus**

4.	Leadership and culture	5
5.	Capacity	6
6.	Community Risk Management	7
7.	Protection & Prevention	9
8.	Response	10
9.	Health & Safety	11
10.	Training & Development	12
11.	Call Management & Incident Support	14
12.	Human Resources	15

## **The Future Organisation**

13.	Collaboration	17
14.	Collaboration quick wins	18
15.	Culture	19
16.	Conclusion and contact information	20

## **1. Executive Summary**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) continues to move forward positively. For the last two years the Service has worked hard to bring about further improvements across a broad range of areas from capital investment in equipment and assets to the reshaping of the management team in the Service to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver not only in today's challenging financial climate but that of the coming years.

In the areas the peer team examined, overall performance has been good. The Service has invested heavily in ensuring that the organisation is fit for purpose with a clear vision which is understood and supported by staff.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) is a confident and visible presence in the Service. His leadership is based upon strong relationships with key staff and stakeholders. He is regarded as approachable and fair with the best interests of the Service at heart. He and his principal officers are widely credited with professionalising the Service.

The majority of staff fully understand the current challenging financial position. Staff trust management to take the necessary action to balance the books and feel that their leadership can be trusted to manage the tight financial position.

However in light of the likely future financial challenges the CFO will need continued strategic support from Elected Members as difficult decisions are made over the next few years so it is welcome that Members generally expressed a desire to be more fully involved.

HWFRS has expressed a clear wish to explore opportunities to work more collaboratively with other Fire and Rescue Services and in particular Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). To demonstrate this clear desire, more extensive collaboration in the future needs to be founded on a clear and explicit collective ambition from the participating organisations.

The Service will need to translate this desire into practical collaborative working, and this could be channelled through working with SFRS on a Strategic Alliance business case once a collective vision has been clearly articulated.

HWFRS is able to evidence a number of innovations which are worthy achievements, including the strategic review with key partners of property and assets to share, dispose of or re-invest through the Shenstone Group and participation on the Public Services Executive Group.

Overall HWFRS is a well run and organised Fire and Rescue Service that is benefiting from competent and enthusiastic staff and sound relations with Members. The challenge in the future will be to maintain these relationships as an uncertain future unfolds and to ensure that opportunities for more effective partnership working are fully realised.

## 2. Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Associations (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in November 2012. Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement. It is a key component of the LGA's 'Taking the Lead' offer ([www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 5-8 November 2012 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, focus groups and visits to eight fire stations.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of Elected Members, front line fire fighters, non-uniformed officers and partner agencies. During the time in Worcester the peer team were well looked after and everyone the team met were fully engaged with the process, open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including Hereford and Worcester's summary Operational Assessment Self-Assessment and key supporting documentation. The peer challenge did not aim to re-run the Operational Assessment Self-Assessment, but instead focused on areas identified in discussion with the Service. The overall scope of the peer challenge was:

"To evaluate HWFRS's operational effectiveness and to help develop opportunities to consolidate our collaboration with Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority".

"In particular is HWFRS:

- Realistic about collaborative opportunities?
- Ready to seize any collaborative opportunities that present?
- Aware of the benefits and risks of any collaborative initiatives"

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into the seven OpA themes and the additional areas of Human Resources, Procurement and Leadership & Culture which were identified by HWFRS as further areas of focus. A discussion of the findings was delivered to the Chair of the FRA and the Services' senior officers in a feedback presentation held on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

This report provides detailed information on the key focus areas agreed with the Service, based around the seven key themes of the operational assessment toolkit areas:

- Community Risk Management
- Training & Development
- Health & Safety
- Response
- Protection

- Prevention
- Call management and incident support

The purpose of the peer challenge was to complement the Authority's Operational self-assessment by providing external challenge to help support improvement and to reflect how the Service is performing across the areas of focus.

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. 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.

### **3. The peer challenge team included:**

- Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Andrew Backhouse, North Yorkshire Fire Authority
- Andy Johnson, Area Manager, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Jane Sherlock, Director of People & Organisational Development, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
- Tom Harding, Inspector, West Mercia Police
- Jonna Stevens, Adviser, Local Government Association

The make up of the peer team reflects the desire of both Hereford & Worcester FRS and Shropshire FRS to explore collaborative opportunities. The team mirrors the composition of the OpA peer challenge team that visited Shropshire FRS 22-25 October 2012 and which was led by Hereford & Worcester CFO Mark Yates.

#### 4. Leadership & Culture

##### Strengths

- **HWFRS is seen as a good place to work. It is business like, pragmatic with clear direction, business focussed and very ambitious**
- **The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) with his Senior Management Board (SMB) have made a significant difference to the organisation**
- **Staff trust senior managers to make the necessary decisions**

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is generally seen as a good place to work as it is business like, pragmatic with clear direction, business focussed and very ambitious for the future.

The current CFO with his Senior Management Board has made a significant difference to the organisation through their hands-on approach and their wish to lead from the top by example. They are approachable and show strong leadership.

Officers and managers are encouraged to make decisions that are justified and make a difference to the Service within the foundations of the Service strategy, 'Our Strategy,' rather than being about slavishly following policy.

Even in face of cuts to budget it is good to see that many staff groups still have an optimistic outlook. There is strong evidence that the Service is continuing to invest in the future despite reducing budgets.

During the assessment there appeared to be a desire from the Members and officers interviewed to work closer together in providing strategic direction for the Authority. Future strategy formulation and clear Authority decision making would benefit from being supported by a stronger professional partnership between senior officers and Elected Members.

##### Areas to explore

- **The desire of Members to become more involved will help to ensure that the Authority is optimising the link between finance, risk and politics to increase the likelihood of success when making strategic decisions in the future**
- **The Service needs to continue to manage the ongoing risks around financial plans for future budget reductions**

The CFO will require continued strategic support from Elected Members as more unpalatable decisions are made during the next few years so it is welcome that Members generally expressed a desire to be more fully involved.

The Representative Bodies have also expressed a desire to be involved more fully at the start of the strategic planning process, if appropriate, so that the shape of necessary changes can be discussed and informally consulted upon

before they are fully formed. This may speed up delivery of projects designed to respond to emerging risks in the future.

Despite the work that leaders have done in communicating with staff, some are not aware of the true scale of the financial savings required in future years so may lack the realisation of the impact on service delivery and organisational changes. It is perhaps to be expected therefore that some staff feel that the previous Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process was not sufficiently consultative.

The hands-on and inclusive style of the top team is welcomed by staff, however a number of staff and officers that the peer team spoke to felt that some of the time senior managers appeared to make decisions without a full understanding of implications to local strategy. This in turn was perceived as undermining middle managers.

There is a perception by some of the staff interviewed that there is a strong Herefordshire and Worcestershire divide, which can cause concern about resource provision, although the Authority and Service are aware of this and use this knowledge as they construct their Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

## **5. Capacity**

### **Strengths**

- **The new district structure has been welcomed by the operational staff**
- **Bromsgrove Police collaboration**
- **The Authority has recruited highly qualified professional non-operational staff**

The new district structure implemented in 2012 has been welcomed by operational staff as they feel it provides clearer identity to their roles and responsibilities and simplifies communication and decision making across the Service.

The recruitment process, and staff retention, within the Retained Duty System (RDS) is generally sound (although there are some concerns in rural areas), and currently exceeds the national average performance figures.

Within the Service there is an increasing spirit of collaboration between HWFRS and the Police. This is being harnessed and furthered by the development of a joint police and fire station at Bromsgrove. Further collaborative opportunities are also being explored, with consideration towards shared infrastructure, at Redditch and in other locations across the area.

An innovative way of engaging with staff, increasing morale and user engagement, has been the way that the management has involved all levels of staff within the design for the new station at Malvern.

The recruitment of highly qualified non-operational staff such as the Head of Legal Services is seen as a positive step although the full value of the addition of this post is yet to be realised.

**Areas to explore**

- **Change management and ‘business as usual’**
- **Co-ordination of project activity**

Whilst the ambition of the organisation should be celebrated, the organisation has recognised that management of cross cutting work programmes could be strengthened and has, within the new structure, given responsibility for this to a senior officer.

As the Service is entering into uncharted budgetary waters there is a greater focus needed to look at the emerging opportunities and benefits to be gained from linking procurement, the capital programme, and contract management. This will necessitate the need to ensure sufficient, and appropriate, co-ordination of project activity to maximise corporate capacity and to ensure interdependencies across departments are captured and duplications avoided.

There is a perception by some staff that the peer team interviewed that, in the context of the change management programme, many of the initiatives are character led and thus when a person in a key position is replaced the next person takes the team in a different direction. When this occurs there is a risk of loss of efficiency as well as initiative fatigue by staff. A co-ordinated approach to project monitoring might to some extent improve this if agreed projects are monitored more closely until completion and evaluation.

**6. Community Risk Management****Strengths**

- **Excellent use of risk data analysis**
- **Local Resilience Forum collaborative culture already exists and can be built upon**

The Service has made excellent use of its performance and risk data analysis when developing the previous IRMP. It is looking to share this experience with Shropshire. However, greater use of risk data analysis could be made to support other departmental business planning processes, particularly those related to prevention activities.

As is clearly evidenced by the results found in the other six themed areas, improvement in all aspects of risk reduction initiatives, are being realised as a result of the reviews that were undertaken in the last 12-18 months, as a direct consequence of the existing IRMP. The new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) will need to show impact of change geographically and consider how it can clearly demonstrate how the Service’s Prevention, Protection and Response activities, in any given geographical area, are being



used in a way that ensures the community risk levels are being managed in an integrated way.

The Service is looking to collaborate with Shropshire FRS in the development of an IRMP policy document, which will outline the generic processes used to develop joint IRMPs in the future in line with current good practice.

The excellent involvement that the Service has with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) will help to inform the process it needs to complete to meet the requirements of the new National Framework Document. The collaborative culture that already exists between SFRS and HWFRS Operations Departments, in support of their LRF work, is helping to drive further collaborative working in this and other departments.

**Areas to explore**

- **Public consultation**

In common with other public organisations, the Service has struggled to attract a high level of engagement and comment, on its IRMP proposals, from the public and other external stakeholders, despite having put significant effort into this. This has led to the Service wanting to explore how this could be improved, which is commendable. However, any additional investment in this area should be balanced against the likely benefits (in terms of increased response from the public) that are likely to be obtained.

The Service is keen to explore the possibility of collaboration with Shropshire when developing its new CRMP, possibly even looking at developing a joint CRMP that covers areas for joint working. To support this, both Services may wish to consider a suitable timetable, to ensure that they can take advantage of the processes that Shropshire has developed around its '20:20' work.

Even if the Service decides not to collaborate with Shropshire on its new CRMP, HWFRS may want to revisit the current timetable set for this work, to ensure that it can be completed in a manner that is robust enough to inform the Service's medium to long term community risk reduction plans and link with the Authority's medium term financial plan.

The Service may wish to consider how they will encourage involvement of more staff in the development of their CRM Plans and proposals going forward as a number of staff commented that the recent consultation on the fire cover options felt more like a communication process, rather than true consultation.

## 7. Protection & Prevention

### Strengths

- **Good Community Safety Strategy**

The recent 'root and branch' review of Community Safety has ensured that the activities and initiatives, undertaken across the Service, are appropriate to HWFRS, with a clear statement about the specific areas now targeted by the new Strategy.

Staff are generally pleased with the introduction of designated leads for each of the four Community Fire Safety (CFS) streams.

The Service is making good use of a number of software solutions in identifying domestic properties to be targeted through its CFS work. There is also evidence that the Community Safety department uses feedback from front-line crews to further improve the accuracy of that targeting.

The CFS department is now ensuring that they manage the volunteers' activities appropriately to get the most from this valuable resource.

The recent restructuring of the Technical Fire Safety Department has resulted in the centralising of a number of its functions, whilst also maintaining a local presence out in the districts. This has enabled the Service to reduce the resources in this department whilst, at the same time, beginning to improve the consistency of advice given to both internal and external stakeholders.

The Service is planning to collaborate with Shropshire FRS across a number of areas. This is particularly relevant to the area of Technical Fire Safety, where the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) software is used by both Services.

The peer team also recognised that the adoption of the Olive Branch training developed by Staffordshire FRS displayed excellent Community Fire Safety collaboration with partner agencies.

### Areas to explore

- **The Community Safety department could make greater use of the analytical skills and tools available to the Performance and Information Team**

The Community Safety department could make greater use of the analytical skills and tools available to the Performance and Information Team. This would help the Service to further progress towards quantifying the benefit that arises from its CFS work, including Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC).

The Service would benefit from ensuring that the benefits from the new PinPoint software are fully realised through its full implementation and on-going support.

Although evidence was given of one 'unproductive' partnership having been stopped, this appears to have been an ad-hoc occurrence and was not as part of an ongoing regular review process. The Service may wish to improve its Partnership monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure that they are all subject to an appropriate level of regular review, scrutiny and benefits analysis.

## **8. Response**

### **Strengths**

- **Good equipment, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and appliances**
- **Demonstrable commitment to fire fighter safety**
- **Response is supported by excellent work in the production of response plans**

Staff from across the Service were in agreement that HWFRS provided operational staff with the best available fire fighting equipment, from PPE to appliances, and that this evidenced and supported the Chief Fire Officer's overriding commitment to fire fighter safety.

This commitment to ensure that the best available equipment is procured and available to operational staff was also evidenced, again by a cross section of the Service, through the trialling and involvement of front line staff in the decision making process for procuring new equipment. This level of involvement is well received by all staff.

HWFRS provides excellent resilience not only in fire fighter availability but also in the wide range of skills which they possess. The local requirements for specialist skills have been well mapped and resources strategically placed across the Service. Fire fighters displayed a clear desire to excel and continuously improve their personal knowledge and skills. Indeed they provided many excellent ideas for service improvement both in procedures and for equipment and this could be tapped into further moving forward.

Wholetime and on call firefighters, feel well trained and competent, and therefore able to deal with the many operational challenges which they are faced with on a daily basis. However, though RDS staff are well trained, some expressed a concern over skills fade due to lack of exposure to incidents and reduction in call outs, although this is also a national issue.

HWFRS provides a sound response service to the public and this is supported by the work to produce response plans for properties such as care/ nursing homes, which significantly improves the service offered to the community.

**Areas to explore**

- **Retained fire fighter availability**
- **Attendance Standards**

Retained staff availability, although providing excellent resilience in general terms, does have difficulties in providing day time availability in certain areas.

It has been noted that many rural retained stations are beginning to struggle to recruit new fire fighters and that some senior managers feel that increased flexibility may be required to ensure resilience going forward, i.e. identifying areas where a relaxation of the requirement to live/work within 5 minutes of the fire station would still provide a faster response to the public than deploying from elsewhere within the Service. Senior officers have also identified a need for a new approach to retained recruitment with more active work in local businesses and possible advertising to increase public awareness of the retained service, i.e. selling the limited time draw on staff to employers along with the skills that the employee will be able to offer once trained by the Fire and Rescue Service.

In addition the Service will need to ensure that staff understand why changes to crewing levels are being implemented to make necessary cuts to service provision. We are aware that this has already been explained to all staff but many of those interviewed were still to be convinced.

In Quarters 1 and 2 of the current year, the Service has seen a reduction in the number of attendances at building fires that met the self-set attendance standard, compared with last year. Although the performance levels currently being achieved are within the level of tolerance, the Service may wish to take the opportunity, offered by the development of its new CRMP, to explore the reasons behind this reduction. The Service has indicated that it may adopt revised standards in the future that will make improvement simpler to understand and implement.

**9. Health and Safety****Strengths**

- **There is a clear strategic management commitment and focus to the continuous improvement of Health & Safety**
- **Health & Safety culture is well embedded**

There is a clear strategic management commitment and focus to the continuous improvement of Health, Safety and Wellbeing. This has been demonstrated by recent organisational restructures which strengthen the links, between Health and Safety, Operational Policy, Operational Assurance, Fleet, Training and Human Resources.

Staff across the organisation are passionate, competent and enthusiastic about health and safety and have widely bought into the vision that Health

and Safety is an organisational responsibility at every level. This was reinforced throughout the visit and the team were impressed with the calibre and enthusiasm of the people they met and consider the culture of safety and safe systems to be well embedded.

HWFRS has recognised the significance and importance of the findings from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Consolidated Report based on the eight inspections completed in 2009/10. This has been instrumental in developing key drivers in improvement plan action and outcomes. This also considered a range of activities impacting in the areas of prevention, protection, performance and risk.

There is a strong training programme for IOSH and NEBOSH across the organisation which is reinforcing the strong commitment and focus on Health and Safety

There are sound systems of tasking improvements to systems, processes and policy from fire investigation, health and safety investigation and near misses through Share Point. There is a strong feedback loop and robust incident debriefing.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Wellbeing – further benefits to be gained?**
- **Consider closer links with health and safety, risk and insurance to drive down personal injury claims**

Due to the current restructure there is the opportunity to review and refresh the current Health and Safety meetings (Liaison Panel) with regard to their terms of reference, communication, participation and consultation arrangements. This will ensure that there is a robust internal structure and process in place amongst all levels and functions of the organisation, and where relevant, external interested parties can participate. This will also provide a more robust Health and Safety corporate governance structure encompassing welfare and wellbeing.

Whilst there is a strong culture and link between Health and Safety, this is less developed in terms of Wellbeing, which is a relatively new concept. Further benefits could be gained by closer links with HR with regards to occupational health, sickness absence, psychological safety, sickness levels and fitness, to improve management information, trend data and processes regarding the “health of the organisation”.

To further support the strategic focus on fire fighter safety there is the opportunity to develop and establish a more robust audit and review programme to evaluate the Service's health and safety management systems. This will help develop and establish a targeted, budgeted audit plan to proactively and continuously improve performance.

The Service could consider the efficiencies, and increased capacity to be gained by developing a common template for policies, legislation review and safety flash notices between SFRS and HWFRS.

The Service would benefit from considering closer links between the Human Resources Department and the member of staff that deals with insurance claims in the Service which would continue to drive down the cost of personal injury claims through improved information on claims history and injury and illness statistics.

## **10. Training & Development**

### **Strengths**

- **A safe and competent workforce**
- **Training matches risk profiles**
- **Assessment and Development Centres**

The Service has a strategic focus on developing and maintaining a safe and competent workforce.

Clear recognition and ownership of the findings of the HSE Consolidated Report has been instrumental in developing key drivers in improvement and training action plans. A thorough review of training and development delivery resulted in a number of key themes and recommendations being managed on a risk assessed basis; some are completed and some are awaiting completion.

Training generally matches risk profiles for station grounds. This has improved especially at fire fighter level as local station area risk assessments have been improved. Individual competencies have been supported by the rollout of Red Kite Competency Training Records.

Capital investment in training and strategic training facilities is welcomed and a number of key stakeholders have been involved in the design which they value. The new facilities should significantly improve the delivery of realistic operational training across the Service.

Leadership Seminars are seen as one good and effective initiative among many, but to fully gauge the difference they make to organisational capability and development, management may wish to continue with the assessment of leadership competence, following the attendance at the Leadership Seminar, as already evidenced by good individual development plans.

There has been a recent improved focus on non-operational support staff training and development needs, which will enhance effective service delivery. Assessment and Development Centres balance a focus between operational and technical competence as well as personal qualities and attributes applicable to roles and responsibilities.

**Areas to explore**

- **Integrated ICT systems**
- **Balance between training and assessing competence**

Training Centre staff would welcome working collaboratively with SFRS trainers to cover peaks and troughs in capacity and offering joint quality assurance using peer reviewers.

Equal importance needs to be given to acquisition and maintenance of skills as well as assessing those competencies to achieve an appropriate balance of focus. This is particularly important as many RDS staff feel that the focus on assessment has taken a lot of emphasis away from attainment of skills through instructions at the Training Centre.

Integrating systems such as Red Kite, HR-Connect, Gartan and Health and Safety systems could improve management information. This should be considered in the light of the new ICT strategy which is being developed, and needs to be enforced by Senior Management Board.

The Service may wish to give consideration to develop online E-learning to support training delivery and access to training for RDS. This approach would need to be supported by an investment in better ICT facilities at stations for the full benefit of such a system to be realised.

Early involvement with and stronger links between procurement, and operational support would ensure training requirements are fed into training delivery appropriately.

In relation to the training and competence of Fire and Rescue Authority Members, Member Leads and Champions are already in place. Further organisational improvement, leadership and capability could be achieved by the development of a more focused and current Member Development Training Programme.

**11. Call Management & Incident Support****Strengths**

- **Fire control staff are highly motivated, driven and engaged**
- **Strong desire for continuous improvement, which has resulted in numerous upgrades and add-ons to the original system**
- **The use of in-house trainers**

Fire control staff are highly motivated, driven and engaged, not only in day to day working, but also the implementation of the new command and control (C&C) system. This motivation has been demonstrated by a strong desire for continuous improvement, which has resulted in numerous upgrades and add-ons to the original system.

Fire control staff felt that the location of control at HQ was positive as support from all departments was “on the door step”.

Once fully embedded, significant benefits were identified from the new C&C system including faster response times, quick and easy identification of risk and a more robust and well evidenced call challenging capability. Indeed, operational staff identified many benefits of the new system and MDT including the handbook and GPS capability.

The use of in-house trainers was a sound idea and has resulted in well trained staff and in-depth understanding of the system and areas for improvements with trainers also offering resilience within the department.

There is a clear desire and capability for collaboration in this area with SFRS which could result in an improved service, resilience and cost savings moving forward.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Operational staff have and continue to face significant problems with the Mobile Data Terminals (MDT)**

Operational staff have and continue to face significant problems with the MDTs. This has resulted in some lack of confidence in the system. These teething problems require careful contract management and resource support to resolve.

Operational staff, and especially retained staff, do not fully understand the new mobilising system and the excellent training within fire control was not as well replicated with operational staff. Indeed training was carried out well in advance of the introduction of the MDT system which reduced its effectiveness and the system was not “sold” to staff. Significant effort to get them back on side is now being delivered as the new system beds down.

## **12. Human Resources**

### **Strengths**

- **HR Business partnering appears to be on track**
- **Energised, professional and motivated team**
- **HR is now recognised as a key enabler**

The new HR team appears energised, professional and motivated which is a strong foundation on which to build for the future to support organisational change.

The HR team is excited about the potential of the function to add value to the organisation moving forward with the leadership and organisational support openly recognising that HR is a key enabler.

Specific HR officers being linked to each area of the organisation is being seen as positive by operational staff and corporate functions alike and a



number of operational staff expressed a wish for consideration for this model to be available outside core hours to support the RDS, even though current data shows that in the past this was not widely used.

Focus on recruitment as a specialist support function is welcomed and it is hoped that this will allow for improved timescales in RDS recruitment.

There is the opportunity to build on the strong foundations and knowledge which exists in HR by capitalising on the learning brought in from new staff from outside the organisation to improve organisational capability, capacity and best practice.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Succession Planning**
- **Consider an appropriate model to support transactional tasks**
- **Further team building and strategy planning**

It is positive that the focus on succession planning, which needs to relate to all uniformed and non-uniformed staff, especially in the light of potential loss of skills through funding reductions is improving and would further benefit from a more integrated approach with Workforce Planning.

The organisation could consider support mechanisms for HR staff involved in the significant change affecting their own function and also supporting the wider organisational change programme.

The Service could consider an appropriate model to support transactional tasks within HR; this could include closer working with SFRS, bolstering up the administration function internally or by exploring the opportunity to outsource.

In a number of departments over the last few years there has been a significant turnover/change in staff which contributes to a lack of organisational stability and constant need to train, retrain and refresh skills. Recent restructures and refinement within portfolios provides a better balance to match expertise. This will further support the culture of improvement moving forward and hopefully bring a degree of welcomed stability to the organisation.

## The future organisation

The first part of this report has focused on the areas HWFRS identified in their scope following their own OpA self-assessment. The remainder of this report focuses on the peer team's view of the wider challenges facing the Service in the future, particularly in relation to further collaboration and discusses the findings from the cultural barometer exercise undertaken with staff.

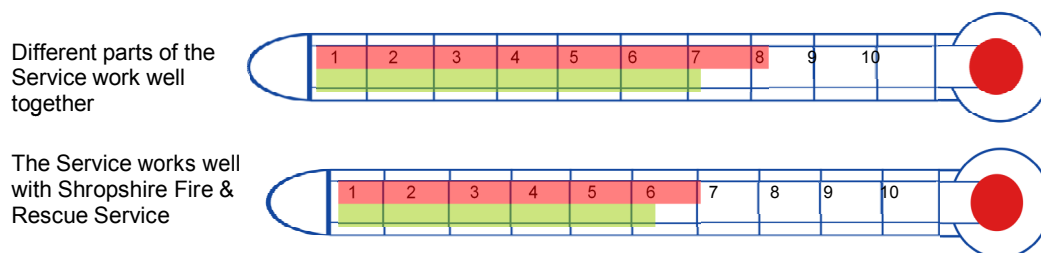
### 13. Collaboration

HWFRS has expressed a clear desire to explore opportunities to work more collaboratively with the Police, local partners and other Fire and Rescue Services, specifically Shropshire FRS. A number of specific collaborative arrangements already exist both formally and informally, with other Fire and Rescue Services and other organisations and these could be further developed.

The Service recognises that any more extensive collaboration on developing common policies or service delivery must be founded on a clear collective ambition from the collaborative partners and a clear understanding of what collaboration means. Collaboration can take place in many different forms from small-scale alignment of policies to enable a common approach to specific service issues, through to more extensive sharing of service functions.

The peer team identified a wide range of views on the issue of collaboration. Table 1, below, gives an overall feel for attitudes towards how well the Service not only works with SFRS, but also how well it works internally across different functions (this is based on feedback from 92 members of staff across the Service).

Table 1



The red bar shows the responses of strategic and tactical managers and the green bar that of operational staff. Perhaps as you might expect managers have a more positive approach to collaboration and points to the fact that there is some further work to be undertaken in order to fully explain the nature

of collaboration and the benefits to be derived. Nonetheless there was a strong recognition when the peer team discussed collaboration with the majority of operational staff that the future funding climate is likely to notably strengthen the case for greater collaboration and also a general understanding at the operational level that collaboration with other Services was practical and sensible.

However, further work is needed to translate this into practical collaborative working if desired.

At the strategic level, the Service might benefit from developing the existing Memorandum of Understanding with SFRS into a strategic alliance proposal/business case. This will include exploring opportunities for greater collaboration founded on improving the quality of services for local people within the counties.

The approach to developing a proposal for a Strategic Alliance will be important and it needs to include open and transparent discussion between political leaders and senior officers. The process should clearly outline the anticipated benefits from greater collaboration and how any resultant risks are to be managed. This should result in a clear roadmap for the future with buy-in from both the political and officer levels. In discussion with some Elected Members the peer challenge team identified that some Members were keen to explore opportunities for collaboration with their elected colleagues in Shropshire. This positive step could lead to an improved understanding between both Authorities about opportunities for increased resilience, improved performance and cost savings. As there is already a joint working group of officers from the two Services they could work with the Members to set out and suggest areas of potential collaboration for a joint Member group to mandate and move forward on the creation of a Strategic Alliance.

#### **14. Collaboration quick wins**

The peer team identified a number of short to medium terms 'quick wins' that would benefit both HWFRS and SFRS but it is recognised that they provide very limited financial savings.

- Sharing of hydrant information across border to Shropshire could be extended to the same distances as Risk Information (10 miles).
- Training instructors and facilities could be shared across HWFRS and SFRS to provide extra capacity in times of need.
- Opportunity to jointly review the ICT/Data Management strategy to facilitate closer collaboration in the future.
- Some informal collaboration is already taking place, such as SFRS providing some HR support to cover sickness, and this could be extended.

- Joint branding when policies are jointly reviewed and then published to get an incremental acceptance of joint branding.
- Further informal relationship building between managers at a tactical level could help to identify more opportunities for collaboration.
- Opportunities to strategically review cross border assets that could be shared or assets that duplicate provisions for efficiencies and economies of scale.
- Aligned recruitment and joint RDS training might shorten the time taken from initial interest to being on the run. However the imbalance in resources and costs between the two Services are acknowledged.
- Phase II control room linking together will negate the need for both Services' secondary control rooms.
- Future capital projects with West Mercia Police.

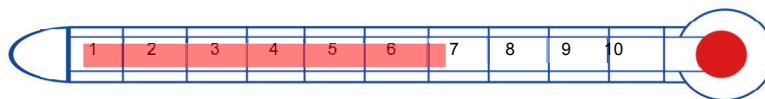
## 15. Culture

To assist the peer team's understanding of the organisation's culture, the team undertook an exercise with 92 officers and Members in the Service. This helped complement other evidence gathered by the team.

One of the strengths of the Service, as heard from a range of staff, is the increased professionalisation of the Service which was generally perceived as a positive. There is recognition that it is a forward looking organisation that has positioned itself well to deal with future challenges and the staff, as evidenced through the cultural barometer, by and large trusts senior officers to make decisions that will improve the Service.

Table 2

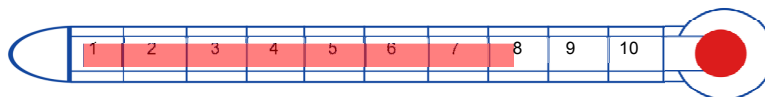
I trust senior officers to make decisions that will improve the Service



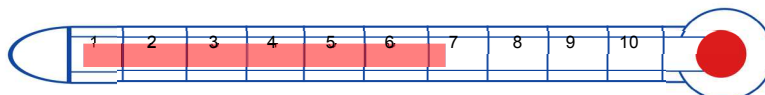
Communication is seen as very good and staff by and large feel that they understand where the Service is trying to go.

Table 3

I get to hear what is going on inside the Service



Issues are discussed with me, I'm not just told what to do



## **Conclusion and contact information**

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers. It is clear that Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service continues to make progress, despite the budget reductions it has already had to manage.

The peer team believe that by harnessing this enthusiasm and commitment HWFRS can embrace plans for the future, managing the risks and challenges along the way.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge please contact:

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