Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
Fire Peer Challenge

Final Report

1. Introduction, context and purpose

This report outlines the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA) Fire Peer Challenge at Surrey Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) in October 2015.

The report provides further detail on the themes that were considered under the heading of 'leadership and organisational capacity' as follows:

- 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

It also covers the following Key Assessment Areas:

- Community risk management
- Prevention
- Protection
- Preparedness
- Response
- Health and safety
- Training and development

Within this, SFRS requested that the peer team provide an additional focus on Preparedness and Training and Development, as follows:

<u>Preparedness</u>

The extent to which a partnership approach is being taken to:

- Ensure a shared understanding of community risk
- Allocate resources in accordance with that risk
- Marshal partnership resources to assist in managing the risk

<u>Training and Development</u>

To look at the role and function of training and development at the strategic level, not just within the FRS but across the wider partnership in Surrey, in a context of diminishing (but not insignificant) resources and a need to ensure value for money. How can training and development be better delivered with partners to ensure community risks are prepared for in the most effective and efficient way?

Fire Peer Challenge is part of sector led improvement. In the last four years, all 46 FRSs nationally have undertaken a peer challenge. Following this, the

process has been revised to reflect developments within the sector and ensure it continues to meet the needs of FRSs and other key stakeholders. FRSs are now able to commission another peer challenge, to take place at a time of their choosing over the next four years. SFRS deserve great credit for being the first FRS to commission a peer challenge using the revised approach – reflecting their willingness to undertake external challenge and learn from others.

The SFRS Fire Peer Challenge took place from 6th to 9th October 2015 inclusive and 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 Operational Assessment. The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and was delivered to SFRS on the final day of the challenge.

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 FRSs' and Fire & Rescue Authorities with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The peer challenge team for SFRS was:

- Peter Dartford, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

- Councillor Rebecca Knox, Chair of Dorset Fire Authority and Cabinet member for Communities, Health and Wellbeing at Dorset County Council (Conservative)

- Nathan Travis, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

- Nick Searle, Area Manager Operational Preparedness, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

- Nick Easton, Improvement Co-ordination Manager, Local Government Association

- Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

Key Findings

3. Leadership and organisational capacity

3.1 Understanding of local context and priority setting

SRFS's 'Public Safety Plan' (PSP - the local equivalent of the Integrated Risk Management Plan) is currently in the process of being refreshed. It will cover the period from 2016 to 2025, replacing the existing version which covers the period to 2020. Along with Surrey County Council's Corporate Strategy, the PSP helps to set the strategic direction for the service. The Corporate Strategy outlines the key priorities for Surrey as:

- Wellbeing
- Resident experience
- Economic prosperity

The PSP seeks to outline the way in which SFRS contributes to these priorities.

The service can clearly outline key current demographic information and data and future trends. Examples include predictions that the number of people aged over 65 will increase by more than 13 per cent by 2020, with a rise over the same period in the number of people aged over 85 of nearly 27 per cent. By 2037, 25 per cent of the population will be aged over 65 – an increase of 59 per cent on the current number of people over that age. Such information, and much more besides, is drawn together in the 'Community Risk Profile' (CRP) for the county, which provides a picture of the changing landscape of community risk, highlighting areas of concern, identifying plans for improvement and exploring the impact of geography, demographics and lifestyle on community risk.

However, a question that has emerged from our activities is how deep the understanding of such information is and how well shared and used it is. We learned, for example, that it only became apparent through operational firefighter activity, when responding to the flooding crisis of 2014, how high the proportion of people aged over 80 was in the areas at risk. This information must have been available through a variety of agencies but it clearly wasn't utilised or understood sufficiently well. Similarly, we understand that a significant proportion of the people who have been killed in fires in recent years have been known to adult social care and were seen as vulnerable.

SFRS is keen to make better use of data, along with its partners, and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) has spoken of an ambition to deliver a 'real Integrated Risk Management Plan' – one that takes things to a new level in terms of the information available between partner organisations and how that is shared and utilised. An Intelligence Unit is currently being formed by SFRS to support this ambition.

3.2 Delivering outcomes for local communities

The PSP outlines 'collaboration' as a key focus for SFRS going forward. This is defined by SFRS in the PSP as:

- "A path which could see us joining together with other emergency services in partnership that benefit the public"

- "Increasing integration and meaningful collaboration with other emergency services to assist them to respond to an increasing demand for services, where we can improve community safety and add public value"

There is a clear commitment reflected both here and in what we heard, around SFRS 'doing the best for the community'. We would question, however, whether that is best achieved by the sequencing of the Aims for SFRS reflected in the current draft of the revised PSP of 'Response, Protection, Prevention'. There is widespread recognition across the fire sector and the wider public sector nationally that 'prevention is better than cure' – and that it is also cheaper. There is similar recognition of this in Surrey but establishing prevention in its usual position within the risk management process requires a major shift of emphasis on the part of SFRS in order to deliver a move away from a response-orientated focus.

SFRS and Surrey County Council currently feel like linked organisations – cognisant of their connection with one another and working together in some respects – rather than forming a cohesive and joined-up 'whole'. Currently, working together includes the provision of a range of support services by the council to SFRS and work between SFRS, the Youth Justice Service and the Educational Welfare Service to deliver the Youth Engagement Scheme. This scheme identifies young people considered at risk of falling out of education and/or becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and crime and seeks to work with them and support them to avoid such risks materialising.

There are felt to be opportunities for much closer working between the council and SFRS, for example around health and adult social care, in order to aid the delivery of corporate priorities. The links that are being forged between SFRS and Public Health represent a good example of what can be achieved but there needs to be a significant shift in how SFRS and the council relate to one another if the potential that exists is to be fulfilled.

The outcomes that are being achieved for communities by SFRS are not widely profiled and those that are tend to be concentrated on response. We found it difficult generally to find information on how SFRS is performing. Where we did find it, for example in the draft PSP, the 'Measuring Performance' section focuses solely on the Surrey Response Standard of

having the first fire engine at an incident within 10 minutes and a second, if required, within 15 minutes, on 80% of occasions.

Volunteers are working hard to support SFRS in meeting community needs. They are supporting operational staff at a variety of events, community visits and education schemes, including 'Junior Citizens' and 'Firefighter for a Day'. They are also helping to promote important safety campaigns, including road safety awareness and the opportunity for people to have a Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV). The way in which volunteers are operating – such as their engagement with Surrey County Council and their work on the prevention agenda – offers some learning to SFRS. However, what is taking place in terms of volunteering at present is seen as representing just the beginning, with those involved feeling that the opportunity exists, with some further investment, to build on the good foundation that has been created and make an even greater contribution.

We would urge SFRS to think about what it might do to address the issue of communities currently being seen as having limited opportunities to use the wide range of assets held by the service. There is felt to be significant potential here that is currently not being tapped in to.

The issues outlined in this section of the report can be summarised as highlighting the potential to:

- Re-balance the response-orientated focus of SFRS
- Enhance joint working between SFRS and the council
- Broaden the availability and nature of information on outcomes and performance delivered by SFRS
- Explore the further potential offered by volunteers
- Increase the opportunities for the community use of SFRS assets

All of these issues are very familiar to many other fire and rescue services. SFRS needs to ensure that it is sufficiently well-engaged with the wider fire sector in order to draw in learning from others to help it take these issues forward in a way that avoids 'reinventing the wheel' and, through doing so, deliver the best possible outcomes for local people. Within this, we would encourage SFRS to expand its performance reporting to include outlining how it is performing in comparison with similar fire and rescue services.

3.3 Financial planning and viability

SFRS has been successful in meeting the financial challenge it has faced to date. In the five years to 2014/15, £3.2m savings have been achieved. The net revenue budget for the service currently stands at around £34m. A further £5.9m is expected to be needed to be found from within that budget in the period from now to 2019/20. Amongst the people we met there was complete confidence that this gap would be addressed. However, there were different views on how it would be achieved, with some people indicating reform of the workforce (primarily involving the non-replacement of firefighters due to retire) would be sufficient, whilst others felt fire station re-alignment would be

required and some saw income generation as offering significant potential. For others, the answer lay with collaboration.

It is positive that the level of confidence in addressing the challenge is so high. The apparent absence of a clear plan may be a deliberate strategy in order to encourage creative thinking and incentivise everybody in the service to find ways of contributing. However, with such a significant sum to find, and the options and time available to deliver it constantly reducing, we see significant benefit in a comprehensive plan being developed that everybody can work towards delivering.

In its work around collaboration, SFRS is working with other fire services, the police and the ambulance service to explore the potential of closer working. The purpose is to significantly reduce cost through combining resources. It is acknowledged that managing in this way would be a lot more complex as each service has a different structure, governance and culture, but doing so is seen to offer further savings without reducing frontline delivery and performance standards. It is seen as being able to achieve £60m savings across partner organisations over a 10 year period.

Fire, police and ambulance services from Surrey and Sussex have formed the Emergency Services Collaboration Programme (ESCP). Nearly £6m of funding has been secured from the Public Service Transformation Network to support the delivery of a key strand of it – a joint emergency service transport function. Currently the different organisations independently procure, manage and maintain their vehicles and equipment. The project aims to integrate the transport provision and maintenance activities of the partner organisations into a single function, thus increasing resilience and reducing cost.

The principle of collaboration is an absolutely sound one and it is acknowledged that the ESCP is still at the early stages in terms of turning it into a reality. People are working hard to move it forward as far as possible but there is a need for greater strategic leadership across the partner organisations to provide clarity about the 'end game' (how far things can be taken and which partners are able and willing to be involved in which aspects) and to help address the inevitable and significant obstacles that emerge.

There are significant ambitions around income generation on the part of SFRS, including what might be achievable through the provision of training and related facilities to a range of organisations. Expectations are being raised around what might be gained financially through this avenue and SFRS will therefore wish to reassure itself that the ambitions can be fulfilled.

It is undoubtedly the case that firefighters in SFRS are increasingly busy. They have recently commenced co-responding on medical emergencies with the South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECAmb) and are also responding, when alerted through the Telecare system, to vulnerable members of the public who need urgent assistance in their home due to health or mobility issues. They are also responding to requests from the ambulance service to assist them with gaining entry to properties in

emergency situations. Linked to the issue we outlined earlier of the response-orientated focus of SFRS and the PSP, the question that arises is whether everything firefighters are involved in represents the best value for money and most appropriately meets the needs of local residents.

3.4 Political and managerial leadership

The CFO is widely seen as visionary and dynamic. He represents the vanguard around collaboration and inspires SFRS to 'be bold'. The newly-appointed Cabinet Member is quickly getting up to speed and looking to both support and challenge the service. The Associate Cabinet Member is widely respected, very experienced and deeply committed.

It is important that the vision for the future of SFRS, with collaboration at its core, is clearly articulated and understood by partners and people within SFRS. There is a danger, which some people feel is already being played out, of the CFO forging ahead but inadvertently leaving others trailing in his wake or not even on board with the idea. Given the importance being attached to collaboration by SFRS, it is vital to ensure that it is built upon solid foundations. This requires the investment of significant time and effort by the leadership of SFRS, and the construction and communication of compelling arguments, to ensure the many challenges along the way can be overcome.

Whilst the collaboration agenda will absorb a great deal of the effort of the CFO, this external and future focus needs to be balanced with sufficient attention being paid to the fundamentals of leading and managing the service and securing the best possible outcomes for local communities. This is a major challenge when there is widespread belief that the Chief Officers Group (COG) is neither operating effectively enough nor providing sufficient clarity of direction. Relationship issues are seen to be at the heart of this and they need to be addressed quickly. The situation is compounded by the fact that strategic commanders, including at the COG level, are not seen to be operating sufficiently strategically. We expand upon these issues in section 3.6 of this report – 'Organisational capacity'.

3.5 Governance and decision-making

There is a refreshed direction from the political leadership of SFRS, reflected in the Cabinet Member's desire to both support and challenge the service, the Associate Cabinet Member's on-going commitment and passion for SFRS and the drive that the new Chair of the Resident Experience Group, which represents the overview and scrutiny function, is bringing. The Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Group acts as a very valuable cross-party sounding board for the Associate Cabinet Member whilst the Member Reference Group has huge potential value. The latter body has been set up to consider and support work on transformation and the Public Safety Plan and is being well supported by officers from SFRS.

It is recognised that this is the time to start applying greater scrutiny to SFRS and the outcomes it achieves – with there being both an opportunity, in the

form of the revised political leadership, and a desire, on the part of both the political and managerial leadership, to deliver it.

The Resident Experience Group is shaping up to make an impact. It is being supported in its desire to learn more about the service, reflected in the day held at Fire & Rescue Headquarters in late September for all the members of the Group to meet people across the service and discover more about how it operates and what it delivers. A Finance and Performance Sub-Board is being formed to help probe key issues around performance, outcomes and resources. The members of the Resident Experience Group will require further and on-going support if it is to deliver maximum benefit. Central to this is ensuring there is access to the necessary expertise to enable elected members to ensure they probe the right issues and do so effectively – within which there is the need to address the issue of them 'not knowing what they don't know'.

There is seen to be good communication to elected members within Surrey generally, both at county and district/borough level, regarding SFRS activity and initiatives. This is vital in ensuring councillors feel well informed about issues within their division or ward. However, there is insufficient availability of, and ease of access to, data and information on the performance and management of the service. We touched on this issue in section 3.2 of this report, reflecting that the outcomes that are being achieved for communities are not widely profiled and those that are tend to be concentrated on response. This limits the scope for elected members and the public to hold SFRS to account and needs to be addressed.

3.6 Organisational capacity

We were hugely impressed with the commitment, passion and goodwill of the people that we met within SFRS during the course of the peer challenge. The senior leadership of the service needs to ensure the people working for the organisation feel properly valued and to minimise the risk of them, and their commitment and goodwill, becoming lost to the organisation as a consequence of less positive things they are currently experiencing, which we highlight below.

Positive industrial relations have been established between SFRS and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), moving away from a very difficult and tense position a couple of years ago. Central to this is a desire and a commitment from both bodies to work together on the 'co-design' and reform of the service and the workforce. The Fire Officers Association (FOA) and SFRS also have good engagement, but this is not seen to be enabled to operate at the same level as that between SFRS and the FBU. There is little, if any, engagement between SFRS and trade union representation for non-uniformed staff. There is therefore a need to ensure that all staff are, and feel, represented when it comes to engaging with and dealing with the senior leadership of the service – whether through a trade union or not – and to have that opportunity to engage in the first place.

It is important that relationships with all representative bodies and the wider workforce are developed to provide the opportunity for widespread involvement in identifying solutions to the challenges that lie ahead. Such relationships also need to be based on a realistic and shared understanding of the nature and extent of the changes likely to be required. Many of the people that we met highlighted significant issues regarding the management and culture of the organisation that are damaging both service delivery and the morale, motivation and wellbeing of staff. These issues concern the following areas:

- Management style
- Decision-making
- Openness, transparency and equality
- Clarity of responsibility
- Accountability

A lot of people see the management and leadership style of the organisation at middle and senior levels as unnecessarily autocratic and militaristic. Whilst it is fully recognised that the nature of what any fire service is sometimes involved in operationally requires such an approach, this style of management is seen to have become the norm – it is felt to be the default management style for the organisation, even for every-day issues.

There are examples of SFRS sourcing excellent equipment for use on the frontline. Examples include the cutting equipment for use in dealing with road traffic collisions (RTCs) and the aerial ladder platform (ALP). However, there are also examples of managerial decisions relating to the purchasing of equipment being taken in a way that lacks openness and transparency and disregards, for reasons that have not been made clear to people, professional advice and the findings from consultation and engagement, where such consultation and engagement has taken place.

These examples include the new uniforms which have just been delivered, new large-scale water carriers and a new command and control vehicle – against all of which stand major questions marks from people within the service in terms of their usability and appropriateness. There is a very clear and widely-held perception that 'managerial whims' dictated what was actually purchased. The purchase of new uniforms is seen to have undergone little in the way of consultation whilst the detailed research to inform what was actually required in terms of the water carriers and command and control vehicle is seen to have been disregarded.

A fleet of new Land Rovers (for use as multi-role vehicles) has also been purchased, which has been widely welcomed. However, there is frustration emerging as a result of the uncertainty people have about, and the length of time involved in, the process by which they are being kitted out and deployed to fire stations. There is also frustration around the decision regarding which markings senior officers' new cars would have, which again is seen to have been lacking in transparency – although people are extremely pleased with the quality of the vehicles themselves.

The way in which situations like this have emerged is a prime example of what we identified as a distinct lack of 'challenge in the system' when it comes to officer decision-making. The situation should exist whereby professional advice and the views and opinions of people being impacted upon by decisions are both invited and listened to – and if, ultimately, they are dis-counted then the reasons for this should be made clear. However, even if such mechanisms were in place it would only provide a partial solution. What is paramount is a culture and an environment whereby people feel able to put their views forward and to challenge appropriately. Such a culture does not exist in SFRS. We met people who felt unable to 'put their head above the parapet' – even people at very senior levels. Thus it is clear that currently, even if the systems existed to enable challenge to take place, people would be reluctant to do so because of the managerial and cultural issues that exist.

We heard of a number of examples of people management decisions which seemed to have disregarded policy – including decisions being taken on the basis of 'whose face was known'. This covered issues including opportunities for promotion, the opportunity to undertake training, development and further education and the transfer of people within the service. Inconsistency and inequality result from decisions being taken in such a way – generating frustration, cynicism and genuine grievance.

Sickness absence is recognised as a very significant issue within SFRS. Some progress is being made on how to address the matter but things are starting from a very low base and there is no strategic approach to bringing about improvement. There is no shared understanding of the level of the problem, with us failing to be given a clear and consistent answer regarding the average number of days of sickness absence across the service, the key causal factors and whether the trend was improving or worsening. The service will inevitably find it difficult to address the issue if it doesn't have a clear understanding of the scale and cause of the problem. This is compounded by a lack of clear ownership of the problem, in terms of whose responsibility it is to manage this key corporate issue and drive improvement.

Communications in the organisation are seen to be poor. There is little face to face engagement by senior and middle managers, although there is seen to have been some improvement around this on the part of Area Managers and Group Managers. Across the service, there is an over-reliance on messages being cascaded. We recognise the challenge, in terms of the geography and nature of the service, of undertaking face to face engagement on a very frequent basis and that the cascading of messages will therefore always represent a mainstay of the approach to communications. However, at present, there are far too few opportunities for engagement and the imbalance between the cascading of messages and two-way engagement is huge. As a consequence, people feel that they are often 'left in the dark'. Even at the senior level the opportunities for people to talk and engage are strictly limited, with there being no forum that brings together the top 20 or 30 managers in the organisation to collectively hear about, share and consider issues.

A great many of the issues outlined above are well known by the senior managerial leadership as a result of staff surveys in recent years and the 'Health Check' process last year. The programme of workforce reform is seen to be looking at these issues, but they need real drive and support from the most senior levels if change and improvement is going to follow. The findings from the staff surveys and health checks have had little profile, which has compounded the problem. Staff know what the issues are, they have been invited to highlight them and yet little tangible progress is being seen. This undermines the credibility of senior managers and generates issues around the trust and faith people place in them in particular and SFRS generally. It also generates cynicism and negatively impacts on people's goodwill. A number of people questioned us about what the process was for sharing the findings from the peer challenge and were sceptical that they would be published. Suffice it to say, there is a very strong appetite and expectation from people we have met regarding receiving speedy communication of the peer challenge findings.

Staff are seeing a distinct lack of progress regarding SFRS addressing the unreliability, ineffectiveness and availability of ICT. The situation is becoming serious, with significant time being wasted as a consequence of simple things such as:

- It sometimes taking people up to 90 minutes to be able to get logged-on to a computer
- Systems crashing and work and data being lost as a result
- Firefighters only being able to access their work e-mails when in the fire station (which is a particular issue for on-call firefighters)
- Firefighters needing to fill out paperwork relating to HFSVs rather than being able to input directly on to an IPad or other mobile device

We recognise that SFRS is not in direct control of its ICT provision and capacity, with Surrey County Council providing the support to the service. However, this does not change the issue – merely the way it needs to be addressed.

A theme emerges from this and what we have highlighted elsewhere in this section of the report – that of there sometimes being difficulty in identifying where responsibility sits for very significant issues and areas of activity. Examples, in addition to that of ICT, include addressing the sickness absence situation, where responsibility sits for decisions around equipment purchasing and how those decisions are taken and taking forward the issues highlighted through the staff surveys and health checks. Linked to this, there is a growing frustration and increasing cynicism as a result of what staff see as a failure on the part of SFRS to hold senior people to account for actions and decisions that have not gone to plan. They contrast this with what they see as swift and overly heavy-handed management action being taken against people at lower levels in the organisation involved in much less significant matters, such as highlighting issues concerning SFRS inappropriately via social media.

Alongside the issue of there being a lack of clarity about who is taking responsibility for different issues and activities, there is also seen to be an overload of projects and initiatives generally within SFRS. This is resulting in instances of:

- The poor implementation of what were sound and forward-thinking concepts
- Issues taking too long to come to fruition whilst others 'wither on the vine'
- The time not being taken to learn from what has taken place

SFRS needs to decide what is important in terms of change and improvement projects for the organisation, involving a process of determining clear priorities. This needs to be underpinned by the allocation of clear responsibilities for delivery.

Whilst it is positive that there is local discretion around how the time in fire stations is spent, the way it is utilised needs to be set within an organisational-wide framework in order to ensure key organisational priorities are delivered. As an example, we understand that an average of 75 HFSVs are being undertaken each year per watch. If there are ambitions to see more such visits undertaken by firefighters, which we understand there are, then this needs to be made explicit and targets set – the achievement of which becomes a local responsibility with discretion at the local level around how best to do so. The same issue applies to other prevention activities, how much face to face engagement watches can expect with middle and senior managers and the fulfilment of training and development requirements.

4. Key Assessment Areas

4.1 Community risk management

As outlined earlier in this report, the draft PSP is orientated towards response. Both the sequencing of the Aims for SFRS reflected in that document – 'Response, Protection and Prevention' – and our discussions during the peer challenge suggest a lack of clarity regarding protection and prevention priorities. This generates a question around whether SFRS's commitment to 'doing the best for the community' is being fulfilled in the most effective way. We suggest a major shift of emphasis is required here.

We also highlighted SFRS's focus on collaboration earlier in the report. It is seen as an over-riding priority, with an aim of securing major savings over the longer-term. Whilst the achievement of financial savings is a clear driver for the organisation, there is a question of whether, at the same time, it will make Surrey safer? It is undoubtedly the case that firefighters in SFRS are increasingly busy – with their work co-responding with SECAmb, gaining access and Telecare fitting very well with the collaboration agenda. However, whilst this represents collaboration it is also still about responding rather than preventing situations from arising.

Risk analysis at the team level is supported by national good practice guidance – but there appears to be limited strategic and operational support to champion effective and sustainable delivery.

It is not clear how well the service is measuring, evaluating and improving the performance of risk analysis.

4.2 Prevention

SFRS's prevention agenda involves a number of good initiatives and there are committed teams working to deliver both individual initiatives and the agenda as a whole. One such initiative is 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive' which is aimed at young drivers in the county. Some of the people we spoke to said that whilst the initiatives that exist are good, the range and scale of prevention work has been stripped back over recent years, reflecting where SFRS's priorities are currently focused. Hopefully this is starting to swing back again, with ambitions around expanding the volunteer service, plans to use NHS data to target vulnerable people in local communities and the prevention strategy for SFRS currently being re-written. For such a re-balancing of the emphasis to take place, however, there is a need for much greater commitment to the prevention agenda from the strategic leadership of SFRS. This would then need to be underpinned by the gearing up of operational crews to deliver it.

As previously outlined, the work firefighters are delivering around co-responding, gaining access and Telecare fit very well with the collaboration agenda but in reality support other agencies' response activities rather than representing prevention activity. By contrast, opportunities to work with health and adult social care to help people lead safe and independent lives, such as providing a preventative 'slips, trips and falls service' or the fitting of assistive technology, are seen to have been missed.

In a context of what we have already outlined regarding outcomes being achieved for communities not being widely profiled, and those that are made available tending to be concentrated on response, there is limited evidence to show that the measuring and evaluating of prevention activity and performance are being used effectively to drive improvement. This was highlighted during our discussions with partner agencies where they praised SFRS for its involvement in joint prevention initiatives but were unable to identify how the work, such as that by the hoarding working group or around police road safety, was being evaluated and/or improved.

4.3 Protection

The protection function within SFRS is going through a process of development, both in terms of its structure and associated resources. There is clearly ambition that, following this, it will progress to become one of the best nationally. There are already good signs, with the function having achieved ISO 22301 Business Continuity Accreditation – one of the first such services in the country to do so.

As part of the desire to progress, the protection team is keen to add more value to Surrey's business community and support wider economic growth and prosperity. This includes delivering business continuity advice and linking with Surrey County Council's Trading Standards and Environmental Health functions (with the link up with Environmental Health extending beyond just the obvious area of Fire Safety) in order to help both new and established businesses in the county effectively manage, and successfully recover from, any adverse impacts they may face in the future, such as a major fire or flood.

The new community risk management (CRM) system will support the measuring and evaluating of performance and offer real potential for it to help drive improvement given it will allow more effective targeting of specific risks to particular businesses, thus enabling the provision of appropriate and timely support and guidance.

4.4 Preparedness

SFRS, like others, has an embedded assurance process. However, the operational assurance capacity has been significantly reduced in recent years. This reduction is felt to be having an impact on operational effectiveness as officers are not available for mobilisation to operational incidents to carry out the assurance process.

National Resilience assets remain available for mobilisation within SFRS. Personnel and training are maintained as per National Resilience guidance within the current reducing budget.

SFRS resilience is in place via a third party. Whilst it is accepted by service personnel that the third party provides resilience cover, there are concerns regarding the expansion of this relationship to include operational response to all technical rescue Incidents.

The Chief Fire Officer holds the position of Chair of the Local Resilience Forum, resulting in strong links with multi agency planning, the Community Risk Register and emergency plans for large scale events. Multi-agency response plans are in place for large scale events. There is a shared desire to establish a single Civil Contingencies Unit across the partnership which would greatly enhance the planning and collaborative working for future events.

Representation has been strong within the Collaborative Partnership and work has been on-going in preparation for the introduction of National Operational Guidance. Continued support is essential in this area to ensure compliance with the guidance and consistency across the region.

4.5 Response

As we have already highlighted, there is a significant emphasis placed on response by SFRS – with this reflected both in the draft PSP and the activities operational crews are predominantly engaged in. Surrey has set a response

standard of having the first fire appliance in a attendance at an incident within 10 minutes and a second, if required, within 15 minutes, on 80% of occasions. To date, the standard has been met on 79.4% of occasions and there is confidence that this can be increased and the target met.

SFRS shares boundaries with a number of other Fire & Rescue Services, including London and West Sussex. Arrangements are in place in line with Section 13/16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act to provide for supporting arrangements at incidents. Response times and cross border arrangements with neighbouring FRSs' have all been considered as part of the process of delivering the fire station re-alignment in Banstead, Spelthorne and Horley. This realignment will assist with the maintenance of response times across the county and the neighbouring FRSs.

There is a clear commitment on the part of SFRS to maintaining operational response, in the form of 25 fire stations and 31 pumps. Whilst this is a slight reduction from previous arrangements, there has been a firm commitment not to reduce appliance numbers any further. Workforce reform has taken place in the form of crewing levels being reduced to four riders per appliance.

The advantages from the change in crewing levels are that the numbers of appliances across the county and attendance times have predominantly been maintained. This is demonstrated through the previously highlighted response standard. There has been an increased availability of appliances across the county as a result of these changes. This is a result of the revision to the conditions of on-call firefighters (involving them now committing to be available for 54 hours per week rather than the previous 120 and self-managing changes to agreed rotas to maintain availability levels).

The disadvantages to this commitment come in the form of the number of personnel available being thinly spread, which reduces resilience. This is impacting on appliance availability due to sickness absence or other abstractions. This in turn is generating constraints around the release of personnel to undertake core risk critical training (which is an issue highlighted in the 'Training and development' section of the report). The release of personnel to attend training in this manner and the need to maintain four riders is leading to significant levels of overtime payments.

As we have previously touched upon, there has been significant investment in new vehicles to support response, including the ALP, water carriers, a command and control vehicle and Land Rovers (which act as multi-role vehicles). Although enhancing the operational response capability, 'buy in' from staff at the earliest opportunity would assist with the integration of the new vehicles into the service.

SFRS has, very logically, established a relationship with an external provider of contingency and specialist support, including rope rescue and water rescue. This arrangement enhances the resilience and capacity of the service. However, there is an issue emerging, which will need to be managed, whereby firefighters are seeing the arrangement as having the

potential to diminish their opportunities to demonstrate, or develop their own skills, in these types of specialisms.

4.6 Health and safety

There is an embedded incident reporting system (Oshens) and there are established levels of investigation.

The level of interaction between Health and Safety departments across regional blue light organisations and CFOA is seen to be good.

Trends around health and safety issues are identified and there is a strong encouragement to report 'Near misses'. This information is collated in a central location. It was demonstrated how this information is being shared in a consistent way with all departments to assist in the reduction of safety events.

As highlighted earlier, sickness absence is a very significant issue within SFRS and there is an absence of a strategic approach to addressing the problem. That said, Occupational Health is widely held in high regard and is doing its bit to address sickness issues – but it needs to form part of an overall organisational approach rather than being left to do what it can in isolation. There is a desire within SFRS to enhance the provision of mental health support available through Occupational Health. Linked to this, SFRS is recognised as 'Dementia Friendly' and there is an ambition for it to attain the 'Mindful' standard.

4.7 Training and development

Gaps in the training and development policy framework, procedures and systems are being identified and addressed but there is no evidence of an over-arching plan that identifies what is required to be 'fit for purpose' and what needs to be done to get there. Without this clarity, the organisation is at risk of putting in place a number of measures that provide short term fixes but do not support overall improvement.

With what is being delivered around workforce reform and changes to the operating model – particularly the 'minimum of four and maximum of four' principle for riding appliances and the reduced resilience that is being seen – there is a growing challenge around aligning the way training is delivered in order to maximise the opportunity for people to participate. SFRS is aware of this need to change the way it manages and delivers training. If the ability of firefighters to maintain their operational competence is compromised or they do not have the opportunity to enhance their skills, there is a potential impact on operational effectiveness. This generates reputational and legal risks, as well as operational ones, if the situation is not effectively addressed. There is reputational risk if the service fails to respond effectively to an operational incident, due to a lack of appropriate skills or supervision of the responders. Additionally, such a failure could present a legal risk, especially if a firefighter

and/or member of the public is injured and the injury can be attributed to deficiencies in the training provision of staff.

The current reliance on the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) and paper-based folders is being removed with the introduction of Firewatch This move away from a basic paper-based and locally managed recording system to an electronic system that can be integrated in order to help to support organisational training priorities – coupled with SFRS's strong desire to embrace the Fire Professional Framework – is seen as very positive.

Conclusion and contact information

Through the peer challenge process we have sought to highlight the many positive aspects of Surrey 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.

Following SFRS's invitation, members of the peer team will be returning to undertake a follow-up to the challenge in six months' time. Kate Herbert, as the Local Government Association's Programme Manager for your region, will act as the main contact 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 Surrey and SFRS every success in the future.

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Annex – Contents of the feedback presentation delivered to SFRS on Friday 9th October 2015

Understanding of local context and priority setting

- The Public Safety Plan is currently being refreshed and will cover the period to 2025
- Surrey County Council's Corporate Strategy also helps set the strategic direction for the service
- The service can clearly outline key demographic information and data and future trends
- However, how deep is the understanding and how well shared and used is the information that is available?
- There is ambition to deliver a 'real Integrated Risk Management Plan' with this supported by an Intelligence Unit that is being formed

Delivering outcomes for local communities

- The collaboration agenda reflects a vision of delivering the best possible service to local people in the most cost-effective way
- That desire to do the best for the community is reflected in the Public Safety Plan – but is that best achieved by the sequencing of 'Response, Protection, Prevention'
- There is widespread recognition that 'prevention is better (and cheaper) than cure' but achieving this requires a major shift of emphasis
- Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and Surrey County Council currently feel like linked organisations rather than forming a whole – with opportunities for much closer working, for example around adult social care, to jointly deliver corporate priorities
- The links that are being forged between the service and Public Health represent a good example of what can be achieved
- The outcomes that are being achieved for communities are not widely profiled and those that are tend to be concentrated on response
- There appears to be limited opportunity for the community use of assets held by the service
- Volunteers are working hard to support the service in meeting community needs but this represents the beginning – the opportunity exists, with some further investment, to build on a good foundation
- The way in which volunteers are operating offers some learning to the service – engagement with the council and the prevention focus

- The service needs to ensure that it is sufficiently well-engaged with the wider fire sector in order to be able to compare how it is performing and draw in learning from others

Financial planning and viability

- There has been successful delivery of the financial challenge to date – £3.2m in the five years to 2014/15
- The financial gap facing the service in the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 totals £5.9m from within a net revenue budget of around £34m
- Amongst the people we met, there was complete confidence that this gap would be addressed but there were different views on how it would be achieved
- Collaboration is seen as being able to achieve £60m savings across partner organisations over a 10 year period and external funding has been secured to support it
- The principle of collaboration is an absolutely sound one and people are working hard to move it forward as far as possible – but there is a need for greater strategic leadership to bring clarity about the 'end game', address obstacles and enable the objectives to be fulfilled
- There are significant ambitions around income generation by the service – there are expectations being raised around this and the service will wish to reassure itself that the ambitions can be fulfilled
- It is undoubtedly the case that firefighters in the service are increasingly busy – the question that arises is whether everything they are involved in represents the best value for money and most appropriately meets the needs of local residents

Political and managerial leadership

- The Chief Fire Officer is widely seen as visionary and dynamic – the vanguard around collaboration, 'being bold'
- The newly-appointed Cabinet Member is quickly getting up to speed and looking to both support and challenge the service
- The Associate Cabinet Member is widely respected, very experienced and deeply committed
- It is important that the vision for the future, with collaboration at its core, is clearly articulated and understood by partners and the service – with a danger that the Chief Fire Officer forges ahead and others are left trailing in his wake or not even on board
- The external and future focus of the Chief Fire Officer needs to be balanced with sufficient managerial attention on the fundamentals of

managing the service and the outcomes it achieves for local communities
- There is widespread belief that the Chief Officers Group is not providing sufficient clarity of direction or operating effectively enough – with relationship issues sitting at the heart of this
- Strategic commanders are not seen to be operating sufficiently strategically

Governance and decision-making

- There is a refreshed direction from the political leadership of the service
- It is recognised that this is the time to start applying greater scrutiny to the service and the outcomes it achieves – with both an opportunity and a desire to do so
- The Resident Experience Group is shaping up to make an impact – being supported in its desire to learn more about the service and forming a Finance and Performance Sub-Board
- Its members will require support in enabling it to address the issue of 'you don't know what you don't know'
- The Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Group acts as a very valuable cross-party sounding board for the Associate Cabinet Member
- The Member Reference Group has huge potential value having been set up to consider and support work on transformation and the Public Safety Plan – it is being well supported by officers
- There is good communication to elected members generally around fire and rescue services activity and initiatives
- There is insufficient availability of, and ease of access to, data and information on the performance and management of the service – limiting the scope for elected members and the public to hold the service to account

Organisational capacity

- We have been hugely impressed with the commitment, passion and goodwill of the people that we have met – the service needs to ensure those people feel properly valued and minimise the risk of them becoming lost to the organisation
- Positive industrial relations have been established but there is a need to ensure that all staff are, and feel, represented

- Many of the people that we have spoken to have highlighted significant issues regarding the management and culture of the organisation that are damaging both service delivery and staff:

  - ❑ Management style
  - ❑ Decision-making
  - ❑ Openness, transparency and equality
  - ❑ Clarity of responsibility
  - ❑ Accountability

- A lot of people see the management and leadership style of the organisation at middle and senior levels as unnecessarily autocratic and militaristic
- There are examples of the service sourcing excellent equipment for use on the frontline
- However, there are also examples of managerial decisions relating to the purchasing of equipment being taken in a way that lacks openness and transparency and disregards (for unclear reasons) professional advice and the findings from consultation and engagement (where it has taken place)
- There is a distinct lack of 'challenge in the system' when it comes to officer decision-making – with it being clear that, even if the systems existed to enable it, people would be reluctant to do so because of the managerial and cultural issues that exist
- People management decisions are seen to sometimes disregard policy and, as a consequence, generate inconsistency and inequality
- Sickness absence is recognised as a very significant issue and some progress is being made on how to address the matter – but there is a lack of clear ownership and drive around the issue
- Communications in the organisation are seen to be poor – with little face to face engagement by senior and middle managers, an over-reliance on messages being cascaded, too few opportunities for engagement and people often feeling left in the dark
- There are no opportunities for the top 20 or 30 managers in the organisation to get together and consider issues
- The unreliability, ineffectiveness and availability of ICT is becoming a serious issue and yet there are few signs of progress
- A great many of the issues outlined above are well known by the senior managerial leadership as a result of staff surveys and the 'Health Check' process last year – the findings from which have had little profile
- The programme of workforce reform is seen to be looking at these issues, but they need real drive and support from the most senior levels

- There is difficulty sometimes in identifying where responsibility sits for very significant issues and areas of activity
- There is a growing frustration and increasing cynicism as a result of what people see as a failure to hold senior people to account for actions and decisions that have not gone to plan
- There is seen to be an overload of projects and initiatives, resulting in instances of poor implementation of what were sound and forward-thinking concepts, issues taking too long to come to fruition whilst others 'wither on the vine' and the time not being taken to learn from what has taken place
- Whilst it is positive that there is local discretion around how the time in fire stations is spent, this needs to be set within an organisational-wide framework to ensure key priorities are delivered

Community risk management

- The Public Safety Plan is response-orientated, with a lack of clarity regarding protection and prevention priorities
- Risk analysis at the team level is supported by national good practice guidance – but there appears to be limited strategic and operational support to champion effective and sustainable delivery
- Collaboration is seen as an over-riding priority with an aim of securing major savings over the longer-term – but will it make Surrey safer?
- It is not clear how well the service is measuring, evaluating and improving the performance of risk analysis

Prevention

- There are good initiatives and committed teams, including 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive' and the plans to use NHS data and expand the volunteer service
- However, much of what was delivered before in terms of prevention work has been stripped back – reflecting where priorities are currently focused
- The prevention strategy is currently being rewritten but there is a need for greater commitment from the strategic leadership and a gearing up of operational crews to deliver
- Co-responding, 'Gaining Access' and 'Telecare' initiatives fit very well with the collaboration agenda but in reality support other agencies' response activities rather than representing prevention activity

- There is limited evidence to show that the measuring and evaluating of prevention activity and performance are being used effectively to drive improvement
- Supporting adult social care to help people lead safe and independent lives is seen as a missed opportunity

Protection

- The function is going through a process of development but has ambitions to be the best
- There is a desire by the team to add more value to the business community, including delivering business continuity advice, linking with Trading Standards and Environmental Health (not just Fire Safety) and supporting wider economic growth and prosperity
- The new community risk management (CRM) system will support the measuring and evaluating of performance – with real potential for it to help drive improvement
- The function has achieved ISO 22301 business continuity accreditation - one of the first services to do so

Preparedness

- The operational assurance capacity has been significantly reduced and this is felt to be having an impact on operational effectiveness
- National Resilience assets remain available and training is maintained with a reducing budget
- Resilience planning is in place via an external party
- The Chief Fire Officer holds the position of Chair of the Local Resilience Forum, resulting in strong links with multi agency planning, the Community Risk Register and emergency plans for large scale events
- There is a desire to establish a single Civil Contingencies Unit across the partnership
- Representation is strong within the Collaborative Partnership and work has been ongoing in preparation for the introduction of National Operational Guidance

Response

- A 10 minute response standard has been set, with an aim of achieving 80% - to date, the standard has been met on 79.4% of occasions with confidence this can be increased

- Cognisance of 13/16 arrangements and joint working with neighbouring services is reflected in the station realignment into Banstead, Spelthorne and Horley
- There is a clear commitment to maintaining operational response – 25 stations and 31 pumps
- There are mixed outcomes from the change in crewing levels to ride with four;

  - ❑ Advantages – appliance numbers, availability, attendance times, response standard
  - ❑ Disadvantages – number of personnel spread thin, constraints around release for training, overtime payments

- The change to on-call firefighter conditions (54 hour contracts) has resulted in increased appliance availability
- There has been significant investment in new vehicles to support response – aerial, multi-role vehicles, water carriers
- The relationship with the external provider of contingency and specialist support is generating issues amongst firefighters regarding the potential for a diminishing of their opportunities to demonstrate or develop their own skills in such areas as rope rescue and water rescue

Health and safety

- There is an embedded incident reporting system (Oshens) and there are established levels of investigation
- The level of interaction between Health and Safety departments across regional blue light organisations and CFOA is seen to be good
- Trends around health and safety issues are identified within the department but the use of that data to address issues is not demonstrated
- Occupational Health is widely held in high regard and there is a desire in the service to enhance mental health provision
- The service is recognised as ‘Dementia friendly’ – with an ambition to become ‘mindful’
- There are high levels of sickness, with an absence of a strategic approach to addressing the issue

Training and development

- The service is aware of the need to change the way it manages and delivers training

- Gaps in the training and development policy framework, procedures and systems are being identified and addressed but there is no evidence of an over-arching plan that identifies what is required to be ‘fit for purpose’ and what needs to be done to get there
- There is a growing challenge to align the way training is delivered with the changing operating model – in order to maximise the opportunity for people to participate
- There are reputational, operational and potentially legal risks if this challenge is not effectively addressed
- The current reliance on IPDS and paper-based folders is being removed with the introduction of Firewatch
- The service is keen to embrace the Fire Professional Framework