



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



# **County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge**

## **Report**

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# 1. Introduction, Context and Purpose

## Introduction

This report presents the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service (CDDFRS) in April 2014.

The OpA self assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

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

Structured into what the peer challenge team saw as key strengths and areas for exploration, the report provides the team's findings against the three key strategic questions:

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

Using the same structure, it also provides a focus on the Operational Assessment (OpA) Key Areas of Assessment (KAAs):

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

Within this framework, CDDFRS asked the team for its views on:

(i) *Community Risk Management*. A critical evaluation of the Service's approach to identifying, analysing and prioritising community based risk. In particular, CDDFRS was keen to understand how it could strengthen its risk analysis processes and sought the the team's views on how well it links risk to activity.

(ii) *Quality Assurance*. This relates particularly to how Service quality assures the effectiveness of its Prevention and Training and Development activities. This included both centrally delivered and watch based activity within this scope.

(iii) *Business Continuity*. This relates to CDDFRS's compliance with the National Framework requirement that services '...have effective business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with [their] duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and to meet the full range of service delivery risks'.

Fire peer challenge is part of sector-led improvement. The CDDFRS Fire Peer Challenge took place from 1- 4 April 2014 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, observations, focus groups and visits to fire stations and community projects. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, staff, volunteers, front line firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

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

### **Context and purpose**

The OpA self-assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

## **2. The Peer Challenge Team**

Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process. They help services with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The peer challenge team for CDDFRS was:

**Paul Hancock** (Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire FRS)

**Councillor Sian Timoney** (Luton Borough Council & Bedfordshire Fire Authority)

**Steve Rhodes** (Assistant Chief Officer and Director of Service Support, West Yorkshire FRS)

**Neil Odin** (Assistant Chief Officer- Community Safety at Hampshire FRS).

**Matt Maguire** (Policy & Executive Support Manager, Cheshire FRS)

**Martin Baillie** (Health and Safety Executive, Public Services Sector)

**Ernest Opuni** (Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association)

### **3. Executive Summary**

CDDFRS's Combined Fire Authority (CFA) has a mature approach and level of understanding of the needs of the organisation. The Service is self-aware about the scale of the challenges it faces and staff across the organisation have a positive approach to transformation. CFA members are well aware of the challenges the Service, like all others, is facing. Without exception, external partners of CDDFRS communicated a clear message to the team that the Service benefits from strong and credible leadership.

The relationships between members of the CFA and CDDFRS officers are positive. There is also a refreshing maturity in the relationship between CDDFRS and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) which has developed particularly significantly during the last two years.

CDDFRS has built strong local relationships with its various partners which are delivering benefits and further opportunities for collaboration. This is evidenced by the fact that CDDFRS has a consistent presence at Area Action Partnerships and the Darlington Problem Solving Group; through this engagement the Service maintains a prominent and highly valued role. The training of partner staff through this work is also extending the reach of the Service into a number of non-traditional fire areas such as the Urgent Care Boards where the health inequalities agenda is being tackled.

Communication across the organisation is thought to be good and there appears to be a healthy level of challenge between functions. There is a clear strategic drive at CDDFRS to empower middle managers which has been broadly welcomed and is starting to have a positive impact. There are individuals across the Service with specialised skills who are crucial to supporting the organisation in the years ahead and within the Service Transformation Programme.

The team feels that it would be prudent to continually assess the effectiveness of these communication channels and in particular how the success of local initiatives and partnerships are captured in the learning process to inform future strategic planning and direction.

The CDDFRS Health and Safety and Training teams have robust assurance and assessment processes and policies applied are appropriate. Also the further provision of fire training and command experiences are broadly welcomed across the service.

The team would encourage CDDFRS to review the current ownership of the Service's vision and strategy within the Community Safety Strategy (CSS), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the Service Transformation Programme in order to provide further clarity on how they support and complement each other.

The team would encourage the Service to develop a consistent narrative to clarify the organisational method of determining risk. There is an opportunity to consider

how local plans at station level integrate with community risk, protection activity, information gathering and training focus.

In addition there is an opportunity for the Service to review current portfolios, responsibilities and meeting structures of the Service Leadership Team (SLT) and the Service Management Team (SMT) in order that CDDFRS can assure itself that these are 'fit for future purpose and are providing real value.'

In addition CDDFRS would benefit from considering how it embeds further the Member training and development programme.

The Service's approach to seeking opportunities for collaboration focusses mainly on non-Fire and Rescue projects. This is understandable as the opportunities for this to happen between the FRSs in the region are limited. This being said the Service is encouraged to ensure that it remains aware of any appropriate opportunities for collaboration with FRSs which may emerge in future and that CDDFRS wishes to pursue.

CDDFRS could be more proactive in telling the public and partners more about what it does and it may wish to review the effectiveness of its marketing and engagement strategies. While there is a wide range of community activity taking place, the Service could do more to promote itself and the community outcomes achieved through its initiatives and partnership working.

The Service has an opportunity to further consider opportunities arising from the emerging public health agenda which may allow it to better capitalise on what it is doing with one Urgent Care Board and the CCGs to address the health inequalities risks more widely.

The devolution of power away from the Service's Headquarters has been successful in empowering the District Teams and local managers. However, implementing this change requires that the Service put additional measures in place to ensure that local intelligence and success is captured and fed back up the organisation.

## **4. Leadership, Governance and Corporate Capacity**

### ***4.1 How effective is the leadership and Governance?***

#### Areas of strength

- Positive relationships between Members and senior officers complemented by Member Champion roles.
- Members are open to discussion and debate of future plans and Transformation Programme - real benefit of Member Away Days (May).
- Strategic drive to empower middle managers broadly welcomed and starting to have an impact.
- External partners consider CDDFRS has strong and credible leadership.
- Proactive and focused approach to officer development for future leadership requirements (SM Development Programme).
- Refreshing and mature relationship with FBU.

CDDFRS's Combined Fire Authority (CFA) has a mature approach and level of understanding of the needs of the organisation. This belies the fact that two thirds of the councillors on it are relatively new to the Authority. With a significant number of new members having joined the Authority in May 2013, it is clear that the Member Champions programme has contributed positively to the development of Authority members' knowledge and understanding. The Authority is a cohesive one and the peer challenge team found clear evidence that members of the CFA work together well.

The relationships between members of the CFA and CDDFRS officers are positive. The Member Champions programme is contributing to this as there are some natural synergies between the portfolios of members and officer areas of responsibility. The roles of the Champions are extensive and cover all key areas including the Retained Duty System (RDS) and Equality and Diversity matters and the concept is universally regarded as working well. As a large Authority, the Member Champions play an important role in building up relationships and ensuring that there is effective dialogue with officers; this proving to be the case at CDDFRS. The team found clear evidence of good relationships developing in a number of areas across the Service's political and professional leadership and this is particularly true of the relationships between the Chair, Vice Chair and the Chief Executive.

As a result CFA members are well aware of the challenges the Service, like all others, is facing. They have acknowledged the complex context in which the Authority has to implement further savings and efficiencies. This has resulted in members being open to debating the wide range of options the Service needs to consider both now and in the future. These include discussions about future options and operating models including greater degrees of collaboration by the Service with appropriate "blue light" and local authority partners. The Authority demonstrates a mature approach to considering the need for change and what was articulated very clearly to the peer challenge team was that theirs is a pragmatic and realistic approach in which there are no 'sacred cows' meaning all options will be considered in assuring a positive future for CDDFRS.

It is clear that there have been some real and direct benefits elicited from the programme of Member Away Days. These provide the space required for consideration of the impacts of the Service Transformation Programme and associated financial challenges which take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between members of the Authority and officers from the Service's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). Whilst Members feel supported by officers, there can be no suggestion of a 'cosy' relationship because each element of the Service's leadership is clearly open to challenge from the other.

There is a refreshing maturity in the relationship between CDDFRS and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) which has developed particularly during the last two years. Part of this journey has included the election of a new Chair of the CFA along with the appointment of a significant number of new members onto the Fire Authority who, along with officers, have a shared experience of negotiations with FBU officials in relation to operational terms and conditions. Another indication of the maturity in the relationship is that while there are currently no formal channels of communication between Members and officials, there are a number of informal mechanisms in place for engaging with the Union and raising issues which can then be formally discussed in a constructive and pragmatic manner. A good example of a successful interface with the FBU is the Service's progressive approach to equality and diversity. The Service's Equality and Diversity Group, to which the FBU contributes both actively and positively, is highly valued by all parts of the Service and is viewed as having become more effective in recent years.

Communication across the organisation is thought to be good and there appears to be a healthy level of challenge between functions. This is evidenced by the positive interface between the CDDFRS Corporate Health and Wellbeing group and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer's (DCFO) Operational Focus Group. Closer working at the Service's Headquarters and links into the Community Protection Directorate also bear this out.

There is a clear strategic drive at CDDFRS to empower middle managers which has been broadly welcomed and is starting to have a positive impact. Managers have welcomed recent moves to decentralise power down through the organisation resulting in enhanced empowerment of the Service Management Team (SMT), comprising of both middle and senior managers, to drive transformation. This decentralisation is evident both among staff at the Service's Headquarters and at a District Manager level with the latter group attesting to the benefits of this shift in power. They value the opportunity for significant decisions to be made at this level of the Service. This has fuelled the appetite for further devolution and the team was made aware of calls for this process to continue further. In tandem with this, CDDFRS is taking a proactive approach to officer development focusing on future leadership requirements reflecting the identification of requirements by SMT. This is contributing positively to a more cohesive workforce and the team were informed that this is impacting positively on staff morale.

Without exception, external partners of CDDFRS communicated a clear message to the team that the Service benefits from strong and credible leadership. Much of this feedback centred on the high regard in which the Chief Executive is held; she is playing a leading role in the partnership arena where her personal impact is

described as positive and her input is clearly appreciated by all organisations with whom she collaborates. Partner organisations and other stakeholders from across County Durham and Darlington universally highlighted her personal expertise and credibility. In a more general sense, partners were effusive in their support for CDDFRS's leaders (both political and professional) and the peer challenge team was left in no doubt that partners place a high value on the excellent liaison they have with CDDFRS (both strategically and operationally). The various Fire and Rescue Services in the North East region clearly respect each other and this too was articulated to the peer challenge team.

#### Areas to explore

- Consider embedding the Member training and development programme.
- Evaluate current communication processes and arrangements (internal and external) to ensure they are effective and tell your story.
- Consider the current ownership and awareness of the Service vision and strategy – CS Strategy, IRMP and Transformation Programme. **Clarity will be key.**
- Opportunity to review current portfolios, responsibilities and meeting structures of SLT/SMT – ensuring they are 'fit for future purpose.' **Clarity will be key.**

The team feels that CDDFRS would benefit from considering how it embeds further the member training and development programme. While there are plans for a comprehensive member training and development programme, the sessions which have taken place since the significant influx of new members joined the Authority in 2013 could achieve greater impact as part of a more structured programme. Inductions have consisted primarily of a one day session which have been well-received but would benefit from being followed up in tandem with a more formalised appraisal of member development needs being undertaken. Plans for rolling out personal development plans for members need to be enacted, as these highlight vital training needs that are relevant to their role as Fire Authority Members. There is an opportunity for this more programmed approach to align with, and support, the broader Member Champion Scheme which has already demonstrated significant success.

The team feels that there would be benefit in CDDFRS evaluating its current marketing and engagement processes and arrangements. This would help the Service to assure itself that these are effective in ensuring that the CDDFRS story and key messages within it are being delivered and received. It was not always clear to the Peer Challenge team that there is a strategic approach to communication and marketing which addresses the need to develop key messages for internal and external stakeholders which help to articulate the Service's vision and strategy. This is partly due to the current structure of the organisation which could do more to enable communications specialists to take a more active part in feeding into the Service's planning process. One way of addressing this might be by including them as an integral part of the strategic decision making process. Communications staff and consideration of communications issues could add significant value if made an integral part of the broader transformation strategy. There is also a prominent role they could play in the consultation on, and implementation of, annual plans and

proposals. At a Station and District level, the organisation is encouraged by the team to assure itself that communications channels (including those presented through members of the Fire Authority and partners) are coordinated and managed to ensure their impact is maximised. With corporate resources at a premium making the best use of this expertise will be important. CDDFRS may wish to consider how it best deploys appropriate toolkits, strategies and templates in ensuring that messages can be actively communicated so that the intelligence the Service possesses can be fully utilised.

The team would encourage CDDFRS to consider the current ownership of the Service vision and strategy within the Community Safety Strategy (CSS), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and the Service's Transformation Programme. A hierarchy of plans exists within the organisation, starting with the three year Community Safety Strategy and working down through the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to Directorate Plans and section plans. However, the ownership of the CSS, including its development and drafting, was not very clear to the Peer Challenge team. This was echoed in discussions about the ownership of IRMP where a number of different parts of the Service areas each claimed overall responsibility for its development. There was also a lack of clarity about the existence of a corporate planning process underpinned by a framework that would enable the CFA and SLT to consider and discuss the full-range of internal and external factors driving strategy and policy. In developing future plans and proposals, it is important that there is clear ownership and a framework underpinning this approach which can then be communicated to the wider organisation.

Determining the ownership of the Service Transformation Programme in particular will be key to the organisation's future success. Doing this will influence the coherence of the Service's narrative as it works to implement new proposals for generating savings and driving change. Proposals to incorporate the annual refresh of the CS Strategy with the IRMP will provide an opportunity to ensure this suite of plans align and remain relevant. Moving forward with clarity about this will be key.

There is an opportunity for the Service to review current portfolios, responsibilities and meeting structures of SLT and SMT in order that CDDFRS can assure itself that these are 'fit for future purpose.' Although there are some exceptions, most members of both groups are promoted from within CDDFRS meaning many are new in post or have new responsibilities. There is a well understood structure for managing the organisation, operating through SLT and the three meetings of the SMT. These structures serve officers well and support performance management in the Districts and across the organisation. However, like many other FRSs, CDDFRS is approaching a period of uncertainty during which a number of key people are due to leave the organisation. This presents an opportunity, in line with the thoughts around the ownership of strategy, to ensure structures and portfolios are fit for purpose as the Service moves forward. This too is an area in which clarity will be key.

Given the Service's reliance on District Managers to act as a conduit between the Service's Headquarters and the stations, CDDFRS may wish to review whether the current arrangement of an annual management seminar remains a sufficient channel for providing dialogue with all staff and RDS in particular.

The Service's approach to seeking opportunities for collaboration focusses mainly on non-Fire and Rescue opportunities. This is understandable as the opportunities for this to happen between the FRSs in the region are limited. This being said the Service is encouraged to ensure that it remains aware of any appropriate opportunities for collaboration with FRSs which may emerge in future and that CDDFRS wishes to utilise.

## **4.2 How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?**

### Areas of strength

- Consistent presence at Area Action Partnerships and Problem Solving Group - CDDFRS taking a prominent role.
- Training of partner staff to identify fire safety risks, extending the reach of the Service.
- Strong local relationships with partners but between Police and Fire in particular. Examples include the 'Opportunity Knocks' initiative and Estates Improvement Programme.

CDDFRS has a consistent presence at Area Action Partnerships and Problem Solving Group and maintains a prominent and highly valued role. The organisation has shown great commitment to local partner structures, with a consistent presence at the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) in Durham and at the Problem Solving Group (PSG) in Darlington. CDDFRS officers are viewed as positive, pragmatic and passionate advocates for community and safety issues by partners. This included partners from local authorities, housing bodies and the police. Fire personnel have helped to make these groups a source of stability and vital local intelligence in the period following local government reorganisation. They have also had a tangible impact on the implementation of a range of local campaigns including bonfire safety initiatives and ensuring partners understand and appreciate the wider fire safety agenda. The involvement of senior managers in the strategic forums, which provide a coordinating role for partnership work in the layer above AAPs and the PSG are also starting to shape a more coherent approach to partner working.

The training of partner staff to identify fire safety risks is extending the reach of the Service. Fire officers have developed practical working relationships with partners which are having an impact on fire safety outcomes. The training of partners who regularly visit the homes of vulnerable people within the community is a positive example of how the Service is using partner capacity to extend its 'reach'. This has been successfully rolled out through housing trusts and local authorities providing a model that can be extended to other partner agencies. This will allow for CDDFRS resources to stretch even further into the community and at the same time reduce the number of visits and interaction received by a household.

CDDFRS has built strong local relationships with its various partners which are delivering benefits and further opportunities for collaboration. These well-developed networks are described by partners as successful due to the great confidence they have in the Service's delivery track record and commitment to 'doing what they say they will do'. The relationship with police is particularly strong and there is a clear commitment to working together at both a service-wide and local level. An example of this is the Estates Improvement Programme where joint police and fire facilities have been developed. Also the 'Opportunity Knocks' project, which aims to deliver joint input on the doorstep from both police and fire, provides strong evidence of the growing trust and respect between the two agencies and provides a solid platform for further collaboration.

## Areas to explore

- Proactive communication (marketing) informing community about outcomes and benefits produced by FRS.
- Deeper evaluation of work undertaken and outcomes – how do you know your interventions are having an impact?
- Consider opportunities arising from the emerging public health agenda and capitalise on what you are doing with one Urgent Care Board to address the health inequalities risk.
- Ensure the success of local initiatives and intelligence is fed back to the corporate centre (Headquarters) to inform future plans and transformation.

CDDFRS could be more proactive in telling the public more about what it does and it may wish to review the effectiveness of how it engages and consults with the community and markets itself to partners. While there is a wide range of community activity taking place, the Service could do more to promote itself and the community outcomes achieved through its initiatives. There is scope for more communications via the Service's website, social media and local newspapers to ensure key messages are being delivered and received and the team would encourage the Service to further explore these avenues. In particular, the team would highlight that the area of focus for CDDFRS relates to the Service better developing its 'story' and the narrative which articulates this. There is an opportunity for the Service to better develop a clearer image and identity if this is done.

The Districts are key to what the Service delivers. This being said, the focus of communication at this level seems mainly to be on the interface with partners. Despite the close links to communities, partners believe that the Service could say a great deal more about its impact, role and activities. Among partners and the community there was a clear appetite for more information, both in terms of initiatives and the broader narrative around the Service's plans for the future. While it is possible to address this issue by making better use of communications skills and channels across the organisation, there is also an opportunity to ensure that CFA members use their position and platform to promote the work of the organisation and its role within broader partnerships both in County Durham and Darlington and beyond.

CDDFRS may wish to undertake a deeper evaluation of the work it undertakes and the outcomes which result in order to assure itself that it fully understands how the Service's interventions are having an impact. Some evaluation does take place however CDDFRS could consider a clearer and more systematic approach to evaluating its corporate or local prevention activities. With resources at a premium as a result of reductions in funding and staff within prevention and protection, it is vital that the organisation understands how its activities are best deployed. Evaluation, as part of a broader project framework, will assist managers in better understanding the capacity issues facing the Service whilst ensuring the organisation gets the maximum return on its efforts.

The Service has an opportunity to further consider opportunities arising from the emerging public health agenda which may allow it to better capitalise on what it is doing with one Urgent Care Board to address health inequalities risks more widely. The changes to health structures are some of the most significant for public service delivery in recent times and include a significant shift of responsibility for public

health into local authorities. These open up different kinds of opportunities for Fire and Rescue Services to use their professional knowledge to influence a broader safety agenda. Equally they present a number of challenges for public bodies such as the need to address an increasing health inequalities gap which in turn is exacerbating vulnerability among some parts of the community. CDDFRS maintains a strong understanding of the health reforms at the strategic level through SLT however engagement at the lower levels of the organisation could be strengthened.

The Service could use its existing involvement in one of the Urgent Care Boards in the sub-region as a platform to promote its activities in fire prevention and the community safety arena across the others. Elected members in particular have an important role to play in promoting and explaining to other partners the benefits of fire and rescue involvement in the wider health arena. This could be achieved through their local authorities as well as through the other local structures in which they are involved.

The devolution of power away from Headquarters has been successful in empowering the District Teams and local managers. However, implementing this change requires that the Service put additional measures in place to ensure that local intelligence is captured and fed back up the organisation. There is strong evidence that the Districts are rich with partner and organisational intelligence. However it is not clear as to whether there is a clear mechanism to ensure that this information moves back up to the CDDFRS corporate centre (Headquarters) to drive planning or the development of Service-wide plans. This is particularly true of information relating to prevention and protection. There is a clearer path for response and risk information to be shared across the Service and there may be some value in reflecting on what can be learned from these processes in order to apply these to what the Service does in relation to prevention and protection.

Members of the Authority and staff through the various fora in which they are involved could also provide a rich source of partner and external information. CDDFRS may wish to consider putting more systematic mechanisms in place to allow information from this source to be better shared and utilised across the Service as a whole.

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

#### Areas of strength

- The organisation is aware of the scale of the challenge and people have a positive approach to transformation.
- Introduction of new duty systems and AVH provide significant additional capacity.
- CDDFRS has individuals with valuable specialist skills and corporate memory.
- Move to the new HQ provides a great opportunity for teams to work together more effectively and collaboratively.

The Service is self-aware about the scale of the challenges it faces and staff across the organisation have a positive approach to transformation. There are plans across the organisation which are tailored to respond to potential changes in capacity and further reductions in funding. Most section heads and managers have robust plans in place to manage their limited resources with a good level of future-proofing built in. Allied to this awareness is a positive approach to addressing the problems of reduced capacity which is testament to the resilience and positivity of CDDFRS staff.

There are individuals across the Service with specialised skills who are crucial to supporting the organisation in the years ahead and within the Service Transformation Programme. Allied to this, these staff are a valuable source of continuity and 'corporate memory' whose input is valued across a range of themes and partnership arenas.

In the short time that Headquarters has relocated to the new site at Belmont Park, there has been a tangible and positive effect on the working culture of corporate departments and improved communications between managers and staff. Teams are working more closely together without depending on a great degree of external stimulus or complex processes to ensure that there is collaboration between sections. It is a clear indication of a workforce committed to maximising the opportunity to share skills and insight across teams and disciplines. This provides a strong foundation on which the operational effectiveness can be maximised.

The introduction of new duty systems within CDFRS, along with Additional Voluntary Hours (AVH), provide significant additional capacity. The changes to the wholtime shift system in particular has enhanced capacity for risk reduction work which is a further demonstration of an organisation and workforce well prepared to adapt how they work in order to respond to the resource challenges faced by the Service.

With specific regard to effective business continuity, the good relationships with Police at both a strategic and local level (and the appetite for seeking further opportunities for collaboration) position the Service well. Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and District Partnerships provide further opportunity for asset sharing.

## Areas to explore

- As responsibility and workload is devolved from centre to district teams consideration should be given to the resilience of the central support provided.
- Consider overall programme management approach of IRMP, estates and transformation programmes.
- Develop a clearer partnership vision to increase opportunities for being commissioned via transformation pots and AAPs (Members).
- Develop plans for the retention of key staff and succession (Corporate).

As responsibility and workload is devolved from the centre to district teams, consideration should be given to the resilience of the central support provided. The reduction in the number of staff providing central support to District and local teams has meant that in many cases, individuals or teams of just two or three are now responsible for providing specialised support for district and station staff. The Service may need to assure itself that this does not adversely impact on CDDFRS's ability to maximise the 'reach' of the Service and support district groups. The challenges of reduced capacity does however mean that the forums in which they operate may benefit from ongoing review to ensure they are deployed appropriately and where they can have the greatest impact.

The Service will want to ensure that it has robust planning processes and a comprehensive understanding of capacity and pressure points, in order to ensure that local staff continue to receive high quality and timely support from Headquarters. A good example of where and how this can be achieved is the human resources team. Having reduced from ten members of staff to just four, they have worked over the last few years to automate business processes, create templates and toolkits for managers and staff and to change their working practices to better meet the needs of local staff. This has created better relationships, streamlined workloads and created valuable additional capacity. There may be opportunities for the lessons learned from this to be applied to other parts of the Service.

The Service may wish to consider the overall programme management approach of IRMP, Estates Improvement and Service Transformation programmes. CDDFRS maintains a project management framework and there may be scope to use this as a foundation for a more robust approach to the management of major programmes, such as the Service Transformation Programme and Estates Improvement. As with the development of strategy, programme management would benefit from having an identifiable 'home' and clear ownership. This would ensure that the use of resources could be more closely monitored and better directed thus allowing the SLT to act more responsively to address emerging issues.

Local partner structures across Durham and Darlington are delivering a broad range of local initiatives, particularly around the traditional fire safety agenda. The move towards commissioning across the public sector and the introduction of various pots of transformation funding may provide opportunities for the Service. The team would encourage the Service to assure itself that it is well placed to maximise such opportunities. This may have the effect of placing its own initiatives and interventions

(such as youth engagement and road safety) on a more secure footing by making greater use of alternative funding streams. In order to do this effectively, the Service will need to have an up to date understanding of its community safety and prevention and protection priorities to enable it to identify and take advantage of the opportunities that emerge. The three-year Community Safety Strategy and annual IRMP in their current format may not provide the best foundation for doing this however having an incorporated document and making the best use of the Service's intelligence sources throughout the year could put CDDFRS in a better position.

With the identification of issues associated with specialist and non-operational roles there is an accompanying risk focussed on retention and succession planning. This is more relevant as teams and capacity reduce and the pressure to deliver increases. While contingency plans and mechanisms to ensure knowledge and skills are retained exist on the operational side of the organisation, there appears to be more to do to ensure the same processes exist for non-operational roles. Given the future challenges, it is timely for the Service to revisit contingency arrangements for these key members of staff.

## 5. KAAs

### 5.1 Community Risk Management

Areas of strength

- CS Strategy provides a basis upon which to build a clear focus for the Authority and Service.
- Clear Authority leadership and understanding of transformation and associated challenges.
- Ward based risk mapping concept provides a focus for local teams.
- Comprehensive understanding of corporate risks and a robust management framework to ensure risks are managed effectively.

CDDFRS's Community Safety Strategy (CSS) provides a basis upon which to build a clear focus for the Authority and Service. The Community Safety Strategy plan provides an easily identifiable source document for the provision of community safety and prevention and protection activities. The CSS is updated every four years at present with an annual IRMP action plan, but there are plans to refresh the document annually, to help improve the relevance of the CSS and to enable the organisation to better target its activities and partnerships.

As mentioned previously, both the Fire Authority and Strategic Leadership Team have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face in the years ahead. This is very much a shared vision and is coupled with a determination to confront the full scale of the solutions required to address future funding and service delivery scenarios. The vision and approach has been developed jointly through various member away days and the one to one contact that both members and officers appear to prioritise the challenges.

Ward-based risk mapping at the local level is helping to focus the resources of stations towards the greatest risks within the community. With further refinement and the challenge and input of specialist staff, this mechanism will help to refine operational activity further and free up additional capacity.

The corporate risk management framework is sound and comprehensive and the mechanisms for considering risk provides a basis for enabling other risk factors to be fully integrated and considered. The positioning of the risk management process within the SMT meeting structures allows for the relevant managers to be held to account and address the risks attributed to them or their activities.

Good links exist to the Information Services team and initiatives are increasingly intelligence-led. The Corporate CS team link into information services and communications for campaigns allowing for initiatives and activities to be challenged where they are not a priority.

The FRS is a valued and committed partner on AAP Boards eliciting high levels of trust and good two-way relationships at District level.

CDDFRS demonstrates confidence that its retirement profile and associated savings can contribute significantly to meeting the future budget deficit. The Service has a

good understanding of this profile with clear projections in place for the next four years.

#### Areas to explore

- Organisation is rich with data – opportunity for bringing together risk mapping and other intelligence (in particular health data via the Urgent Care Boards).
- Develop a consistent narrative to clarify the organisational method of determining risk.
- Consider how local plans at station level integrate with community risk, protection activity, information gathering and training focus.

CDDFRS is a Service which is rich with data. This provides an opportunity for bringing together risk mapping and other intelligence such as health data accessed via the Urgent Care Board. There are also opportunities for the Service to explore the effectiveness of the two way flow of information and data between Service Headquarters and Districts to inform future plans and targeting of resources.

The team would encourage the Service to develop a consistent narrative to clarify the organisational method of determining risk. There is an opportunity to consider how local plans at station level integrate with community risk, protection activity, information gathering and training. The Service may also wish to evaluate the 'added value' of the station audit process and in particular how this delivers improvements in performance and standards over and above the District Team's quarterly audits.

It is important for the Service to ensure that its plans do not become too narrowly focussed on finances and resource challenges more generally to the detriment of a fuller appraisal of wider policy and partnership issues relevant to the development of the Service's Strategic Plans, (IRMP and CSS) and community engagement arrangements. There may be benefits to considering a broader planning process for this work to reflect a strong coherent vision which better utilises risk reduction through improved targeting. This will mitigate any risks that Community Safety targeting is predominantly based upon capacity rather than the assessment of risk.

## 5.2 Prevention

### Areas of Strength

- Developed a large capacity at station level for Home Safety Checks with clear expectations of delivery.
- Fire Death Protocol – an excellent example of partnership agreement about vulnerability.
- Local innovation in delivering with partners (e.g. AAPs, Problem Solving Groups) – Age UK befriending scheme, Bonfire initiatives.

CDDFRS is highly committed to delivery of home safety fire checks as a main strand of its approach to prevention.

The Fire Death Protocol is an excellent example of partnership agreement and understanding about vulnerability whilst local innovation in delivering with partners is clearly demonstrated via the work the Service undertakes in AAPs and the Problem Solving Group. Initiatives such as the Age UK befriending scheme and Bonfire initiatives are used extensively in improving and identifying trends. Through good use of data analysis the Service is picking up emerging trends (for example food related false alarms)

### Areas to explore

- Resolve tension between output targets and high risk focus in HFSC delivery.
- Consider further targeting of homes/property outside of response times.
- Consider deeper evaluation of current initiatives to ensure appropriate use of resources – aligning to risk.

There was no strong evidence of household targeting or community profiling and the team therefore felt there was limited targeting of HFSCs. At present the areas outside the 70 percent coverage within 8 minutes response standard are not prioritised for HFSC visits.

There is an opportunity for the Service to better utilise the links it has to health and public health data to ensure that CDDFRS is fully utilising its understanding of its various communities. This may also provide further potential for funding pots, awards and grants but there is more to do to ensure the focus at a strategic level translates into a clearer picture about how the Service will engage locally.

There would be benefit from further work being undertaken on Community Safety activity benefit realisation. With an increase in commissioning and bidding for alternative resources as an integral means of delivery, CDDFRS needs to be able to demonstrate underpinning the benefits of community safety activity particularly those cited as at risk as a means of being well placed to utilise these opportunities.

### 5.3 Protection

#### Areas of Strength

- Competent staff and robust systems provide assurance against organisational standards.
- Innovative use of station staff to inspect property that would not normally receive a visit.

The Service has a very strong approach to quality standards and this stands out well within the protection teams. High levels of autonomy further strengthen this area allowing managers to focus on high risk buildings which in turn contributes to lowering the risk for the Authority.

The existing contract with Essex FRS with enforcement seems to be a good use of resource and demonstrates a willingness to partner with other organisations where obvious benefit can be shown.

The capacity developed within station based staff to inspect lower risk, less complex buildings will provide a much richer picture of risk for the Service over time.

#### Areas to explore

- Consider how protection could be used to lower risk to fire fighters and the community from the built environment.
- Clarify whether the organisation exists to enforce the law or to use it to reduce risk in the community.
- Assess the resource impact arising from the increasing number of premises on the RRO Audit Programme.

The team would encourage the Service to assure itself that it has sufficient capacity to fully deliver its risk based audit programme. The current premises re-inspection/audit programme details eleven thousand incomplete properties which may be beyond the Service's current capacity and capabilities. There may be opportunities to increase capacity and improve targeting and ability to develop campaigns by engaging Local Enterprise Partnerships and other partners in a more routine and structured way. There is engagement with partners but there may be benefits to utilising other perspectives such as those relevant to new business – streamlining information into business.

There is work still to do to ensure a better deployment of computer systems and software; currently there is a high dependency on manual processes in place being utilised in extracting data from CFRMIS.

As is the case with other parts of the Service, there is a need for CDFRS to consider the future retirement profile of the team to ensure continued level of skills and knowledge remain.

## 5.4 Response

### Areas of Strength

- The Service's operational resilience arrangements are well supported with the resilience contracts in place.
- Some innovative and effective staffing arrangements developed across the Service providing financial saving as well as improved productivity.
- Clear commitment to operational improvement via a dedicated group to gather data and information and action changes.

The Service's Response Strategy is clearly articulated within the CSS and performance against the standards of response is good. For example, response to dwelling fires is currently at 75.9 percent against a target of 70 percent.

There are a number of flexible response arrangements within the Service which are aligned to the Authority's risk profile. For example, TRVs provide a more effective response to wildfires and a Flood Response Vehicle provides appropriate PPE across the Authority's area.

There is a clear commitment to operational improvement via a dedicated group charged with gathering data and information and overseeing action changes. The OVEG forum seems to have positively impacted on organisational approaches to buying and maintaining equipment and assets.

### Areas to explore

- Reinvigorate the channels available to all staff through which they can suggest improvements for the Service.
- Continue to monitor response standards and how they inform the risk modelling process to develop future options as part of the Service Transformation Programme.

There may be opportunities for the Service to consider further options relating to peak activity, deployment of RDS and Day crewing plus. This may have a significant impact by yielding significant savings with minimal impact on service delivery.

## 5.5 Health and Safety

### Areas of Strength

- Health and Safety team have robust assurance processes.
- Themed audits provide independent assurance of health and safety arrangements.
- Health and safety issues are identified as part of the Operational Improvement Board.

Health and Safety issues are identified as part of the Operational Improvement team. The Health and Safety team seems to be a stable one due to having not significantly been impacted by reductions in staffing. Health and Safety is a standing agenda item at senior level meetings of the CFA, SLT and SMT. In addition the

Health and Safety team report to a senior manager within Operations meaning there is good SMT involvement and oversight whilst there is a Member H&S Champion.

The CDDFRS Health and Safety team have robust assurance processes and policies applied are appropriate. In addition the programme of internal and external accreditation of stations on a three year basis by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) provides additional assurance. The OSHENS reporting system is established and well understood and is providing valuable learning.

Themed audits provide independent assurance of health and safety arrangements based on changes in operational guidance. As these are carried out by the Health and Safety team there is the benefit of an additional level of independence.

#### Areas to explore

- There is opportunity for the Health and Safety team to support the assurance processes of other teams and departments e.g. OPERA and PORIS (process and quality).
- Consider how internal audits are prioritised (i.e. need to focus on those deemed to be higher risk)

There are opportunities for organisational learning which could be better captured through a clearer process for identifying issues from H&S Audits, incident debriefs, exercises and accident investigations. There may be benefit in the use of 'organisational stories' to engage staff in the learning process.

District Managers are a key link between the strategic level of CDDFRS and the front line. There was a message received by the team that District Managers do not always feel that they have the level of access or communication routes with senior management that they require. The Service may wish to explore whether there would be benefit from more regular attendance by senior managers at monthly District Manager meetings.

There would be benefit from a clarification of the standards Line Managers are using to assess their crews against when carrying out workplace assessments. This would assist in ensuring consistency across the Service and ensure that the crews are being assessed against agreed and common standards (NOS).

Operational readiness audit teams do not appear to include a peer review element (i.e. a Peer District Manager). There may be some value in exploring whether there is a means of introducing this element as an additional level of assurance.

## 5.6 Training and Development

### Areas of Strength

- Modular approach to training provides a consistent framework for training delivery across all stations.
- The command suite is an excellent asset which supports command assessment and development.
- Many of those interviewed welcomed the additional resources put in place for command training and fire training.
- Station Manager Development Programme is well received and provides a process to support succession planning.

The delivery of training devolved to stations is monitored through the use of feedback sheets. The 3 month course is an effective approach as it allows the Service to reflect on how well training is embedded. In addition District and Station Managers have flexibility with regard to what training is covered outside the 24 month modules.

The Command suite is an excellent asset to support and assess competence. In addition to this the debrief system and associated use of Occupational Safety and Health Notification System (OSHENS) is well established and understood.

The further provision of fire training and command experiences are broadly welcomed across the Service. All Officers intending to take command of incidents in the future are expected to have completed the Level One command training (Hydra Minerva). All training is focussed upon alleviating risk.

The Station Manager Development Programme is well received and provides a process to support succession planning. The mentoring of individuals on the Programme by Area Managers adds value and gives the Programme real credibility.

An important element of an individual's development and performance is enhanced by 360 degree feedback forms which form part of all appraisals up to Area Manager level.

## Areas to explore

- Command suite (training development and assessment) would be further supported by ensuring that FDO and RDS supervisory commanders have exposure to training incidents and exercises to reduce the risk of skill decay.
- Watch based training - the more training is devolved, the more critical it becomes for assurance to take place.
- Assess the requirement for further realistic training to address the reduced exposure to incidents.
- There needs to be a focus on the RDS sections on Wholetime and Day Crewed stations.

The Community Safety Strategy currently identifies the role of training focusing upon risks within each District. However the link to Districts training specifically to those risks was not clear. CDDFRS would gain benefit from further consideration of clarifying links which ensure crews are trained and have information for their risks within their area.

With regard to Command training it was not clear as to whether there is a systemic approach to ensuring that once qualified to command through Hydra Minerva, there are opportunities to apply that training at exercises to reinforce this knowledge and skills. This is particularly important in light of the reduction in the numbers of fewer incidents.

Due to the different working patterns of RDS staff in their full time employment there appears to be, on occasions, limited access to trainers and courses. This prevents skill development outside the formal modules and drill nights and consideration should be given to providing more flexible ways of scheduling and delivering training.

There is also scope to explore the effectiveness of the managerial support mechanisms to the RDS cohorts on Whole Time and Day Crewing stations. Addressing this would help the Service to better assure itself that the RDS are competent in the Core and Critical skills and are maintaining station standards. It is important that outcomes from the Operational Active Monitoring and Debrief Process are being communicated to and actioned by RDS crews and stations.

The team found there to be mixed awareness on RDS stations and among cohorts of the RDS about the Service's Improvement Strategies and plans. There is an opportunity therefore to cross-reference the Operational Improvement Team's actions with the objectives outlined in the RDS Improvement Plan.

The more training and assessment is devolved, the more important it will become for the Service to be more prescriptive about training standards and the assessment of competence. A consistent approach to training delivery to the same standard across all stations would result in a greater confidence in the assessment of competence. This in turn would enhance the Service's ability to audit more effectively.

The indication from monitoring through debriefs, OPERAs, drills, reducing injury rates is that training outcomes relating to firefighter competency are being achieved. However CDDFRS may wish to confirm that that training objectives, outcomes and

standards are being achieved consistently at a local District/Station level and for centrally run courses. The recently launched Fire Professional Framework and in particular the Operational Competence Model may provide some useful guidance to assist in this review.

## **5.7 Call Management and Incident Support**

### Areas of Strength

- Experienced and committed staff performing to high standards and wishing to contribute more.
- New duty system has provided additional flexibility within the control room.
- Use of Amber Days being used to address and facilitate training.

The Authority is in the process of transferring its Control Room function to the new headquarters site at Belmont Park. This move is part of the project to replace the existing command and control system with a new state of the art mobilising system. The Service has project management arrangements in place and control room staff are actively engaged in the project and move. There is a wealth of experience in the control room which is being used to good effect.

Performance against call handling standards is actively monitored by the FCM and reported to SMT on a regular basis. The new duty system has not only provided flexibility for the delivery of training (amber days) but it has also improved the resilience of the control room function.

Despite the distraction of the project and move to headquarters staff are clearly committed to providing a professional service and, for example, are involved in the learning from incident and multi agency debriefs and exercises. Control room staff also work with the Risk and Operational Delivery Teams in developing and reviewing operational policies.

### Areas to explore

- Explore the potential of utilising control room staff in developing and sourcing income streams for CDDFRS.
- Assess the impact on the delivery of training as a result of the new duty system.
- Ensure transition plans are in place for the transfer of the control room function to the new HQ.

Control room staff were keen to be involved in other areas of the Service's work and in developing ideas for income streams to mitigate the impact of the savings that the Service has to make. This provides a great opportunity for the Service to tap into another resource and skill set.

Whilst the new duty system has provided some flexibility and resilience the team believe that it would be timely to review the coordination and delivery of training as the traditional watch model i.e. everyone on the same watch being trained together, has been superseded by the new duty system. Control room staff expressed a view

that, on occasions, individuals are completing training modules on their own rather than as part of the team on duty.

## **6. Conclusion and contact information**

CDDFRS is a highly committed and proud organisation. It is extremely well regarded by partners and the community. The challenges facing the Service will require continued strong political and professional leadership in very much the same vein as the Service is demonstrating at the present time.

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

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