



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



# **Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge**

## **Report**

## **Report Contents:**

<b>1. Introduction, context and purpose</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>2. The Peer Challenge Team</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>3. Background</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>4. Summary of Findings</b>	<b>Page 5</b>

## **Key Areas of focus**

<b>5. Leadership and Governance</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>6. Outcomes For Citizens</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>7. Organisational Capacity</b>	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>8. Community Risk Management</b>	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>9. Response</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>10. Training &amp; Development</b>	<b>Page 16</b>

## **Other Areas:**

<b>12. Prevention</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>13. Protection</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>14. Health and Safety</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>15. Notable Practice</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>16. Conclusion and Contact Information</b>	<b>Page 19</b>

## **1. Introduction, Context and Purpose**

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

The Fire Peer Challenge is part of sector-led improvement. It is a key component of the LGA's 'Taking the Lead' offer ([www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from 2<sup>nd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activity that included interviews, observations and focus groups.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, officers, staff, frontline firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

During their time with SFRS the peer team were well looked after and everyone the team met was fully engaged with the process and open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including the SFRS OpA self-assessment and key supporting documentation.

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

### **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 fire authority elected members and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment 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. It is not a form of sector-led inspection and is a mechanism to provide 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 report provides detailed information on three core questions under the theme of Leadership and Corporate Capacity:

- How effective is Leadership and Governance?
- How well are outcomes for citizens being achieved?

- How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

The peer team were also asked to focus on three key areas:

- Community Risk Management and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) - Consultation on IRMP is currently underway and SFRS requested that the team consider the document and the Service's approach to the provision of information on risk.
- Response – The Service is facing significant change and asked the team to assess its frontline service delivery including on-call personnel, incident command structure (ICS) and monitoring processes.
- Training and Development – The Service is proud of its approach to training and development through working closely with Wattisham Flying Station and through its development folders but wanted the team to assess this to inform future thinking. The peers were also asked to consider the quality and amount of training provision for on-call firefighters.

The areas of Prevention, Protection and Health and Safety received a lighter touch consideration by the peers.

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

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.

The peer challenge team for SFRS was:

- Dominic Harrison – LGA Associate, previously CFO Cumbria County FRS and Lead Peer
- Cllr Kay Hammond – Surrey County Council
- Nick Borrill – Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Lincolnshire County FRS
- David Vazquez - Area Commander Warwickshire County FRS
- Gill Elliott – Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association.

## **3. Background**

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is part of Suffolk County Council (SCC). Suffolk is a large non-metropolitan county of approximately 1,466 square miles situated in the East of England. It has borders to the north with Norfolk, to the west with Cambridgeshire and to the south with Essex. It has a mix of densely-populated towns and sparsely-populated villages, with the population being in excess of 719,000. One third of the population live in the three largest towns of Ipswich, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds.

The county is served by three major trunk roads and several primary routes. There are approximately 1,000 miles of trunk roads and principal A and B roads, with an estimated 15 million vehicle miles travelled each year. Suffolk's roads have a good safety record. Between 2001 and 2008 there was a 13.5% reduction in road casualties and a 20% reduction in fatal and seriously injured cases.

There is a significant volume of maritime, coastal and river traffic. Over 50 miles of coastline and several navigable estuaries support recreational and commercial water use. The Port of Felixstowe is the UK's, and one of Europe's, busiest container ports, handling over 40% of Britain's containerised trade. There are commercial ports in Ipswich and Lowestoft.

SFRS employs around 180 wholetime and 450 on-call firefighters. Wholetime staff are based in Ipswich, Bury, Lowestoft, Haverhill, Newmarket and Felixstowe and there is an on-call complement on every fire station. There are approximately 50 support staff working a variety of contracts in a range of administrative, front-line and managerial positions. Generic ICT, Finance and Human Resource services are provided through a county and district council shared services commercial partnership with Customer Service Direct (CSD). The contract comes to an end in Spring 2014, with outsourced services being returned to the County Council. Other corporate functions such as Property, Procurement, Facilities Management, Communications, Democratic Services and Legal are provided through the County Council or other parties, supported by SFRS managers.

SFRS's property portfolio includes; 35 fire stations, their headquarters in Suffolk County Council's strategic hub, a shared workshops facility, a supplies 'warehouse' function and a training centre at MoD Wattisham Flying Station. The service has faced a 12.5% reduction in its budget since 2010. This has meant a reduction of uniformed wholetime staff from 275 in 2011 to 213 and a 20% reduction in support staff.

In 2013 an 18-month project to consider the potential for a voluntary merger with Cambridgeshire FRS ended with a joint decision not to pursue a merger. The Service is currently considering its options for its future governance and is looking at the possibility of a move under the Police and Crime Commissioner and greater blue light collaboration with partners. Work started in September 2013 with initial funding secured from the Transformation Challenge Award to service some of the collaborative work, in particular an extension of the shared fire and police stations.

#### **4. Summary of Findings**

SFRS is delivering good and cost effective outcomes for the community. It has effective leadership from the newly appointed Chief Fire Officer and the Cabinet Member, whose passion for the Service is widely recognised. The Council Chief Executive has confidence in the CFO to lead the Service through the challenges it will be facing over the next few years.

Since 2010 SFRS has managed to deliver substantial savings amounting to 12.5% of its budget without noticeable adverse impact on the community. It has successfully merged its control room function with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service which has meant a saving of £400k per year. The Service continues to perform well against a broad range of indicators and has a clear focus on managing and reducing risk. It has dedicated staff keen to provide a good service.

Training and development at SFRS was impressive and is a real strength for the Service. The training facilities at Wattisham are widely praised by all who have used them, including wholetime and on-call firefighters. The Service should now start to consider how it can increase the amount of training on-call firefighters receive above the present two hours per week level.

The Service is facing challenges around making further savings and considering options for its future governance. These will need strong and informed Members, able to take what may be difficult decisions for the Service and the community. The recently-formed Policy Development Panel could be an effective forum for this. Further development and training for the Panel's members will enable it to properly challenge operational and governance proposals.

The peer team felt that it will be important for officers and members to consider all the possible options for the future governance of the Service. Governance by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is one option but other options exist that include merger or collaboration with the neighbouring fire services.

The widely-quoted mantra that SFRS is the 'cheapest fire and rescue service in the country' is laudable: however, this might actually be damaging the Service's prospects by making its staff less willing to accept changes. Relationships between the management of the FRS and the representative bodies are generally positive. However, the future challenges in respect of budget cuts are not yet clear and this is impacting on the transparency of the 'debate' between managers and staff at station level or with the public. Members and managers need to be better at communicating the rationale for the future as well as giving more positive messages about what has already been achieved. In terms of achieving further savings, the peer team would encourage the Service to be more creative in its approach to models of service delivery.

SFRS may also benefit from seeking out new opportunities and embracing a wider role for itself: for example, as a result of Public Health moving into the Council.

## **Key Areas of Focus**

### **5. Leadership & Governance**

#### **Strengths**

- **Experienced and committed portfolio holder who is a strong advocate for the service**
- **Good working relationships between senior officers and lead members**
- **Chief Executive understands FRS issues and trusts CFO to deliver for Suffolk**
- **Dedicated and committed workforce with a 'can do' attitude**

SFRS has an experienced and committed Cabinet Member who is a strong advocate for the Service. He takes an interest in all aspects of the Service and is keen for his fellow members to increase their own understanding of the fire service and the challenges it faces.

There are good working relationships between senior officers and lead members. They hold regular meetings and have regular conversations with each other. The recently-formed Public Protection Policy Development Panel has already started to look at some key fire service topics, including the possibility of a change of governance for the Service from the County Council to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

The County Council's Chief Executive clearly understands the fire service's issues and trusts the new Chief Fire Officer to deliver for Suffolk. The fact that his recent appointment was substantive rather than acting demonstrates confidence and trust in him to lead the Service and to challenge the County Council when necessary.

Peers found a real "can do" culture amongst staff who are proud to be part of the organisation and of the service it provides to the community. This commitment and enthusiasm is a considerable asset to the Service as it looks to deliver further change. The generally good industrial relations environment at SFRS improves the chances of future change programmes progressing relatively smoothly.

#### **Areas for consideration**

- **Need for strong political leadership to address future challenges, explore all options and embrace the difficult decisions**
- **PDP is in its infancy but has potential to shape and inform the future direction**
- **Requires a better shared understanding of future potential options to achieve the vision**
- **Potential options need to be communicated better throughout the organisation**

There is a clear need for strong political leadership to address the Service's future challenges, explore all options and embrace the difficult decisions. Peers felt that all the possible options for the future of the service should be appraised and discussed in detail with members. The Service has appointed an Area Commander to examine the feasibility, amongst other options, of it coming under the control of the PCC. . Other possible options could include mergers or collaboration with neighbouring fire services. Peers were concerned that a second unresolved governance project so soon after the Cambridgeshire failed merger could damage the Service's reputation.

The Policy Development Panel is in its infancy but has potential to shape the fire service's future direction. It requires a forward plan of its work and a strong Chair. There also needs to be some significant development of its members to enable them to properly challenge operational and governance proposals. Panel members need to have greater detailed knowledge and understanding of the Service and the confidence to take the big decisions that will be needed. A programme of fire station visits between meetings for members could be considered.

All councillors need to be advocates for the fire service and engage with their local communities more on fire service issues. There needs to be a better shared understanding of future potential options for going forward once the initial appraisal work has been completed. The Service needs to create better links with Health and Wellbeing Boards and the Public Health function within the Council

As part of the County Council the Service will have to take its share of the council's planned £156m budget cuts over the next four years. This could mean a significant reduction in the fire service's budget consistent with reduction in local government funding. Until recently, discussions have tended to centre around discrete operational units, with savings only being delivered by "removing" units. What is needed is discussion around new ways of working and more creative alternative delivery models. The peer team understands that a more holistic approach to making savings has already started and would encourage this.

Once they have become clearer, the potential options need to be communicated throughout the organisation. At present the "rumour mill" on stations is rife. Management needs to regain the initiative and control the conversations that are happening. These conversations should start from the top and be communicated to staff at all levels. An evaluation of the shared control centre with Cambridgeshire could overcome some of the criticisms voiced by staff.

## 6. Outcomes For Citizens

### Strengths

- **Service is performing well across a broad range of indicators**
- **Frontline changes to date have been phased, well-managed and have had little impact on communities**
- **IRMP is in line with current guidance**
- **Visibility of shared public service delivery, e.g. joint use of fire/police stations**
- **Combined control delivering promised savings**

SFRS is performing well across a broad range of indicators. Performance measures such as response times and numbers of false alarms are moving in the right direction and Suffolk is a safe place to live. More back office support around performance management would improve the picture the Service has about its improving outcomes for the community.

The Service has already implemented significant change to date equating to 12.5% of revenue budget. The changes have been phased, well-managed and have had little impact on communities. Performance continues to improve.

The IRMP is in line with current guidance and meets the requirements of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Although they realise few savings financially, joint fire/police stations in Suffolk are a visible indicator of joined-up public sector working.

The combined control function with Cambridgeshire FRS has come under criticism from staff. However in the vast majority of cases the function correctly mobilises appliances in Suffolk and it is delivering the promised savings of £400k per year. The recently-introduced system of dynamic mobilising has made a positive difference for communities in Suffolk. Some stations have found that they are mobilised to more calls than before, whilst others are mobilised to less: management need to better influence the conversations that are taking place on affected stations.

### Areas for consideration

- **Engage openly with local communities over the financial challenges and service changes ahead**
- **Continue dialogue with the workforce over the rationale for, and pace of, change**

The future challenges in respect of SFRS's budget cuts are not yet clear and this is impacting on the opportunity for transparent 'debate' at station level or with the public. Little is understood of the broader fire and rescue service context. As soon as the future financial picture is clearer for senior managers,

the Service needs to engage openly with staff and local communities over the financial challenges and service changes ahead. Members and managers need to be giving more positive messages about what has already been achieved without impacting on the service to the community.

Dialogue with the workforce over the rationale for and pace of change needs to continue. More two-way communication would help, as would giving staff information about what is happening elsewhere in the fire service nationally. The success of issues like the control project could be better communicated both internally and externally. The widely-stated mantra that Suffolk is the 'cheapest fire and rescue service' needs to change. It is not good for the Service's image and appears to be hindering the willingness of staff to accept further change.

## 7. Organisational Capacity

### Strengths

- **Staff are a tremendous asset**
- **Good use made of other SCC services**
- **Generally positive relationships between management and representative bodies**
- **‘there is capacity, we just need to get better at releasing it!’**

The Service has seen a significant reduction in back office staff, managers and firefighters since 2010. Numbers of wholetime uniformed staff have reduced from 275 to 213 and support staff by 20%. Despite this, all the staff that the peer teams spoke to were fully committed to the Service and are proud to work for it. They are a tremendous asset with an impressive “can do” attitude.

Good use is made of other county council back office and support services including Customer Services Direct which provides generic IT, HR and Finance services. This contract ends in Spring 2014 with the outsourced services being returned to the county council. Other corporate functions such as Property, Procurement, Facilities Management and Legal are provided through the county council. HR are currently developing a People Strategy for the Service which will help it move forward and respond to further changes and the workforce churn likely to be caused by a significant number of planned retirements.

There are generally positive relationships between management and representative bodies. All the unions expressed the view that good relationships exist, although they felt that the recent strategic manager restructure exercise could have been handled better.

There is some recognition within the organisation that there is unused capacity in the Service that can be tapped into. The peer team received the following quote - *‘there is capacity, we just need to get better at releasing it!’* Peers undertaking the operational peer review in 2010 reached a similar conclusion. The Service needs to find considered and permanent ways of releasing that capacity. One example might be to review the types of fires that flexi officers need to attend and we are aware of work that has been commissioned in this regard.

### Areas for consideration

- **SFRS is embedded in SCC but operational staff need to understand and support the council’s wider agenda**
- **Is on-call availability an issue?**
- **Opportunities to develop capacity: are the right people doing the right work? E.g. sickness, grievance administration**

- **Consider other ways to do things that are creative, innovative or different?**

SFRS is embedded in SCC but operational staff need to understand and support the council's wider agenda. Staff are generally calling for a "retrenchment" of activities rather than embracing a wider role and seeking out new opportunities: e.g. the public health function now in councils. The Service should look to consider other ways to do things that are creative, innovative or different, rather than just making savings from cuts.

The availability of on-call fire fighters appears to have fallen. However this may be a consequence of the introduction of Gartan (the new management information system). It is important to assess the actual and perceived impact this has had to determine whether it really is an issue for concern. The use of Sharepoint has made more available a huge amount of data but the Service now needs to share this with the public.

There are opportunities to develop capacity within the organisation. For example, station managers need to deal with issues like staff sickness, grievances and discipline etc. at the lowest appropriate level rather than elevating them to more senior managers unnecessarily.

## 8. Community Risk Management

### Strengths

- **Focus on managing and reducing risk**
- **Good engagement with Local Resilience Forum to explore broader risks, threats and emergencies**
- **Use of sector-competent consultants to support professional judgement**
- **Well-developed business continuity plans**

The IRMP 2014-17 identifies the Service's key community risks and there is a clear correlation with those in the Suffolk Resilience Forum Community Risk Register. The revised IRMP format, which outlines the risks and the core strategies to mitigate them, follows current guidance.

There is good engagement with the Local Resilience Forum to explore broader risks, threats and emergencies with weekly face to face meetings. Recent events like industrial action and storms on the East Coast in December 2013 will have tested these plans. The use of external consultants Process Evolution to look at options for dealing with risks is very positive.

The Service uses risk tools effectively to support more detailed planning, as evidenced by the previous changes to service delivery. While the work being undertaken by Process Evolution is not yet complete, it is indicative of the Service's evidenced and risk-based approach.

There are a number of Business Continuity Plans in place to support the key corporate risks and these continue to evolve. Managers are encouraged to own their own plans. Whilst the plan for industrial action has been tested over the past few months, it is recognised that the remaining plans need to be exercised in order to test their effectiveness.

### Areas for consideration

- **Is the baseline IRMP document too strategic; does it ask the right questions; does it support engagement?**
- **Do staff and the public understand the impact of previous IRMP changes on community risk?**
- **Resources required to plan and manage performance against risk?**

The current IRMP document was seen by some as too generic. It is anticipated that this will not stimulate a high number of responses from the on-going consultation. However, it is acknowledged that the Service does intend to consult on any proposed specific changes to service delivery resulting from

implementation of their core strategies. It is important that the Service identifies which changes need public consultation and which only need internal consultation as there are a number of potential changes which do not require the costly public level of engagement. There would be benefit in ensuring that staff are fully aware of this approach.

While the IRMP identifies the key changes made in the last two years in response to funding reductions, it is not clear what impact this has had on the Service's ability to manage risk or deliver key outcomes for the community. This outcome should be communicated to both staff and the public to ensure the changes are understood in context.

While performance is reported to FSG, it is not clear how well embedded performance management is throughout the Service. There appears to be an emphasis on outputs rather than outcomes, e.g. the inclusion of response times, as opposed to other key indicators, in the County Council performance report typifying this approach. There were also some anomalies in the performance figures presented which it is understood relates to issues around the timely receipt of IRS records. There is a need to ensure appropriate capacity is given to performance management and to ensuring that the focus remains on outcomes.

## 9. Response

### Strengths

- **PFI has improved the estate significantly**
- **Excellent vehicles and equipment designed for Suffolk's requirements**
- **Managed PPE service is seen as a great improvement**
- **Dynamic mobilising improving response**
- **AIM is informing policy and practice**

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects have significantly improved the estate and were a good deal for Suffolk. The benefits of these deals for SFRS should be more widely known as some staff only acknowledge the costs of making any changes to the contracts. The Service has recently secured the services of a County Council contract manager to enable them manage the £80m PFI contract more closely and maximise benefits to SFRS. PFI is an example of another issue that could be communicated to staff and the community more positively.

The Service has excellent vehicles and equipment designed for Suffolk's requirements. Staff appreciated the high quality equipment they work with and are pleased the fleet is being maintained effectively. This outcome has been achieved despite the challenge of replacing aging vehicles and equipment from pressured revenue and capital budgets.

The managed personal protective equipment (PPE) service is seen as a great improvement on the previous arrangements, with personnel being issued with modern and well-maintained firefighting apparel. Dynamic mobilising is improving Service response and the public are getting a better service. Whilst some stations are unhappy about a reduction in the calls they are asked to respond to, others have seen an increase. These staff are generally more positive about the success of the joint control function than those at stations with fewer call-outs.

Active incident monitoring (AIM) works well. It is informing policy and practice and is feeding into training and development planning. Themes and training needs identified on the incident ground can be fed back into the design of operational policies and influence the training delivered to personnel.

### Areas for consideration

- **Are smaller incidents being over managed?**
- **Are stations in the right place with the right crewing?**
- **Is confidence in combined control being undermined?**

Flexi duty officers are being sent to incidents which could be adequately managed by the watch or crew commanders. As a result flexi officers feel

overburdened. The general feeling about this issue is that most would welcome the planned review of the system of officer mobilisation.

Within obvious financial constraints, the Service needs to look again at whether its stations are in the right place with the right crewing. The external consultants Process Evolution and professional judgement indicates that innovative changes could be made to enhance operational response and simultaneously increase efficiency.

Confidence in combined control is in danger of being undermined, despite the fact that it is saving £400k per year and the community are getting a better service as a result of dynamic mobilising. One or two contentious decisions appear to be having a disproportionate effect. The cited issue around mobilising the ERT (Emergency Response Tender) is small in the overall scale of response but is drawing a disproportionate amount of attention.

## 10. Training and Development

### Strengths

- **Wattisham universally acknowledged as a great resource**
- **All staff have embraced and taken ownership of the new development culture**
- **'Development folders are brilliant - producing higher quality firefighters'**
- **Training plan covers risk critical activities and provides sufficient flexibility for local management**
- **OTG well-received by wholetime staff**
- **Broader development and competency challenges are recognised**

Training and development is a real strength. The facility at Wattisham offers a significantly improved training venue from that previously offered at Lowestoft. Wattisham provides carbonaceous, hot fire and a range of road, rail and hazmat scenarios. Driving and elements of incident command system assessment (ICS) are facilitated elsewhere in the County with no apparent detrimental impact on the overall training offer. Wattisham was also delivered at a lower cost than other proposed solutions, providing a cost-effective approach for Suffolk County Council and the community. The venue benefits from a fifteen year lease and no limitations on when training activity can take place. Given the success of the facility, it may now be appropriate to explore whether the full potential of Wattisham is being accessed.

A paper-based training plan has been created for use by on-call and wholetime duty personnel. It provides timetabled guidance to Junior Officers in relation to risk critical activities such as Breathing Apparatus (BA), road traffic collisions (RTC) and high priority standard operating procedures (SOPs). Other activities are identified within the planner and stations have the flexibility to incorporate the additional elements in a timely manner at their discretion. With sufficient consideration and foresight these discretionary elements can support the development portfolios for station-based personnel with little or no additional work.

Operational staff recognise the value of the training provided at Wattisham and the introduction of operational training groups (OTG) is especially welcomed. The annual five day course for wholetime personnel provides a range of operational scenarios and an opportunity for the assessment of ICS competency within both a practical and simulated environment. It provides the Service with the opportunity to quality assure the inputs of station training plans using qualified and independent instructors/assessors.

The training and development managers recognise the challenges posed by the limited training time available to on-call personnel, the need to quality assure all training inputs given to all operational staff and to ensure that all elements of risk critical activity are addressed within the annual training plans.

The Service undertook a review and made a number of recommendations in 2008 which looked specifically at on-call personnel. Some, but not all of the recommendations have been addressed. There would appear benefit in progressing outstanding recommendations.

### **Areas for consideration**

- **Do all Members have sufficient knowledge to challenge and support future developments?**
- **Time available to develop and maintain on-call competence**
- **Timely completion of electronic maintenance of skills recording**
- **Access to more realistic training for on-call staff**
- **Quality assurance for theoretical training delivery**

The challenges of on-call staff competence are recognised and have been well understood by the Service for some time, evidenced by the policy development panel report of 2008 and conversations with personnel across the Service. The Service should address the evidenced risk between time required and time available as a priority. Drill nights should focus on training and development, with non-training activities such as testing of equipment, inventories, visits etc. limited or removed. Additional training time should be sought and the Service, in conjunction with its on-call personnel, should identify the best time for its use in terms of 'when and where'.

The project to create an electronic training recording system linked to evidence and activity should be expedited to ensure the Service can provide a quality-assured and evidenced record of competence for all its personnel, with the highest priority being operational competence from development firefighter through to CFO. Consideration should be given to extend the system to include other non-operational competencies identified within the national occupational standards and specialisms such as fire protection, fire investigation, learning and development qualifications and so on.

With reducing incident numbers, opportunities for all operational staff to operate within a realistic environment have reduced. The five day OTG for whole time personnel provides an excellent control measure to address this reduction in operational activity. However, the on-call staff have also experienced similar reductions in operational activity and from a lower original base. As part of the review of training time for on-call staff, consideration should be given to increasing their exposure to the full range of realistic training environments, such as those provided at Wattisham.

The Training and Development Department are constructing a number of condensed risk critical SOP guidance documents for on-call staff and already deliver theoretical input from the wholetime OTG to on-call staff during a number of their training nights. The recognised importance of quality assuring practical activity equally applies to any theoretical inputs. The Service should ensure it can evidence that all operational personnel have received and understood the inputs utilising some form of assessment. The AIM process

will then seek to assure the Service that training inputs that have been delivered and assessed are being acted upon and followed on the incident ground. Areas of concern from AIM reports should then inform the delivery and content of future policy and training.

## **The following areas received a lighter touch challenge**

### **12. Prevention**

#### **Strengths**

Prevention activities within the Service are effective. The Service clearly recognises the value of education and early intervention as part of its Prevention work. It has some well-developed non-statutory partnerships and is starting to make good use of volunteers to extend its capacity and reach into the community, although its volunteers could be involved more broadly in the County Council's volunteer systems.

#### **Areas for consideration**

Some of the Service's partnerships with statutory partners are less well developed such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and Public Health. SFRS needs to increase its influence with these bodies and consider what it can offer the community. The effectiveness of the Community Safety Partnerships should be considered since they have been reduced in number from seven to three. The Service is not doing as well as it could with regards to home fire safety checks (HFSCs) Consideration should be given to potential capacity within operational fire crews to increase the number of HFSCs carried out.

### **13. Protection**

#### **Strengths**

The risk-based inspection programme is well developed and well-resourced compared to most services. It is evident that there is an adequate inspection system for high risk properties and the team produces good management information.

#### **Area for Consideration**

All the staff working in Protection are on "Grey Book" terms and conditions and the Service needs to consider whether some of them could be better employed elsewhere in the Service: e.g. is the aspiration to provide a Fire Engineer necessary or could the Service commission this resource externally or share with another fire service.

### **14. Health and Safety**

#### **Strengths**

The Service has an assured health and safety management system with a proactive and committed approach. The joint investigation protocol looks

good. The CFO represents the Directorate on the corporate Health and Wellbeing Board and chairs the Directorate's Health and Safety Forum.

There is a robust accident/near miss reporting procedure. Analysis of accident data is carried out by Health and Safety staff and disseminated to the Service through the annual Outturn Report.

Health and Safety Training for managers has been recently addressed with managers receiving role- appropriate NEBOSH accreditation as part of the drive to improve the Health and Safety culture.

### **Area for consideration**

It will be important for the Service to maintain the strong focus on health and safety as it goes forward.

### **15. Notable Practice**

The Service has introduced development folders for all roles from Firefighter to Area Commander. They are based on role maps rather than the NVQ model. The folders set out the key competencies, activities and standards required for each role. The first to be completed was for firefighters. Progress is monitored, with competence being formally assessed and signed off. Folders are quality assured by sample monitoring. Although the folders place a time burden on those enrolled and their assessors, personnel appear to really appreciate the structured programmes offered and the associated support. The Service benefits from an auditable trail of assured evidence and is anticipating an increase in standards across all on-call stations in a time scale of the next one to two years.

Quote 'Development folders are brilliant, producing higher quality firefighters'.

### **16. Conclusion and contact information**

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers and staff. It is clear that Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service is providing a good service. There is enthusiasm and commitment from all staff and the peer team believe that by harnessing this and by seeking out more innovative and creative solutions SFRS can continue on its improvement journey.

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

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