



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



# **Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report**

**May 2013**

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## **1. Executive Summary**

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has a strong foundation of good performance on which it continues to build. After a period of time where the Service perceives that improvement has largely slowed, it is now looking to push on. In 2013 the Service announced a major cultural change programme: Pathway 2020. It was within this context that the peer challenge was asked to explore five key issues.

The Service's performance on community safety is strong. There is good commitment from staff and the underpinning policies, processes and training are in place to deliver community safety activities effectively. Work at the station level is strong. Improvement in community safety needs to be evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. This should include evolving the role of the central community safety team, evaluating the accessibility and effectiveness of the initiative register and complementing partner agency community safety activities to a greater extent. The contribution that the Service makes to wider community outcomes, such as those relating to health, education, crime and anti-social behaviour and economic development should be more overtly recognised and promoted.

Equally, the Service's performance on training and development delivery continues to be strong. The Shirley Towers incident in 2010 caused the Service to reflect on its approach to health and safety and training and development. The Service has played an important role in sharing the learning from this incident nationally. The current overall approach to training and development delivery appears to be fundamentally sound. However, further improvements can be made focused around a more holistic and discerning approach to budget reductions and the delivery of a comprehensive organisational development strategy which will help support the implementation of Pathway 2020.

Elected members will have to play an important role in Pathway 2020. The Chairman provides clear strategic direction for the Authority. However, it will be important for all members to take a stronger political leadership role in shaping policy and working with senior officers to robustly explore options for future changes to the organisation as funding is reduced and the Service explores more innovative solutions to deliver safety and well-being outcomes.

How the Service works with its local communities will also be important. There is a strong 'bottom up' approach to engagement, a range of projects and an evolving approach to targeting key vulnerable groups more effectively. However, the approach to engaging with local communities continues to develop. The primary challenges will be to ensure more contact with local communities 'involves' local people rather than simply 'informing' them. High quality community engagement is challenging, but there are good signs that the Service will explore more creative engagement in the coming months.

ICT can also play a major enabling role in making Pathway 2020 a reality as well as improving core service delivery. This is currently not the case.

Although a significant IT resource exists and a range of standard functions and bespoke products are used, IT fails to take a 'business analyst' approach to its 'customers' (the Service). Some IT support is slow and bureaucratic. The future approach to providing an IT function needs to be re-examined to ensure it is fit for purpose and more innovative. This needs to include the IT Support Team taking visible leadership of the IT/technology agenda and proactively working with colleagues across the organisation to ensure the systems utilised assist in the efficient delivery of their respective outputs and outcomes.

## **2. Introduction**

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service in May 2013.

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 29 April – 2 May 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activity including interviews, focus groups and visits to four fire stations.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of officers, front line firefighters and partner agencies. The peer challenge took place during the week of the County Council elections. As a result the peer team met or talked to a number of members but the Chairman was not present for the feedback session. During the time in Hampshire the peer team were very well looked after and everyone the team met was fully engaged with the process, open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to the team in advance, including Hampshire's summary Operational Assessment self-assessment, key supporting documentation and a series of thematic briefing sheets. The peer challenge did not aim to re-run the Operational Assessment, but instead focused on areas identified in discussion with the Service. The overall scope of the peer challenge was to explore five areas:

- Community safety – prevention
- Members, governance and scrutiny
- Training and development
- Community engagement
- Technology, innovation and service effectiveness

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a discussion of the findings was delivered to the Service's senior officers.

This report provides detailed information on the five key focus areas agreed with the Service. Two of these tie in to the key assessment areas of the Operational Assessment Toolkit – prevention and training and development. The other three areas were specifically identified by Hampshire Fire and

Rescue Service as important known challenges which the Service wished peers to explore.

The purpose of the peer challenge was to provide 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 was:**

- Peter Dartford, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Robert Light, Kirklees MDC
- Jason Thelwell, Chief Operating Officer, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service
- Mark Blatchford, Group Manager, Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service
- Andy Kettle, Operations Director, Fire Service College
- Stewart Larter-Whitcher, Client Executive, IBM
- Neil Shaw, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

### **4. The journey so far and Pathway 2020**

The Service has a strong foundation of good performance on which it continues to build. The last five years have seen a significant improvement across a range of primary indicators of performance, including:

- significant reductions in the number of primary and second fires (from 32.4 fires per 10,000 population in 2006/07, down to 14.5 in 2011/12)
- reductions in the number of fires attended (from 553 incidents per 100,000 population in 2006/07, down to 333 in 2011/12)
- reductions in the number of accidental dwelling fires (from 14.3 per 10,000 population in 2006/07, down to 12.0 in 2011/12)
- reductions in the number of false alarms (from 109 per 10,000 population in 2006/07, down to 43 in 2011/12)

The Service recently announced a major cultural change programme: Pathway 2020. This is intended to signal an upward trajectory of improvement and, importantly, signals a change in approach. An approach which is based on empowerment and mobilising the whole workforce on improvement. Pathway 2020 is very fresh (it was only launched in the week preceding the peer challenge). Feedback from staff was very positive on the

principles which underpin Pathway 2020, with an enthusiasm for empowerment.

The Service is currently developing three key questions to explore with staff and communities to be able to understand how well it is performing and how much progress it is making towards being 'the best'. Importantly, the organisational culture of the Service has a number of characteristics on which it can build: openness, friendliness, enthusiasm, pride in the Service and a desire for on-going improvement.

This is underpinned by a strong and stable financial position planned up to 2015. The leadership provided by the Chief and Deputy is well respected and inspires confidence. However, it is recognised that below this level, there is a degree of ambiguity in relation to who 'fills the leadership space' when the Chief and Deputy are out of the organisation.

Pathway 2020 presents an opportunity for the organisation to take a new direction on its improvement journey. The Service needs to build on a range of positive building blocks already in place as they develop wider awareness of the programme. There are a number of key barriers to address to further progress Pathway 2020.

The Service recognises that some of these barriers are more significant than others. The peer challenge has concentrated on the more significant barriers. These include; organisational structure, leadership style, organisational culture and ICT. These are likely to inhibit the delivery of Pathway 2020 if they remain unaddressed.

As Pathway 2020 is rolled out over the coming months, there are opportunities for members and senior managers to shape and take ownership of the journey. The Service has a significant senior and middle management resource. Senior and middle managers will need to provide the leadership to make Pathway 2020 a success. It is for the Service to determine the number, type and role of senior and middle managers, but Pathway 2020 is more likely to be successful in an organisation with a flatter structure and one in which allows more effective decision-making as close to the point of service delivery as possible. It should also be recognised that significant cultural change is unlikely to happen if the current, substantial management structures remain in place or work as at present, as the temptation will always exist for individuals to refer the more difficult decisions to more senior managers.

There is strong evidence of a legacy of a 'command and control' management style. For Pathway 2020 to be a success it will require a different approach from senior and middle managers. A style which is comfortable with empowerment, variety in local responses to achieving Service outcomes and some degree of ambiguity.

The current organisational culture characteristics which are likely to inhibit Pathway 2020 include; some senior managers bypassing the organisational

structure, cliques and groupings of staff and the complex furniture of the decision-making process.

Industrial relations within the Service are relatively positive. Officials from the representative bodies reported a good relationship with Principal Officers and a feeling that they 'could knock on the door of the Chief', if they had concerns to raise. However, they felt that the benefits of positive and early engagement with representative bodies are not appreciated by managers below the Executive. Limited involvement in the recently completed 'staff review' was identified as an example of this lack of recognition. Limited facilitation of trade union engagement was also highlighted as a barrier to their meaningful contribution to the development of the organisation. Consideration could be given to more overt facilitation for trade union officials to become involved in key projects being undertaken, particularly as many will have an impact on members of the workforce. Such an approach would appear to be consistent with the principles described within the 'Pathway 2020' vision.

The magnitude of the positive benefits to be realised through the cultural transformation being sought is huge. Such an enlightened approach is unusual in a fire and rescue service, as such it will be necessary to ensure that continual investment is made to maintain the momentum of change. It will be important to seek the views of staff on what form such investment should take to build a strong sense of ownership of the new culture across the organisation.

ICT can play a much more effective enabling role in delivering Pathway 2020. The detail of ICT and technology is explored in depth later, but fit for purpose ICT designed to support and facilitate business objectives will be needed to create a more agile and intelligence-led organisation.

Although the Service currently has a strong financial position, it will be important to maintain its strong focus on the changing future financial landscape. This will include continuing to model different potential financial changes and managing the risks associated with these over the years up to 2020.

The Service produced a self-assessment which appears to have a mature awareness of the achievements of and challenges facing the Service. The self-assessment contains considerable detail on a range of operational achievements.

## 5. Community safety – prevention

### Strengths

- **Strong willingness from staff to drive forward the agenda**
- **Stations use community risk intelligence to target activities**
- **Fire safety measures are included within care packages of vulnerable adults**
- **Good relationships with the county's community safety partnerships**

There is a strong willingness from staff and focus across the whole organisation to drive forward the community safety agenda. The underpinning policies, processes and training are in place to deliver community safety activities effectively. This includes dedicated teams focusing on Schools Education, Arson Task Force and the Fire-Setters Intervention Team.

The service has clearly identified its prevention priorities, aims and objectives in the overarching Service plan and the three supporting delivery plans for Home, Road and Arson reduction. As long as these plans evolve alongside any redesign to the central community safety team and the development of community risk intelligence, the Service's prevention strategy should be fit for purpose in supporting the journey towards 2020.

There is a clear awareness of community safety issues at the station level. Most activities are targeted at key vulnerable groups. Stations use community risk intelligence to target activities, such as the vulnerable persons project and these inform station plans. Activity reports give accurate, brief and clear information. Diversity Liaison Officers are attached to some stations and are making significant inroads into reaching minority communities.

Work is already being undertaken with partner agencies at the local level across the county that supports wider community safety work within communities. There is also evidence that fire safety measures are being included within care packages of vulnerable adults. The number of deliberate fires has reduced significantly over the last five years. The Arson Task Force is contributing to this overall reduction. This is a good example of how information is shared with Hampshire Police to make communities safer. The Chief Constable described the relationship between the Police and Fire and Rescue in Hampshire as 'second to none' and cited the co-location of safer neighbourhood teams with Fire Service colleagues as an example of the benefits of it.

Good relationships exist with the county's community safety partnerships and the Service is working proactively on wider outcomes on issues like health, education and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. These are good examples of activities which already support the Pathway 2020 approach. However, these are currently being undertaken outside of the organisation's established systems and processes, with some managers being perceived as 'mavericks' (where they take a more pragmatic approach rather than using established systems).

The Chief referred to 'pockets of model behaviour' when describing the Pathway 2020 vision. Such behaviours need to be perceived as being expected, rather than outside of established organisational practice, as appears to be the case currently.

Systematic evaluation of activities is undertaken. Evaluation is meaningful and there are examples where the impact of projects is disseminated across the Service, for example, the arson reduction work.

#### **Areas to explore**

- **Role of the central community safety team will need to evolve**
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative register**
- **Complement activities that partner agencies undertake rather than trying to 'compete'**
- **More flexible use of existing resources to provide Community Safety Officer input for all Groups**

There are conflicting views between the Central Community Safety Team and local Groups on how best to deliver the Service's community safety priorities. This is leading to tension between the functions. If the Service intends to develop a more empowering approach, in line with Pathway 2020, the role of the central team will need to evolve to be more comfortable with a variety of local delivery models and focus more on guiding (where appropriate), some central delivery (where there is added value e.g. School Education Team) and enabling local areas through better dissemination of good practice. The tension between 'central' and 'local' is not confined to the community safety function. The Service may wish to reflect on this tension more widely in other service areas.

There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative register. This should include clarifying:

- who is using it
- its accessibility
- who is involved in the evaluation process
- how community safety partnerships can be involved in the development of new and existing initiatives (where appropriate)

There is universal agreement that Community Safety Officers (CSO) do a great job for the Service and community safety partnerships. However, not all Groups have a CSO and some share one. The Service should consider more flexible use of existing resources to provide CSO input for all Groups.

The Service has many effective partnerships. However, feedback from partner agencies indicates a perception that the Service needs to complement and support activities that partner agencies undertake rather than trying to 'compete'. Partnership working will be further strengthened if the Service can

provide more consistency in officers assigned to partner activities. This would create more stability for agencies.

The use of community volunteers is developing. The current approach to involving the community and voluntary sector needs to be revisited. The community and voluntary sector could be used more effectively to take over the role of recruiting (or using existing volunteers). They have a core competency in this area and the Service should seek to capitalise on this by using their expertise in recruiting new volunteers.

## **6. Members, governance and scrutiny**

### **Strengths**

- **Chairman provides clear strategic direction for the Authority**
- **Members provide direction to and scrutiny of the Principal Officers of the Authority**
- **Structured approach to member development**
- **'Sprinklers debate' demonstrates how members have the capacity to shape future strategic policy direction – notable practice**

The Authority Chairman provides clear strategic direction for the Authority. Members play an important role in the work of the Fire Authority providing direction to and scrutiny of the Principal Officers of the Authority. The Authority has well established traditional formal governance structures which members and officers are comfortable with. Members have clear passion and pride in the Service and in making local communities safer.

The Service has a structured approach to member development and recognises the importance of members developing their skills and experience, especially with an imminent intake of new members after the 2013 County Council elections.

In 2012 members undertook a robust debate on the use of sprinklers. The debate around this issue demonstrates how members have the capacity to shape and own future strategic policy direction and should be considered notable practice in members exercising their political leadership role. The opportunity to utilise this approach in other areas should be explored

### **Areas to explore**

- **Enhanced leadership and constructive challenge**
- **New demands will require members to provide greater strategic direction**
- **Further enhance engagement with members and staff on strategic matters**
- **Development of an organisational development strategy which includes a focus on succession planning skills development and talent management**

- **Members to play a stronger role leading communities through local consequences of resource and risk based strategic change proposals**

In coming years members will need to provide enhanced leadership and constructive challenge as the Authority increasingly balances the conflicting interests of decreasing resources, evolving risk, unknown incident levels and a diverse partnership agenda which includes a new commercial trading arm.

The Authority will face a significant change in its membership with over 20% of members retiring prior to the County Council elections in 2013. Members will need to appreciate their evolving role in coming years, and particularly the challenge of maintaining a Service best able to meet the known risks of the area with reducing resources.

The new demands on the Authority will require members to provide greater strategic direction over the business of the Authority. How the Service prioritises its activities across all of its communities and evaluates outcomes for those communities whilst managing service demand with reducing resources will require the wider engagement of members.

Judgements on what are acceptable risks in terms of practical deployment of resources have previously been made by officers but given reduced resources and the expected continuation of declining incidents there will be a requirement for different judgements on future acceptable risks which will need to be taken at a member level.

Members will need to consider how best to provide future strategic direction, how greater member understanding of risks, resource use and prioritisation can be achieved alongside closer scrutiny of new challenging projects such as the commercial trading venture and the Networked Fire Control facility.

Principal and senior officers may wish to consider how best to further enhance engagement with members and staff on greater detail of strategic matters particularly where they have the potential for high risk to the Service and where they could have a high public profile. The confidence to share a wider range of options at an earlier stage will lead to greater understanding and long term ownership.

Officers will need to consider a wider set of objectives for committee reports from the traditional 'getting a decision approved' style. This could be trialling a more option based reporting style and seeking greater member ownership of reports and decisions.

Members and senior management will need to give consideration to the development and delivery of a comprehensive organisational development strategy which includes a focus on succession planning, skills development and talent management. To meet the future needs of a smaller and leaner organisation, managers at all levels of the management structure will need to be more willing and able to make decisions. The Service's future approach to

developing its talent will need to clearly identify the skills and talents it feels the future organisation will need and ensure these are built into a range of development activities (not just formal training courses), with a focus on 'softer' (non-technical) skills like people management, partnership working, dealing with ambiguity and decision-making.

The Authority may wish to consider whether it has the right structures to scrutinise the emerging new delivery partnerships it is involved in. More informal member-officer interaction on key issues is likely to enable the Service to achieve 'buy in' and commitment to challenging proposals. This might be achieved, for example, through:

- member briefing sessions after Authority meetings
- greater use of CMT to take an early look at emerging issues and horizon scanning
- use of Chairman's briefings for wider debate than committee agenda
- discussion on specific issues taken on a broader basis to encourage member understanding and participation (building on the positive experience of the sprinkler policy debate and the significant policy ownership by members that came from it)

The community leadership role of members is vitally important. Future decisions will require members to play a stronger role leading communities through local consequences of resource and risk based strategic change proposals. Members will need to decide how the public are consulted and public debate is supported with evidence and data. Authority members will need to be clearer about their role as strategic leaders of the Fire Authority with the public responsibility of ensuring that the Fire and Rescue Service provides the relevant levels of public protection. Officers will need to consider how they support members in their decision making, alongside their evolving community leadership role.

## **7. Training and development**

### **Strengths**

- **Overall approach to training and development delivery appears to be fundamentally sound**
- **Training Delivery Team develop courses and blend the approach of station based centrally delivered training**
- **e-learning process has been well received by staff**

The Shirley Towers incident in 2010 caused the Service to reflect on its approach to health and safety and training and development. The Service has played an important role in sharing the learning from this incident nationally. The current overall approach to training and development delivery appears to be fundamentally sound and inclusive of all duty systems. This should enable the Service to deliver the outcomes of the emerging Fire Professional Framework.

There is a clear understanding within the Training Delivery Team regarding how to develop courses in the future and how to blend the approach of station based training and training delivered centrally. The e-learning process has been well received by staff and is used on a regular basis. The introduction of 'moodle' was mentioned on a number of occasions in a very positive manner. This roll out has allowed for the pre-briefing of staff before practical training courses. This allows for more time to be focused on the practical side of the course. It is important however to ensure that standards are maintained in the e-learning phase so that the training department can get the best out of operational staff on the course. The training staff also declared a wider cultural benefit in that individuals were taking more responsibility for their own development.

Standards of training in core skills have risen due to the implementation of a programme to train more station based staff to become instructors, particularly on RDS stations. The introduction of breathing apparatus and road traffic collision instructors has been well received by all, with an acknowledgement that there is an opportunity to expand this type of training to release costs and improve outcomes. There is evidence that watch based training instructors are maintaining good standards through assessment and ensuring that any personnel who do not reach the required standard are given extra training and support.

There are good relationships between training staff and watch based staff, with an acknowledgement on stations that the standard of courses delivered at the training centre are excellent. The training centre expressed a desire to raise standards further and to also reduce costs through the expansion of e-learning. However, there may have to be an investment in additional software and hardware in the first instance to realise this on-going cost reduction.

#### **Areas to explore**

- **A more holistic and discerning approach to budget reduction – recognising that flat rate reductions impact on individual parts of the organisation differently**
- **Delivery of a comprehensive organisational development strategy**
- **A corporate understanding of the issues which affect the different departments and a joint approach to problem solving**
- **Review of flexible crewing arrangements**

The financial environment has stabilised over the last six months, which has given the Authority the space to understand the financial constraints that they will be working within in the medium term. Evidence suggests that whilst the quality of the training being delivered is good there is a need to ensure that organisational arrangements are effective. In the first instance there needs to be a better and more inclusive relationship between the management of the training function and the rest of service delivery. This relationship needs to allow the following:

- a more holistic and discerning approach to budget reduction which takes account of the timing and interdependencies between service delivery and the training department (this should include focusing budget reductions on lesser priorities areas rather than a general 10% reduction across all departments within the service)
- consideration to the delivery of a comprehensive organisational development strategy which includes a focus on succession planning and the future skills the organisation will require as its structures and business processes are transformed.
- a corporate understanding of the issues which affect the different departments and a joint approach to problem solving
- a review of flexible crewing arrangements which will allow the Authority to deliver training in a different manner in line with the changing financial scenario

Information from other fire and rescue services across the country which have different arrangements for resourcing training for front line crews will help to make an informed decision on this issue.

In terms of flexible crewing models and the associated training issues, there are a number of Services which have good practice models, these include:

- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service who have introduced a self rostering model and an associated training structure which has released savings in the organisation and still allows staff to be fully trained in their core activities
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service who release up to 5 appliances every day for training and have an excellent core training model with good attendance and a positive evaluation from end users
- Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, which releases up to 25% of its whole time fleet on a daily basis to facilitate training and community safety activities. These appliances are still available should a major or serious incident occur

There are other examples, but these should provide the Service with an opportunity to appreciate a different perspective.

## **8. Community engagement**

### **Strengths**

- **Strong 'bottom up' approach to engagement**
- **Range of national projects such as the Princes Trust, Young Firefighters Scheme**
- **Evolving approach to target vulnerable groups more effectively**

The approach to engaging with local communities continues to develop. The Service can point to a large number of engagement activities that happen at the local level across the county, including; Cosham Community Day, work

around the decommissioning policy for disused buildings in Portsmouth and the Hightown Older Persons Day. There is a strong 'bottom up' approach to engagement. Stations are empowered to contact and work with local organisations and networks to tap into key vulnerable groups. This triggers a diverse range of projects and interventions, including; Seafront Safety in Southsea, work with the Nepalese community and on the issue of tombstoning. Alongside local engagement activity, the Service delivers a range of national projects such as the Princes Trust and the Young Firefighters Scheme.

The Service is evolving its approach to target vulnerable groups more effectively. A good example of this is the work it has recently undertaken with local businesses. The business seminar and supporting database of companies provide a stronger focus for a key group.

An Engagement Ambassador role will be launched in 2013 to provide a focal point for a range of work on improving engagement. The Service has a significant marketing and communications function. This is used to support stations with engagement activity

#### **Areas to explore**

- **Struggling to make coherent and consistent sense of local issues which come back into the centre of the organisation**
- **Elected members should play a stronger role in facilitating community engagement and feeding-in community intelligence**
- **Opportunities to share community engagement with other agencies are being missed**
- **Consider potential for Pathway 2020 to deliver a 'step change' in community engagement**

The Service is struggling to make coherent and consistent sense of local issues which come back into the centre of the organisation. The Service's Community Engagement Strategy has yet to be finalised. There is a wealth of local engagement activity and there would be limited added value of keeping track of this centrally. However, for key vulnerable groups the Service needs to develop a mechanism for identifying common messages and lessons learned from interventions. This might be undertaken creatively by gathering feedback from station managers a couple of times a year in a qualitative way, or using an online community of practice (or themed intranet page) to capture the information. In turn this could be used to inform the Service's community risk intelligence.

A significant range of the Service's current community interaction is focused at the 'inform' end of the community engagement spectrum. This includes community events, press releases and much of the existing website content. The overall challenge is to move consistently along the engagement spectrum towards 'involving' communities in shaping activities and interventions.

Staff working within local areas, delivering services need to develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs of members of the community.

Pathway 2020 has the potential to liberate staff across the Service to use their skills, expertise and local intelligence to work with communities to address their concerns and priorities for change. This will result in staff working with local people to resolve issues, rather than imposing activities and interventions on them.

Elected members should play a role in facilitating community engagement and feeding in community intelligence back into the organisation. This can be strengthened. Cheshire Fire and Rescue's Performance Management Groups are an example of engaging local members, strengthening accountability and providing an opportunity to feed in local intelligence. This model might provide useful reflection for the Service. The 'local Member' scheme in Staffordshire is another example that could be examined.

Opportunities to share community engagement with other agencies are being missed. Local authorities, police, NHS and fire and rescue service all undertake engagement. They currently all use their own engagement mechanisms. Whilst there is some informal sharing or notification of engagement events, this could be undertaken in either a much more joined up or rationalised way. It is for the partner agencies to determine if there is better added value in rationalising the engagement mechanisms. However, there are at least some benefits by joining up activities through things as simple as having a common calendar of significant events/activities or joint planning/co-ordination of significant engagement activity.

## **9. Technology, innovation and service effectiveness**

### **Strengths**

- **Outsourcing, particularly of standard functions**
- **Reducing complexity and risk for specialist IT skills in-house by sourcing products and support from vendors**

As Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service provides a service to Hampshire, so IT should serve Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Service gets out into the community to provide prevention and response. So the IT function should mirror this analogy. National technology developments generally are leading to an expectation that the organisation's in-house solutions will be similarly fleet of foot.

The basic desk top and supporting IT infrastructure is taken from Hampshire County Council. Level 1 support is provided by the in-house IT function. Some systems, such as Command & Control and 'moodle', are taken directly from the supplier. The radio, cabling and networking are undertaken by the IT department. Headquarters is moving towards a wireless network and 'bring your own device' approach. Stations are connected to Hampshire County Council as if they were desktops in Headquarters.

Outsourcing, particularly of standard functions such as desktop, is good practice. Reducing complexity and risk for specialist IT skills in-house by

sourcing products and support from vendors, such as Incident Command simulation, is good practice. However, this is a double edged sword. Individual Open Source vendors, such as 'moodle', may not exist in the future, so resilience needs to be incorporated.

Implementation of a core business suite, such as Fire Watch, has the potential to reduce cost and deliver significant business improvement. Stations are also used as a form of additional resilience.

The Shared Service project builds on a strong relationship between the Service, Hampshire Constabulary and Hampshire County Council and creates an opportunity to deliver significant benefits.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Comparisons with staffing levels and management structure at other Fire Services should be reviewed**
- **Developing a 'business analyst' role**
- **Second line support is slow**
- **Process and bureaucracy to be rationalised**
- **Greater innovation**

There are 22 staff within the IT function, with four layers of management. Comparisons with staffing levels and management structure at other Fire Services should be reviewed. For example, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service have a smaller IT support team for a larger Service. Overall, the IT service needs to take visible leadership of the IT/technology agenda and proactively work with colleagues across the organisation to ensure all systems are fit for purpose and support the efficient and effective delivery of outputs and outcomes.

Product selection, such as Fire Watch, should be more tightly integrated with IT and where implementation is delayed then issues with legacy systems needs to be raised. Lessons learned from Fire Watch training and implementation should be incorporated into a "best practice" document for future projects. Failure to do so impacts IT credibility in the workplace.

Innovation appears to be driven by the business and IT is reactive to issues. Many private sector organisations benefit from a "business analyst" treating the remainder of Service as "customers". Fundamentally this is based around the IT function being engaged early in discussions around developing business processes. Developing this role and capability is likely to be really beneficial.

Departments are acquiring products and technology separate to procurements undertaken by the IT Department. This can lead to complex IT estates. Business intelligence (often called 'Big Data') can be a powerful tool for the business. Writing reports is a task for end users; explaining what data is available (internally and externally) and exploiting it for the business is a task for a business analyst.

IT is perceived by many staff across the organisation as unresponsive or slow with poor feedback loops. The lack of availability of e-learning was referred to across the Service when it was in fact available. Sometimes the fault is not with core IT, but this is not explained to users.

Second line support from Hampshire County Council is slow. The service level agreement should be reviewed. Where appropriate issues should be escalated and enforced which currently appears not to be happening. The Shared Service project provides an opportunity to reset standards and expectations around IT. There are also risks of the current problems being perpetuated if not addressed.

There is also a perception that IT is reactive and for some individuals it can be slow. The lack of support for Fire Watch after hours and on drill nights was given as one example of this. IT process and bureaucracy need to be rationalised. Numerous examples were given including the procurement of dongles and basic IT kit. Overall a "One and Done" approach should be aspired to. Key data into one system and it should populate all associated systems.

## Further Information

### How the peer challenge aims to add value

The LGA is keen to understand how peer challenge can add real benefits for the Service. We will evaluate the peer challenge, but we are also keen to track the benefits the Service have derived from the work. The benefits will be explored sometime after the peer challenge. However, the peer team have identified the following likely significant benefits from this peer challenge:

- **External challenge raising issues others would not** – the peer challenge has been able to surface issues within the Service in an objective and challenging way. This is likely to enable the Service to see issues like the challenges around IT more clearly. It has also enabled a robust challenge and validation of good performance on issues like community safety and training and development, which provides reassurance to the Authority.
- **Better co-ordination of community safety activity** – the peer challenge aims to trigger a reshaping of the role of the central community safety team, a better system of evaluating community safety activities and a change in the co-ordination of community safety activities with partner agencies.
- **Better strategic direction from members** – the peer challenge aims to trigger a discussion with the new intake of members which will lead to a different kind of member development. More collaborative and which leads to members being more supportive of senior officers and more constructively challenging of policy issues
- **Breaking down the silos** – the peer challenge aims to enable the Service to now explore how the tension between ‘central’ and ‘local’ service delivery can be resolved and there can be better working across services.
- **Further progression on the community engagement spectrum** – becoming a Service which ‘involves’ local people to a greater extent, rather than ‘informing’ them. This might be seen through a greater number of ‘involving’ community engagement activities.
- **Raising the value of the business analyst** – shaping the role of the IT function to treat the rest of the Service more as ‘customers’ and being a better enabler of the work around Pathway 2020.

## **Conclusion and contact information**

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers. It is clear that Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service continues to make progress and is embarking on a challenging and ambitious direction through Pathway 2020.

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

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge please contact:

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## Notable practice

During the peer challenge the team identified a number of areas of notable practice. A number of these were not directly related to the areas of focus, but are useful to briefly summarise here:

**Procedures for safeguarding vulnerable children and adults** - the Service has a comprehensive policy and procedure in place for safeguarding. The policy and procedure contains key information that is condensed into a 'fire facts' guidance sheet which enables operational crews to identify triggers and implement safeguarding measures when required.

**The networked Fire Control project** - the Service is collaborating with three other fire and rescue services to deliver a resilient emergency fire control capability that will create opportunities for improvements on service delivery and financial savings across all three Services in future.

**The Arson Task Force** - the work of the task force has made a significant impact contributing to the reducing trend in the number of preventable fires in the County.

**Command training and assessment** - the service has a well developed incident command training capability that ensures all incident commanders are effectively trained and competent to undertake their role.

**Member's political leadership role** - engagement of members in the development and implementation of the sprinkler policy enabled them to have a wide ranging discussion around the implications, resulting in greater member ownership and advocacy.

**Animal Rescue** - the Service is seen as the national setter of best practice in animal rescue. It uses an innovative model to deliver service within Hampshire in partnership with other key agencies and takes the national CFOA lead on development and dissemination of best practice.

**Use of volunteers in the Nepalese community** - the Service has used its volunteer program to successfully access the Nepalese Community and deliver its community safety agenda.

## Signposting to areas of good practice

### Flexible crewing models and training issues

- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service who have introduced a self rostering model and an associated training structure which has released savings in the organisation and still allows staff to be fully trained in their core activities
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service who release up to 5 appliances every day for training and have an excellent core training model with good attendance and a positive evaluation from end users
- Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, which releases up to 25% of its whole time fleet on a daily basis to facilitate training and community safety activities. These appliances are still available should a major or serious incident occur

### Elected members feeding in community intelligence

- Cheshire Fire and Rescue's Performance Management Groups are an example of engaging local members, strengthening accountability and providing an opportunity to feed in local intelligence. This model might provide useful reflection for Hampshire.