

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee

Item 6

16 September 2011

Report on the outcomes of the Service plan objective 'Develop the core skills of our firefighters' 2009/2012

Report of the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

- 1.1 The Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service plan 2009/2012, introduced the objective to 'Develop the core skills of our firefighters', to ensure the effective and safe resolution to operational incidents.
- 1.2 The Training and Development team (T&D) presented the results of a research project into core firefighter skills to the Service Management Team (SMT) in Autumn 2009. This research resulted in the production of an action plan to realise the identified improvements in training, development and staff assessments to ensure the objective of improvements in core skills, knowledge and understanding for staff.
- 1.3 This report identifies the changes and improvements completed and any outstanding items within the action plan at February 2011. It additionally identifies the methods to conclude outstanding items and how these will be addressed.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 PRSC note the current position of HFRS and progress towards the completion of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service plan 2009/2012 objective to 'Develop the core skills of our firefighters'.

3 Introduction and background

- 3.1 HFRS has always placed priority on ensuring that our operational personnel are provided with the highest level of training and development. In response to feedback from the service, it was seen as timely to undertake a review of the 'core skills' of our firefighters, and consider where further improvements in the quality of training could be provided.

- 3.2 A research project and report was completed by the Training and Development team and presented to SMT on 21/09/2009. The report provided the findings of a comprehensive service-wide survey and interviews with key staff groups.
- 3.3 The research reviewed all processes, systems and standards currently utilised to develop our operational staff. The research also identified that Supervisory Managers and Station Managers have a significant responsibility in firefighter development and therefore the scope of the report was widened to recognise those roles.
- 3.4 The report made recommendations on the training, development and assessment systems in relation to the roles of Firefighter, Crew Manager, Watch Manager and Station Manager, and focussed on the specific areas of the role maps (job descriptions) that relate to operational competence and team development.
- 3.5 The recommendations were supported by SMT and an action plan within T&D was created. Progress on this action plan was monitored at Training Strategy and Policy Groups.

4 Actions, outcomes and improvements

- 4.1 A summary of the actions, outcomes and improvements relating to the action plan are provided at Appendix A. The Training and Development team have implemented improvements across the roles of Firefighter, Crew Manager, Watch Manager and Station Manager. Improvements have also been made in a number of key systems that underpin the training and assessment of our operational staff.
- 4.2 The early indications of this work are positive, with an increase in the completion of assessments across all areas and in particular the risk critical areas of training (see Workplace Assessments, Appendix A). The future introduction of Firewatch will provide more accurate data to underpin future analysis on the effectiveness of training and the competence levels within the workforce. This, in conjunction with the Quality Review System, will provide the service with both qualitative and quantitative methods of measuring our future performance in this area.
- 4.3 The Service recognises that we will need to constantly improve the quality of our training and assessment and this will continue as a core activity.

5 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives

- 5.1 Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service plan 2009/2012, introduced the objective to 'Develop the core skills of our firefighters', to ensure the effective and safe resolution to operational incidents. The need to improve the skills of our firefighters remains a key priority to ensure we are successful in delivering high quality, safe and effective services to our communities.

6 Risk analysis

- 6.1 Developing the core skills of our firefighters and managers is fundamental in ensuring the effective and safe resolution of operational incidents, and maintaining the health, safety and well being of our operational workforce.

7 People Impact Assessment

- 7.1 The PIA for this work did not identify any new impacts. Where developments have been undertaken in specific areas the people impacts have been assessed and considered within each specific area.

The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

8 Environmental and Sustainability impact assessment

- 8.1 Non applicable

9 Resource implications

- 9.1 Human Resources-

All additional activities have been carried out with the existing resources of the Service.

10 Consultation

- 10.1 Consultation for the original report was completed via electronic questionnaire to all staff and by a series of focus groups for specific development areas to review each development process in detail. Additional evidence was gathered from interviews with Station Managers.

- 10.2 The methods used included:

- Online survey to all HFRS staff
- Focus groups for each of the systems identified in 4.2
- Face to face discussions with Station Managers

11 Conclusion

- 11.1 The work undertaken within the service objective has resulted in a number of improvements that have directly contributed to raising the standard of operational training and assessment within HFRS. Improvements have been identified and implemented for Firefighter, Crew Manager, Watch Manager and Station Manager roles. There have also been a number of improvements in key training and assessment systems that underpin achievement of 'core skills' for operational staff.

11.2 The service will continue to develop and change over the coming years. Future challenges in terms of the financial settlement, and demands from our communities will require greater flexibility in the workforce, and present a continuing challenge to maintain the core skills of our firefighters. This area of work will continue to be a key priority for the service and we remain committed to providing effective training and assessment to all our staff to support their operational activities.

12 Background papers

12.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.

Completed actions and improvements of the Service plan objective 'Develop the core skills of our firefighters' 2009/2012

The following summarises the areas identified for improvements and the progress made against the agreed action plan:

Firefighter selection tests

HFRS worked within the national/regional review regarding currency and validity of the selection tests. The Process Improvement Team have revised the selection process for Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel, but the National Firefighter Selection Test (NFST) remains the current process applied.

Work is progressing within the Future Firefighter Programme to review and refine the future attraction and selection process for firefighters. This will maintain the key elements of the NFST but introduce some improvements to make the process more appropriate for the service.

Phase 1- Initial firefighter training

The initial course content has been reviewed and non-essential theory has been replaced with additional practical training. Although continuing with the modular delivery of the course, the continual use of practical skills has been introduced throughout, including during the theory modules.

Reintroduction of a final assessment, additional theory and practical tests after each module and 'practical firemanship' as specific subject within the course. Module E (scenario based training) extended by 2 days, community fire safety input reduced from 5 to 2 days and the whole course aligned to relevant National/Regional standards.

Phase 2 - Firefighter development

Introduction of a core skills assessors course (A2) and the introduction of assessor networks for NVQ and station based instructors.

Note - Our station based instructors are firefighters who have been trained to deliver and assess in risk critical areas of training e.g. breathing apparatus, rope pack, road traffic collision, first aid, manual handling.

Phase 3 - Workplace Assessments

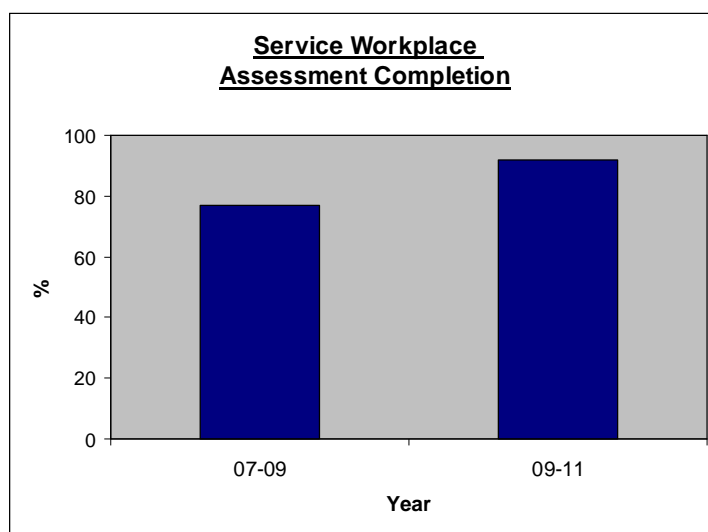
Our Workplace Assessment programme is the training and assessment programme that is delivered on fire stations and provides the framework for assessment against all areas of operational activity.

Assessment criteria for all Safety Critical Workplace Assessments units have been written to support consistent assessments to recognised standards, across the service. These standards are equal to or higher than those detailed in the relevant Training manual.

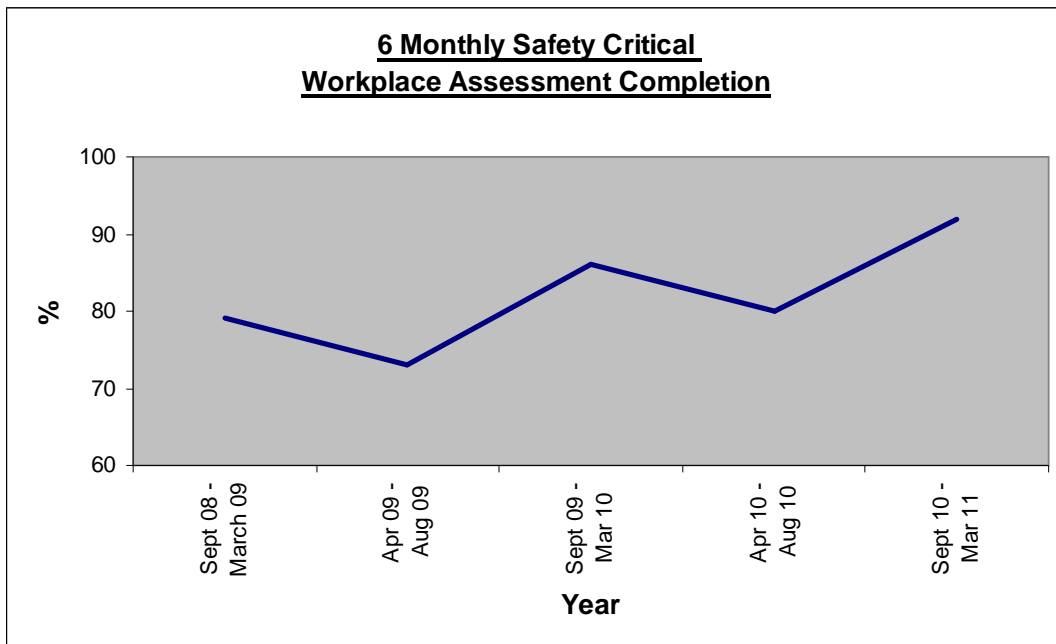
Introduction of embedded station based instructor networks and the provision of embedded breathing apparatus instructors in RDS teams successfully piloted. An Exercise Coordination Group was established which supports programming and coordination of realistic training exercises within Groups and at service level (e.g. Operation Orion).

Performance

The following charts represent the completion of all workplaces assessments for 2007 to 2009 and 2009 to 2011. This shows a clear improvement in the completion of Workplace Assessments across the service over the two Workplace Assessment periods.



The following chart represents the completion of 6-monthly safety critical workplace assessments (breathing apparatus & rope pack):



Service Delivery Performance Management Group receive 6-monthly reports on the completion of safety critical workplace assessments. This information is also provided directly to Group Managers to enable direct performance management of stations.

Supervisory and Middle Managers Assessment and Development Centres (ADC)

Introduction of an operational knowledge and understanding assessments at Supervisory manager level, as part of the last two ADC's. Reading list and 'question bank' are close to completion for Middle manager ADC and will be completed prior to next ADC. The above internal option was chosen over external providers and has been used nationally within other services.

Using good practice and learning from other Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), HFRS separated the assessment section from the development centre section. HFRS have delivered the first Supervisory Managers Development Centre, accessible by all staff groups, which provides a development centre to successful candidates to identify the first stage of their development.

Work is progressing on developing the Middle Manager Development Centre for the future which will be in the same format.

Supervisory and Middle Managers Development programmes

Increased the evidence required to demonstrate operational competence to 3 mentoring reports for operational commanders, within development. Incident Command System assessments are now a pre requisite of eligibility to take a command role at an incident complete with a two year validity period.

Introduction of a core skills assessors course (A2) and a review of the presentations skills course to support the workplace assessment process for both RDS and WDS. These courses are a requirement for all our assessors and support them to meet the required standard of delivering training and assessment.

Training Support Materials

Breathing apparatus training packages have been updated and placed online. All remaining training packages are part of a programme of updating and will be available online in the future. We have used a seconded experienced Firefighter to assist in developing and improving current core skills online training packages. This secondment ended in April 2011 and we will be seeking a further secondee to further progress this work.

Station Based Instructors

Reintroduction of instructor portfolios to record when assessment activity is undertaken. Approval obtained and now in process of establishing embedded breathing apparatus instructors within RDS teams. This successful RDS instructor network concept will now be considered for expansion across other instructor networks.

Audit of staff skills/competencies

The current Service Order for Workplace Assessments stipulates that Station Managers, Group managers and Support Officers have a responsibility to carry out regular audits of the skills and competencies of their staff. The Training and Development department provide support to the local line managers to improve the frequency and quality of the audits.

Outstanding actions and replaced actions

The following summarises the outstanding actions and planned work for the areas identified for improvements:

Firefighter selection tests

No actions outstanding.

Phase 1- Initial firefighter training

No actions outstanding.

Phase 2- Firefighter development

A complete re-write of development plans at every level is being undertaken, and will be completed by December 2011, as a project within T&D. The Quality Review Strategy (QRS) has been approved by Training Strategy Group and will be a major project for T&D for 2011/12. Its implementation will ensure an independent quality assurance process and can be targeted at identified trends/focus areas.

Phase 3 - Workplace Assessments

We are reviewing the Workplace Assessment Programme (WAP), which will be developed into a Maintenance of Competence/Maintenance of Skills approach (MOC/MOS), in conjunction with the Firewatch implementation. This approach has been agreed by Community Response and Training Policy Groups.

Introduction of an independent quality assurance audit of firefighters skills, based on an Ofsted system, has started with three trials completed. These trials have formed the basis of the QRS.

Supervisory and Middle managers Assessment and Development Centres (ADC)

No actions outstanding.

Supervisory and Middle managers Development programmes

Optivote system to manage station based knowledge and understanding assessments installed at each work base. An HFRS 'Moodle' web based site is under development which will be enhanced to include Optivote system.

Training Support Materials

Alignment of all packages to the Regional 'Ways of Working' Standard Operational Procedures (SOP's), has been delayed due to project extension on the planned completion dates for the SOP's. The HFRS 'Moodle' web based site will enable the updated 'core skills' packages to be placed online.

Station Based Instructors

The network of station based instructors (WDS) remain essential to support the delivery of training and assessment of station based personnel of the Workplace Assessments. We have introduced instructor portfolios to record assessment activity and enhanced our instructor workshops to include assessment of the attendees in their instruction and assessment techniques.

Future impacts of the Efficient and Flexible Crewing Project will reduce the availability of personnel for release from station and the instructor network will be a key resource in the future. We are producing a proposal to re-establish the network of RDS Instructors to supplement the Group Liaison Trainers and provide a higher level of skill and assessment capacity on our RDS stations.