



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

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

**28<sup>th</sup> November – 1st December 2017**

**Report**

## **1. Introduction, context and purpose**

This report outlines the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA) Fire Peer Challenge at Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS). Fire Peer Challenge is part of sector-led improvement. The process has been evaluated and revised to reflect developments within the sector and ensure it continues to meet the needs of fire and rescue services and other key stakeholders.

The SFRS Fire Peer Challenge took place from 28<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017 inclusive. It consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, focus groups and fire station visits. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of officers, staff, front-line firefighters, partners and elected members. During the challenge the peer team were very well looked after and people the team met were fully engaged with the process and very open and honest.

The peer team undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including the SFRS Self-Assessment. The evidence and feedback gathered during on-site activities was assimilated into broad themes and delivered to SFRS on the final day of the challenge.

The Service Operational Self-Assessment requested that the peer team address a number of key questions and provide a response to the Chief Fire Officer and his senior team:

### **1. Blue Light Collaboration**

Now the duty to collaborate is in legislation, is SFRS maximising the benefits of blue light collaboration?

### **2. Organisational Capacity**

Capacity to do everything we want to do is a recurring theme: Where is there capacity that we haven't yet tapped into? What can we do differently or better to release this across the Service?

### **3. Culture, Equality and Inclusion**

From the information we have gathered and presented, what can we do that is different and better to improve our culture, especially around equality and inclusion?

### **4. Performance**

What do we need to do better to present a truer and more accurate picture of our performance?

### **5. Operational Assurance**

What is the peer team's view of the arrangements we have in place for Operational Assurance? Where do you think we still have gaps we should address?

The peer team also examined the OpA key performance areas and the themes under the heading of 'Leadership and organisational capacity'. The themes under leadership and organisational capacity are:

- Understanding of local context and priority setting
- Delivering outcomes for local communities
- Financial planning and viability
- Political and managerial leadership
- Governance and decision-making
- Organisational capacity

## **2. The fire peer challenge process and team**

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector and peers are at the heart of the process. They help Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The peer challenge team for SFRS was:

- Ann Millington, Chief Executive, Kent Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Kay Hammond, Surrey County Council
- Mark O'Brien, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- Ian Tonner, Group Commander Prevention, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Matt Sismey, Organisational Development and Inclusion Manager, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Gill Elliott, Review Manager, Local Government Association

## **3. Executive Summary**

In 2013 the last LGA peer challenge found that SFRS was delivering good and cost-effective outcomes for the community with effective leadership. During the 2017 peer challenge it was clear that the Service's good operational performance has been maintained and SFRS continues to be a well-run service with a well-deserved reputation for keeping its community safe and offering good value for money. The Service understands its local context and risks and it has a good operational base with sound practices and low levels of fire-related fatalities. SFRS is staffed with excellent people who

are committed to the Service. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) and the Cabinet Member for Fire are both highly regarded by staff and partners.

SFRS is making good, measured progress on collaboration and, to a large extent, the Service is driving the collaboration agenda. It has sound partnerships with Suffolk Police and the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST). The work it does with the Local Resilience Forum is effective. Over half of its' thirty-five fire stations are, or will soon be, shared or used collaboratively, and the process for achieving this has been well-managed. Going forward the Service needs to develop the narrative around the benefits of collaboration, including the way it is increasing capacity and improving finances.

Organisational capacity is an issue for SFRS as it is for most Services. There are examples of good use of organisational capacity. The sharing of support functions with Suffolk County Council (SCC) is an effective use of resources. It may be possible for SCC to provide more support to Fire in areas where they need capacity such as project management, data and evaluation activities. Good use is made of volunteers for community engagement and prevention work, and there is probably scope to increase the number of volunteers.

Overall the Service needs to reprioritise existing work and analyse emerging priorities against capacity. It should also consider how it can simplify its processes, review governance and policies and empower and up-skill staff to enable decisions to be made at the appropriate level. Project management must ensure that projects are managed "end to end". The Service should consider its approach to automatic fire alarm (AFAs) responses as part of a wider demand management strategy.

In terms of culture, equality and inclusion, the Service has started to address some of these issues and is engaging well with staff to move the agenda forward. A more open culture of challenge and dialogue is emerging. The Service needs to ensure that it embeds the County Council's behavioural values (ASPIRE) throughout the organisation. Workforce diversity remains an issue in terms of recruitment, along with the rates of disclosure of sexual orientation and disability for existing staff.

SFRS understands that its performance management is an area for improvement. However, the peer team did find several positives that can be built on. Good corporate data is provided to Suffolk County Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) and lead Councillors and the one-page performance 'l-sheet' dashboard that is produced is impressive. In general, the Service needs to be better at defining its desired outcomes. There needs to be a better and clearer narrative on managing community risk. Prevention activity generally could be promoted more. Excellent prevention work is being done but employees on fire stations are not always aware of it.

Operational Assurance within the Service is good. There has been significant investment in operational training to support operational assurance. New

processes appear comprehensive and robust. Learning from incidents is good. There is opportunity to embed quality and customer experience into the operational assurance board process and to ensure that the process for “closing the loop” and ensuring that critical or important information is read, understood and actioned.

## **4. Key Findings**

### **4.1 Understanding of local context and priority setting**

SFRS has a strong, clear leadership focused on reducing community risk. The Service understands its local context and risks and has well-established arrangements to gather and use data, intelligence and targeting to reduce risk to the community. The current IRMP had a comprehensive consultation process and early work to develop a strategic assessment of risk with SCC Public Health colleagues appears to be very good also and will inform the next IRMP.

### **4.2 Delivering outcomes for local communities**

SFRS has a good operational base with sound practices and low levels of fatalities. Its response to the Grenfell fire has been good. A timely and joined up approach to assessing risk, working with relevant local authorities, and involving operational and specialist staff, meant that any risks to the communities of Suffolk were identified, mitigated and public assurance maintained. Operational assurance is effective. “Hot” and formal debriefing is regular and used for learning, although training for operational debriefing and mental health issues is required. Command training is good. The terms of reference are being developed for a joint ‘demand analysis’ piece of work between FRS, Suffolk Police and SCC. It is evident that all the partners that are involved are keen to make progress in this area.

The narrative on community outcomes and how inputs, outputs and measures are used is not clear. More focus is needed on the quality of the customer experience and evaluating outcomes. The Service should also consider how it can build a stronger narrative which captures all the good work that is going on. Crews have little understanding of the “bigger picture” such as how safe and well visits can reduce costs to the County Council and the NHS. They tend to concentrate only on fire issues. The links between district operational teams and district prevention teams could be improved, particularly around identifying risk and performance management.

### **4.3 Financial planning and viability**

SFRS has always benchmarked as a low cost but well-performing service. Although the County Council still has to make £55m of savings over the next three years, it has agreed to a 4-year efficiency programme for the FRS through to 2020/21. The bulk of this programme has been delivered through the recent IRMP. SFRS received a DCLG grant of £4.94m for joint buildings with the police and has used this to further develop its existing very good One

Public Estates programme, with many shared assets. It has a reserves position within SCC whereby the level of reserves for earmarked and non-earmarked commitments puts it in a sound position.

Budget control has been passed down from the deputy chief fire officer (DCFO) to area commanders. They have a good understanding of their budgets which is a real strength for the Service. Budget data is increasingly good and creating transparency around the fire service's finances. Budget management at station level has greatly improved. Managers are much more "finance savvy" and budget forecasting and monitoring is getting better. More training and support is still needed. The Oracle system itself is not hugely "user friendly". The Service needs to consider how it can save to invest. Changes to AFA response might create resources to deliver emergency medical response or increased prevention activity

#### **4.4 Political and managerial leadership**

The Service has strong visible political leadership and effective political governance. The portfolio holder is passionate, well-briefed and is an excellent advocate for the Service. The senior team is well-respected by staff and partners. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) is valued as an excellent contributor to the County Council's corporate management team. The Service has started to provide some leadership training for senior managers. This is starting to have an impact. Political leaders could be more engaged on the equalities agenda. There was also a lack of awareness by councillors of the wider benefits of public health budgets in the work of the Service.

#### **4.5 Governance and decision-making**

The cross-party fire steering group on Suffolk County Council is well informed and very supportive of the fire service. They add value by being a sounding board for future policy decisions. The group is separate from County Council Scrutiny arrangements. Corporate performance data is effectively used by the County corporate management team and councillors in taking decisions. Industrial relations in the Service are good. There is a joint forum of all representative bodies and councillors which provides a good opportunity to meet and discuss issues. There are several layers of scrutiny through the Council and the Leadership teams. Staff are involved in decisions about station design requirements.

### **5. Blue Light Collaboration: Now the Duty to Collaborate is in legislation, is Suffolk FRS maximising the benefits of blue light collaboration?**

SFRS is making good, measured progress on collaboration and, to a large extent, is driving the collaboration agenda in its area. Ensuring that all three services are aligned is one of the challenges of collaboration but the strength of the governance arrangements helps in this regard. . There is an executive board as well as a steering group and a sponsor board. A blue light integration board enables confidential discussions for solving issues between

the agencies. The police have also offered to provide SFRS with HMIC inspection reports on collaboration, to assist with outlining the collaboration roadmap.

The process of collaboration has developed fresh relationships with the Chief Officers across the top teams of the County Council and SFRS and with elected members. SFRS has a very good relationship with the County Council. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) is part of the County's corporate management team and heads up a number of different services as well as fire. The arrangement adds value to the broader leadership of the County Council.

The Service has good partnerships with Suffolk Police and the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST). The work it does with the Local Resilience Forum is effective and the CFO currently chairs this forum. It's "One Public Estate" property collaboration is well-established and there are an increasing number of shared assets now with the police and ambulance service. Twenty out of SFRS's thirty-five fire stations are, or will soon be, shared or used collaboratively, and the process for doing this has been well-managed.

Peers felt that SFRS could be more articulate at stating the benefits of sharing assets. It did make some reference to financial savings on estates and marginal gains around increased opportunities for joint training with those sharing the sites. In contrast Suffolk Constabulary spoke in detail of both financial and operational benefits of the shared estates strategy and the way shared stations have provided better local policing by enabling the police to spend less on their estate and re-invest that cost in improved policing. SFRS should now start to develop a narrative on how estates collaboration has released capacity and created opportunities for other work such as prevention. The Service should also consider the additional benefits it is deriving from the shared estates strategy such as greater value for money, improved operational effectiveness and cultural influences.

The narrative around releasing capacity and improving finances could be strengthened. There is a good synergy developing on identifying the possible overlap between police and fire on "Demand work". An example of this is the fact that both are changing how they record road traffic collisions. The Service is developing itself as a health asset alongside the police and ambulance. This includes looking at opportunities for emergency medical responding (co-responding), dementia awareness training, and support for response to falls and gaining access to assist EEAST access patients. The EEAST thinks that co-location has driven improved joint training and closer relationships. The joint Fire/Police Cadets is excellent practice.

There could be greater cross-border joint fire policy and delivery teams and joint fleet maintenance/equipment projects. There appears to be limited cross border support across operational areas with Norfolk and Cambridge. The Service could consider holding joint multi-agency gold command courses (MAGIC), with districts, the county council and the police in addition to the

existing collaboration with Essex FRS. It may be feasible to have joint on-call and PCSO posts at shared buildings. As the scope for collaboration widens it will be important for SFRS to manage the risk of “mission creep” and to ensure that all ideas are supported by a business case with bottom up involvement and effective governance.

**6. Organisational Capacity: “Capacity to do everything we want to do is a recurring theme” Is there capacity that SFRS has not yet tapped into? What can it do differently or better to release this across the Service?**

Organisational capacity is an issue for most Services as budgets shrink. SFRS actually has some very good examples of practices that make good use of its’ organisational capacity. Shared office space within the County Council HQ allows for good communication at senior level and the shared back office function with SCC is an effective use of resources. It may be possible for SCC to provide more support to Fire in areas where they need capacity such as project management, data and evaluation activities.

Operationally, the resilience crewing of on-call “OCCR” (on call crewing reserve) is a good use of resources. It allows the watch commander in charge of the unit to use their resources dynamically to ensure best spread of cover across the district areas. Operational crews are undertaking business safety compliance inspections.

Good use is made of volunteers for community engagement and prevention work. They make a positive contribution the Service’s capacity. There is probably scope to increase the number and scope of volunteers.

There are good industrial relations within the Service, with effective governance measures. These enable decision making and the introduction of new policies and practices to happen more quickly.

The peer team felt that there were a number of ways that SFRS could create or release more capacity within its operation. Some longer-term answers lie in moving down decision making, using LEAN techniques or smarter working to challenge and redesign every process. Other ways include more effective management development to up-skill people to be more effective, use of e-learning, and sourcing good practice from other Services and partners.

The empowering of staff has been a success and can be built on further in other areas such as shift changes etc. There are also further opportunities for fire staff to feed into the new Suffolk transformation programmes to support the Councils three strategic themes. Overall the Service needs to take stock of and analyse emerging priorities, reprioritise things it is already doing and maybe stop doing some things. There was a common view expressed that this doesn’t happen enough. The Fire Strategy Group should be regularly reviewing priorities.

The Service also needs to consider how it can simplify its processes e.g. promotion, appraisal and development folders. These are still seen as a massive

commitment on top of the “day job”, although we understand they have been reviewed and slimmed down considerably. It should also review governance and policies to enable decisions to be made at the appropriate level. There appears to be some duplication of boards. For example, as the new Governance Boards find their feet, there is some evidence that the Operational Assurance Board has considered items which then go to the top team for decision. However, the decision could have been taken at the level of the Operational Assurance Board as five out of its six members are also on the top team (Fire Strategy Group)

Project management needs some development in the Service to ensure that projects are managed “end to end”. There needs to be better scoping at the start to identify all the issues and proposed benefits, as well as improved cost tracking and benefits realisation after project end. Improved communication lines and training is needed on a number of new operational initiatives (e.g. COBRA) or where decisions are made around existing capabilities (e.g. Command Support Vehicles)

The Service needs to consider its approach to automatic fire alarm (AFAs) responses as part of a wider demand and risk management strategy. Responding to fewer AFAs would allow a realignment of the use of crews on other community risks e.g. Emergency medical response or prevention work. The Service could use the Taskforce approach used well within Protection for prevention impact days. These should be developed once pay issues are resolved nationally. In general Prevention and Protection activity needs to be clearer to all staff. This is an awareness and learning opportunity.

IT resources, governance and project management need to be addressed within the Service. IT is not as reliable or user-friendly as it should be. IT literacy is also an issue for the Service. Staff and trainers need to have more confidence in their infrastructure. There has been a review of IT earlier in 2017 and a number of recommendations were made. A new IT manager has been recruited for 18 months to deliver the action plan. The items in the plan include closer working with the county, completing outstanding IT projects, improving the Fire IT system and enabling the fire districts to take on more work. SFRS might want to consider employing some specialist social media resource to ensure that it can make the best use of Twitter, the new mobile app and the growing number of enquiries from Facebook.

SFRS could consider whether allocating significant operational references such as National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers (NILO's) and Hazardous Materials and Environmental Protection Advisors (HMEPA's) to the critically important Group Manager (GM) cadre is the right use of resources. The six GMs are vital to service delivery and to specialist central functions and the commitment to these two references is significant. SFRS may want to consider if Level 2 Flexi-duty Station Managers may have more capacity to undertake these roles, leaving the GMs to support the management of the Service and the delivery of projects.

The Service is introducing policies which will extend the approach whereby on-call appliances are mobilised to operational incidents with a crew of three. It is recommended that this initiative is now implemented. Such a policy would

provide additional operational capacity by increasing the availability of on-call appliances and the ability of the on-call workforce to provide a service to their local communities. This approach is also likely to result in an increase in retention of on-call staff as they will see more operational activity through being utilised as part of the operational response to incidents when previously the appliance would have been off the run. Similarly, the Service should also consider the further use of smaller 'rapid response' type vehicles, like that being provided at Wrentham fire station, allowing for a more appropriate and flexible response to certain incident types and again ensuring that maximum use can be made of available on-call staff.

SFRS may wish to re-examine the use of flexi-rostering, alternative shift lengths, and / or changes to shift start and finish times, as a means to increase productivity across the whole-time workforce. Such changes may increase capacity through increasing length of day shift; enable additional safer homes checks or business safety compliance checks to be undertaken; extend the time available for wholetime firefighter support to on-call fire stations, typically provided on a day shift; and support greater flexibility for day-based training courses.

**7. Culture, Equality and Inclusion: From the information SFRS has gathered and presented, what can it do that is different and better, to improve its culture, especially around equality and inclusion?**

The Service recognises that it is on a journey of cultural improvement and it is keen to learn how it can go forward. There is a genuine commitment by the senior team to change the culture at SFRS. At the senior level there is a more open and challenging dialogue which is having a positive response. Managers recognise that cultural change is a big challenge but that the journey towards it has started.

The Service is far more self-aware than before due to the concerted efforts made to address issues around culture and inclusion following the 2014 and then 2016 staff survey. The survey led to the establishment of a number of staff focus groups to consider the results. These were facilitated by a manager from the County Council's Trading Standards Department. The Service also employed external consultants, Equality Works, to undertake further research around equality and inclusion in the Service and is incorporating their findings into its future plans and discussions with staff and members.

The Service set up a staff engagement group earlier this year which has been welcomed by all staff. The group has representatives from across the Service. It has met twice so far but has already produced a new set of aims and vision for the Service, which have been adopted by the Fire Strategy Group.

A Continuous Improvement Plan is now in place to take forward the leadership, culture and equality plans. It is a large and comprehensive plan. It will be

important to establish the priorities within the plan, the costs involved and a timeline of achievement.

There is some evidence of an inclusive workplace for women. Female firefighters that we spoke to were very positive about their working environment, career opportunities and terms and conditions. For example, there has been a move away from standardized maternity rules towards a greater focus on individual needs. There was also good evidence of support for dyslexic staff.

The Service has made a good start on addressing mental health issues. There is a more positive approach to mental health awareness linked to the culture improvement work. The CFO is leading on this through his blogs. Occupational health provision has changed to enable a better service, especially on mental health. People are generally more willing to admit to having mental health issues and are asking for assistance more. This is helping to open up the debate and more managers are discussing the issue. For example, on-call managers are using their regular discussion sessions to address broad issues like mental health.

Culture changes are also evident at station level. There appears to be less evidence of 'them and us' between whole-time and on-call firefighters with a gradual blurring of the roles. This is really positive and needs to continue. There is an empowerment and capacity building programme with watch managers. The Service is developing an in-house mobile app to keep on-call, and all staff better informed about issues and news in the Service that affect them. The app will be available to all staff.

Relevant job adverts are now open to all. There has been an increasing access to grey book roles by green book support staff and several appointments made that reflect this approach. This marks a cultural shift for the Service.

Inclusion and equality is opening as a debate but needs to be articulated in a broader way to include everybody, i.e. green/grey book, white shirt/black shirt, mental health and well-being, ageing workforce, carers, and other protected characteristics. Documents in the Service need to have equality and inclusion embedded in their language. Cultural symbols and language are important. For example, the Service might wish to consider changing from the term Commander to Manager. There is still a lack of diversity within the Service, especially at a senior level, albeit the benefits of being part of the SCC management team does bring a much broader diversity. At all levels disclosure of non-visible identities is low. The Service needs to work harder to raise declaration rates of disability (visible and non-visible) and sexual orientation. Training and awareness raising would help to develop this and raise confidence.

Equality skills training as well as awareness and development is also required. The Service will be undertaking a whole-time recruitment exercise in 2018. It should ensure that everyone involved in the process understands the legislation that applies to recruitment and selection and has been trained to recognise unconscious bias. There needs to be greater awareness of the prevalence of alpha male behaviour that might be inhibiting female firefighters during

operational work. e.g. a male firefighter taking cutters from a female firefighter at a road traffic collision.

The Service needs to develop communications plans as part of each project. All middle managers have to be on board with corporate messages and make use of a consistent narrative. The use of “change scripts” would ensure greater consistency of key messages. The CFO’s blogs have an engaging style - other communications should use the same informal personal manner. Communication takes place, but it is not always consistent or sustained. Information needs to be cascaded down and feedback received up the line.

It may be beneficial to review policies that are considered by staff to be divisive, for example the two pay bands for watch manager roles and above. Most Services have migrated over time to just one pay band at each role, normally, the higher B band. This was always the intention for Services. Maintaining two pay bands for one job role can become divisive. It creates problems for the Service with regard to moving staff between bands, job transfers and job size issues. Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) are currently compulsory for station commander and above, although they are available, but not mandatory or regularly provided, to firefighters, crew and watch managers. The Service should routinely carry out PDRs at all levels. Peers were told by some staff about inconsistent management practices around maternity and temporary appointments. HR needs to ensure that managers know the correct policies and practices and that they are applying them in a consistent manner.

Greater clarity about the diversity of on-call variable contracts including day cover and shorter hours would be likely to have a positive impact on the availability and recruitment of a greater diversity of staff.

The Service should consider the greater use of internal mediators and wellbeing champions. Internal mediators might help to de-escalate grievances so that issues can be dealt with at the lowest necessary level. Wellbeing champions would be volunteer staff who are trained to signpost fellow staff to support services and to take a lead in communicating on wellbeing issues for their part of the workforce.

The team heard several accounts of staff not feeling they could challenge their manager for fear of the effect on their career. It is not clear how much this is part of an urban mythology or if it is a reality and reflects inconsistent leadership practice. The Service needs to explore this further and take action to address it where substantiated.

Going forward it will be important for the Service to maintain engagement with staff representatives on the equality agenda.

**8. Performance: What does the Service need to do better to present a truer and more accurate picture of its performance?**

SFRS understands that this is an area for improvement. However, the peer team did find several positives that can be built on. Good corporate data is provided which allows for reporting to CMT and Councillors. The one-page performance I-sheet dashboard produced for councillors is impressive. The annual business plan is a good clear document and the corporate risk register is done well. It is refreshed quarterly.

In general, the Service needs to be better at defining its desired outcomes. There needs to be a better and clearer narrative on managing community risk. For example, Suffolk is an “aging” county – how is activity aligned to the strategy of helping people stay in their homes longer? The Service-wide plan and directorate plans should reflect the narrative consistently. The Service also recognizes that more can be done to improve data sharing with partners.

There is a culture on station of not completing the electronic Incident Recording System (eIRS) forms and this is not being managed effectively. This is impacting on the accuracy and quality of data.

Data on risk critical training – New staff receive training for mental health and health and safety awareness skills. This was developed with the Service’s occupational health providers and it is regularly presented to all members of staff. Managers can access SCC positive mental health courses for further training. All staff access operational monitoring and debriefing policy which includes the critical events questionnaire which is available at all stations and departments for self-referrals with further access via the front page on SharePoint. SFRS also works in partnership with Duradiamond Health Care (Occupational health providers) and the mental health charity MIND via its ‘MIND pledge’ and action plan. There is an opportunity to better formalise this training and the peer review team noted that the Service was considering a model such as “TRiM” and it is recommended that this is considered.

Due to the lean nature of the workforce the organisation has a single point of failure in a number of areas and this represents a risk (for example in the Operational Assurance Station Manager post) There is a concentration of expertise in only a few people. The Service needs to develop a knowledge management plan.

Prevention activity generally could be promoted more. Excellent prevention work is being done but it’s not always known about at stations. There is a lack of structure around ad hoc prevention activity that is undertaken by stations. The Service should evaluate risk for prevention activity and set clear targets.

**9. Operational Assurance: What is the peer team’s view of the arrangements SFRS has in place for Operational Assurance? Where do they think there are gaps it should address?**

The Service makes good use of its “Ops viewing platform”. It has the technology to see at a glance what is going on at incidents and this makes for effective and timely dissemination of operational information which is used by managers as part of their quality assurance process.

There has been significant investment in the training centre to support operational assurance. The training centre is well-established and well used. The facilities support a wide range of high quality training and learning opportunities

The new operational assurance processes recently introduced appear comprehensive and robust. Feedback from incidents is provided after every incident via the “safe person report” form which are completed and submitted directly by crews or individuals. Receipt of these forms is acknowledged immediately which supports staff engagement. In addition, there are routine formal debriefs which support learning from incidents and such lessons are fed back into the training department formally.

The Service is engaged well with the National Operational Guidance (NOG), National Operational Learning (NOL) and Joint Operational Learning, (JOL) national functions. A gap analysis process is used to identify gaps between Service policy and new national operational guidance when it is published. Lessons from operational incidents are fed into both NOL and JOL. These processes are overseen through the Operational Assurance Board and, in addition, there is a Health and Safety Group which forwards issues to the Operational Assurance Board as necessary. Health and Safety generally is a strength and is well embedded with a positive health and safety culture evident.

There is active monitoring of operational performance, incident command and health and safety compliance on the incident ground through Level 2 and Level 3 response officers. Safe person report forms are submitted by these officers if they undertake this role at incidents.

The Risk and Resilience department is well-led. The responsibilities of this team are well constructed and make sense, covering a complimentary group of functions and responsibilities.

Emergency, event, and business continuity plans are robust and effective. For example, the “move to critical process” is well planned and has recently been tested.

Incident command training and annual 4 day firefighter refresher training is both delivered in-house and outsourced, and verified internally which is good. Health and Safety and Learning and Development agree key learning from Ops Assurance and feed into the programme. Assurance about the provision of Level 1 incident command is being considered through the Ops Assurance Board with plans to close the gap in 2018.

The Service could consider opportunities to embed assessment of quality and customer feedback into the operational assurance and debrief process to inform

policy development and decision making at the Operational Assurance Board. Although the review team did not meet with Control staff or visit the control centre, staff on the fire station visits expressed concerns around aspects of the performance of the joint control centre. The Service may wish to re-look at issues being raised and address through the joint Control governance boards in place. Although the Service makes good use of Resilience Direct, there may be opportunities to increase the usage across response officers and to increase the amount of risk and other data / information held

The Service should consider the need for operational de-briefers to be trained in a common and proven methodology such as through the College of Policing. The Service should also look at distributing responsibility for facilitating larger scale debriefs as this function appears to potentially be a single point of failure.

There is a need to review the process for “closing the loop” and ensuring that critical or important information is read, understood and actioned. There did not seem to be a robust process for confirming understanding of confirmation and feedback sent out from the centre as part of debrief outcomes. Tracking outcomes from remedial actions is difficult.

Although it is a relatively new process which is still embedding, the Service may wish to undertake an interim review in light of further approaches to quality and operational assurance now being considered through the NFCC.

## **10. Quick Wins**

- Involve the Staff Engagement Group in communicating the Service’s new vision and values
- Increase understanding of green/grey book grading equivalence
- Increase IT resource (consider graduate placement/intern)
- Celebrate success more e.g. the benefits of sharing estates
- Write to on-call employers thanking them
- Make more use of blogging “You said, We did” to feedback to staff
- Make sure the Performance Information Sheet is accurate and issue to all regularly.
- Reframe some of the County council’s aims as outcomes for the public which SFRS will support e.g. In support of “Ageing Well In Suffolk” SFRS’s priority is ‘working with partners to help elderly frail or people living with dementia stay in their homes safely, through a programme of safe and well visits, carer information and falls work.
- Complete Dementia Friends training for all
- Exchange managers between Services to develop insight and portable wins
- Establish a staff suggestion scheme to speed up how good ideas at station level can be evaluated and feedback to staff.

## 11. Conclusion and contact information

Through the peer challenge process we have sought to highlight the many positive aspects of Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service but we have also outlined some key challenges. It has been our aim to provide some detail on them through this report in order to help the Service consider them and understand them. The senior managerial and political leadership will therefore undoubtedly want to reflect further on the findings before determining how they wish to take things forward.

Thank you to SFRS for commissioning the challenge and to everyone involved for their participation. The team are particularly grateful for the support provided both in the preparation for the challenge and during the on-site phase and for the way people we met engaged with the process.

Rachel Litherland/Gary Hughes, as the Local Government Association's Principal Advisers for your region, will act as the main contacts between SFRS and the Local Government Association going forward, particularly in relation to improvement. Hopefully this provides you with a convenient route of access to the organisation, its resources and packages of support.

All of us connected with the peer challenge would like to wish Suffolk FRS every success in the future.

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