



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Warwickshire 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 (LGA) and Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) Fire Peer Challenge at Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service (WFRS) in November 2016.

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 and welfare
- Training and development

Fire Peer Challenge is part of sector led improvement. In the last five 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. WFRS deserve great credit for being one of the first FRSs to commission a peer challenge using the revised approach – reflecting their willingness to undertake external challenge and learn from others.

The WFRS Fire Peer Challenge took place from 22nd to 25th November 2016 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 WFRS Operational Assessment. The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and was delivered to WFRS on the final day of the challenge. The slides from the feedback presentation are reproduced in an appendix at the end of this report.

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

The peer challenge team for WFRS was:

- Mark Hardingham, Chief Fire Officer, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Nick Chard, Chair of Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
- Craig Parkin, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Lynsey McVay, Group Manager Service Delivery, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Kieran Timmins, former Deputy Chief Executive, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
- Briony Davies, Cambridgeshire County Council (shadowing role)
- Chris Bowron, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

Key Findings

3. Leadership and organisational capacity

3.1 Understanding of local context and priority setting

The vision for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service is firmly established as "Protecting the community and making Warwickshire a safer place to live". This, along with the mission statement for the service, "Responding to emergencies when the public needs us most", is well profiled in key corporate documentation. The priorities for the service are also clearly outlined: keeping the public safe, keeping firefighters safe and doing our very best.

An extensive document, the Warwickshire Risk Profile, exists to inform the work of the service and acts as one of the key sources of data and intelligence for the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The current IRMP covers the period from 2013 to 2017. The next IRMP is currently in development, with a draft planned to be ready in January 2017 for consultation. It is intended for the final version to be put before the Fire Authority in May 2017.

The service also utilises MOSAIC data and the Exeter Data Set to identify risk, which in turn informs the allocation of resource and the development of prevention initiatives. The service's Performance Information team and the

Warwickshire Observatory, which sits within Warwickshire County Council, play key roles here.

A reflection of the way in which the service identifies and responds to emerging issues can be seen in relation to arson. The number of deliberate fires, whilst much lower now than around a decade ago (670 in 2015/16 compared to 1,960 in 2006/07), has increased steadily in each of the last three years. Analysis shows that the issue is concentrated in certain parts of the county. The service, along with partners, is responding accordingly. The Prevention team and the Arson Reduction Team, which has recently been supplemented with a Crew Commander as a reflection of the increasing demand, undertake a daily assessment of the risk of arson. The areas at risk are targeted by teams in vehicles and, innovatively, also on bikes.

Based on the latest CIPFA information, WFRS is (in terms of total budget) one of the smallest in the country. It is close to average spending terms on a per capita basis. The political leadership of the council attaches importance to fire and rescue and the service has, along with children's services, been the most protected of all frontline services in relation to budget reductions – something which we outline in more detail later in this report.

3.2 Delivering outcomes for local communities

People across the service and wider Warwickshire County Council are committed to delivering for the citizens of Warwickshire. "Being the best we can be" is a long-established objective of the fire and rescue service and will shortly be adopted for the whole of the council. Everybody we spoke to in both organisations is focused on achieving the same outcome - a fire and rescue service that is doing all that it can to protect the community and make Warwickshire a safer place to live.

Based on anecdotal evidence, the fire and rescue service can be seen to be held in high regard by the public and elected members. It is a trusted brand and is seen to be delivering effectively. One hundred per cent of respondents to a satisfaction survey - offered to all those people who have received support from the service in relation to a fire and rescue incident, had a Fire Home Safety Check or received a Fire Safety Inspection at a non-domestic premises - indicated they were completely satisfied with the work delivered for them by WFRS.

Looking at the most recent full-year performance data (2015/16), it can be seen that the first attendance response time standard (75% within 10 minutes where there is a life risk) was met. There have been significant reductions in many areas of activity and types of incident when compared to five years ago and national benchmarking shows very positive results for Warwickshire per head of population in relation to the number of primary fires and accidental dwelling fires. However, and as reflects the trend nationally, 2015/16 saw an increase in many areas of activity and types of incident – including the total number of incidents, road traffic collisions, property and vehicle fires,

deliberate fires, non-domestic fires and false alarms - compared to the previous year or two.

In terms of prevention activity, the service undertook more than 3,500 Home Fire Safety Checks in 2015/16. Over 200 schools were visited by the service, with fire safety advice given to nearly 13,000 children. More than 2,300 pupils received 'Fatal Four' road traffic collision education.

3.3 Financial planning and viability

The service, which openly acknowledges that it is a relatively small one, has an operating budget of £19.2m for the current year (2016/17). The service has seen a reduction in the budget in the period from 2011/12 to 2017/18 of just under £3m. This has formed part of the wider council's 'Shaping the Future' savings plan and has been managed effectively by the service, being delivered in a way that has sought to protect the frontline response element of WFRS.

'Shaping the Future' has been split in to two stages - the first covering 2014/15 and 2015/16 and the second the subsequent two years encompassing this year and next. In the current stage, the service is required to deliver £1.22m of savings, with the first stage having delivered £1.16m. Under 'Shaping the Future', Warwickshire County Council will deliver an overall budget reduction of 18.6%. The fire and rescue service is facing a potential 12.5% reduction – reflecting quite a significant degree of financial protection for the service. The council's previous savings programme, running across the three years from 2011/12 to 2013/14, saw a reduction in the fire and rescue service's budget of 2.2%, compared to an overall reduction for the council of 17.6%. The period described included a number of organisational improvements taking effect that had originated from the Atherstone-on-Stour Investigation Report.

Along with the rest of the council, a set of savings proposals are being developed for the service to inform the authority's budget-setting process for 2017/18. With around 80% of the service's budget relating to people, further reductions will inevitably centre in that area. The issue is whether they are applied in a WFRS-specific setting or are achieved through a wider, collaboration-based, approach.

Warwickshire County Council has recently supported WFRS by making significant capital investment in the form of a refurbishment of those fire stations introducing new duty patterns, the development of a dedicated training centre at Southam, and bringing its HQ building up to date. Frontline firefighters highlight the fact they have good equipment and appliances that enables them to do their jobs effectively. There is a sound process that sits behind this, which sees firefighters being consulted and involved in the testing of proposed equipment to ensure what is procured is right.

There was a strong perception amongst staff from many levels of the service that WFRS was under-resourced and had suffered disproportionately large financial challenges compared to the fire sector in general and other areas of Warwickshire County Council. This does not appear to be borne out by the available statistical comparison data. There was a strong focus on the “cuts” that had to be made with little acceptance of the context in which the county council was operating. The service should consider how it can improve financial awareness and understanding of the service position in relation to other areas and how it can develop a greater understanding of the rationale for future changes.

3.4 Political and managerial leadership

The way the senior management of the service engages with the frontline is welcomed and valued, with them being seen to be open and transparent. The management structure is seen to have stabilised recently following a number of changes and a series of temporary arrangements that have now been put on to a more permanent footing. A new atmosphere is developing as a result.

In April of this year, a dedicated WFRS staff survey (as opposed to one that formed part of a wider council staff survey) was commissioned, with a response rate of 76%. The results from this are being used to inform a 'cultural review' looking at organisational development challenges and opportunities. As part of this, leadership development is being invested in. Work is also needed to develop and maintain a consistency of message and engagement from the middle and senior management tiers. This relates to what was described to us as 'a layer of clay' in the middle management of the organisation – although we recognise that this issue is not unique to WFRS.

There is a strong sense of uncertainty regarding the future direction of the service. There are a number of elements to this, with all of them contributing to a real lack of clarity on where WFRS will sit, in terms of its governance, in the years to come. These are outlined in the next few paragraphs.

The fire and rescue service currently forms part of Warwickshire County Council and that will not change in the space of the next year or two. Recent national developments regarding blue light collaboration, as well as various more local attempts at mergers or alliances with neighbouring services in the last 10 years, has placed a strain on the relationship between WFRS and the council which is recognised within and beyond the two organisations. At the heart of this is the debate of whether WFRS is advantaged or disadvantaged, in terms of resources, support and finance, by being a county council-based service (compared to Combined Fire Authorities), and the role it can play as part of the wider council.

These issues - which go beyond the level of individuals and are about how two organisations have become conditioned in the way they view one another - are impacting negatively. There is an immediate priority of making the

relationship between WFRS and the county council work. Too much capacity is being absorbed by sub-optimal working relationships and, as we have already highlighted, there is no immediate alternative set of governance arrangements.

There is a desire between both WFRS and partners generally, but Warwickshire County Council particularly, for a more co-ordinated approach to their thinking and planning and to value their potential joint contribution more. This particularly includes business partners (internal support functions) who are keen to have a dialogue based less on “as WFRS we want you to do this” and more “we are trying to achieve this outcome – how can you best enable us to do so”. There is an emerging sense of WFRS seeing the essential need for the role of the business partners and the resources allocated to them to be looked at positively in a joint dialogue, although this needs to progress further. It is also jointly felt that the fire and rescue service and other functions in the council, such as social care, could work more closely in identifying vulnerable people and looking to protect them together.

The financial context of the public sector and the national agenda in terms of reform of fire and rescue makes ‘collaboration’ with other partners a very logical avenue to explore, indeed doing so is set to become a legal duty in the near future. Three potential collaborations for WFRS have been explored over the last few years, none of which have come to fruition - adding to that sense of directional uncertainty. Further potential collaboration can be pursued but the conditions have to be right in order to enable it to succeed - the most vital of which is clear political agreement and direction.

Once the strategic direction for the service is clear, it is important to ensure that capital investment is aligned accordingly in order to maximise opportunities for partnership and joint working. As an example, decisions on future expenditure on projects equivalent to the current refurbishment of fire and rescue headquarters and the building of the new training centre will be more straightforward when the strategic direction of WFRS is known.

The tragedy at Atherstone-on-Stour in November 2007, in which four Warwickshire firefighters lost their lives, is still being felt and very much continues to have an impact. This manifests itself in a variety of ways, including heightened levels of anxiety around potential efficiencies and savings (because of the perceived risk), on-going welfare and support being provided through Occupational Health and a reluctance on the part of some staff to look to assume positions of greater responsibility and be assertive in their decision making. On the latter point in particular, the service recognised this issue and has implemented a programme of training to develop more assertive decision-making on the incident ground. WFRS is also now developing how this principle might be applied in the non-operational environment. It is important that WFRS is mindful of this continued impact.

Joint-working with partners at an operational and local level within the county is good. There is a lot of activity, including risk identification, response, prevention and preparedness. Examples include arson, road safety and the

work of the Local Resilience Forum. This is all founded on strong relationships at this level.

Relationships at a more strategic level operate within a complicated and varied partnership environment in the region and sub-region – both geographically and in terms of the range of organisations. This clearly doesn't make things easy. However, it is recognised that enhancing these relationships further can be the key to future success and they should therefore be invested in much more. The fact that the Chief Fire Officer is now involved in the Safer Warwickshire Partnership is a positive step and one that is very much valued.

As touched on earlier, there is a desire on the part of partners for WFRS to involve them earlier in their thinking and planning and to value their potential contribution more. An example would be the opportunity to have involved partners in co-designing the 'Safe and Well Health Checks'.

3.5 Governance and decision-making

The Fire Cross Party Working Group of elected members on Warwickshire County Council is actively engaged, aids understanding of the service across the wider elected membership and is well supported by WFRS. They have traditionally acted as an effective sounding board, for example in relation to the development of the IRMP, and have been both keen and enabled to spend time visiting parts of the service and meeting staff.

There has been a recent shift for fire and rescue from the council's Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The rationale for that shift is unclear to us and, based on our discussions, it feels as though fire and rescue is competing against greater priorities when it comes to the focus of the committee. That said, the position of the service and the issues and challenges facing it are well understood by the committee.

It feels as though, between the two main elected member forums linked to fire and rescue, there is a risk of duplication and dislocation. This includes a lack of clarity on their respective remits, which in turn raises questions around where key issues should be considered by elected members, and where the Portfolio Holder's input is best provided. One of the issues within this is that, as we understand it, a good proportion of the elected members on the Working Group were drawn from Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – with the Working Group acting almost as a sub-group of the committee – meaning there was good understanding and linkage across the two forums. The shift from one overview and scrutiny committee to the other has caused some dislocation in that respect.

3.6 Organisational capacity

It is undoubtedly the case that people within the fire and rescue service are extremely busy – there is a lot of activity and a great deal going on. However,

we see a need for greater prioritisation and focus. The wide range of initiatives and projects is absorbing significant time and effort and things are not necessarily being seen through to completion as a result of people needing to move on to the next thing. A more comprehensive 'plan, do, review' approach would assist – with an increased emphasis particularly on the 'review' element. An increased rigour in the identification of potential risks in the form of 'unintended consequences' would also be beneficial.

As an example, the decision to remove Watch Commanders from fire appliances was made for perfectly understandable and logical reasons – to provide greater flexibility, greater support to middle managers and improve Level 1 Incident Commander cover across the county – but the reality is that the full value has not yet been realised as currently they are spending considerable amounts of their time providing cover as appliance commanders to maintain availability levels whilst wider establishment changes take full effect.

As another example, we recognise that the pragmatic approach that has been taken to the gradual rolling out of new shift systems has maintained positive relationships with staff and representative bodies. However, the range of duty systems now in place makes for more complexity in the back office systems and processes and the infrastructure has been slower in catching up. For example, it was identified that it was harder to effectively plan training activity at times that suited all work patterns and more difficult to ensure internal communications messages are being consistently delivered and understood.

The future directional uncertainty and the relationship with the county council that we highlighted earlier, combined with what we had described to us as inefficient decision-making processes (with examples presented of some issues being debated for overly-long periods of time and sometimes still not ending up having a decision taken on them), are absorbing precious capacity in a non-productive way.

It is therefore possible to conclude that, in relation to what we highlighted earlier regarding the need for greater prioritisation and focus, this is not necessarily about stopping doing things. Rather, it is more about ensuring time and effort is applied in the most effective and productive way.

Maintaining capacity to deliver for the public – focused on response – is fully understandable. The service has sought to do this, as we highlighted at the start of this report, and has done that well. That does not, however, mean that the frontline resource has not been revised at all during the course of the budget reductions and related changes. It is also the case that the service has been seeking to increase investment in non-response areas, including prevention. However, it appears to be the case that less prominent, but vitally important, areas including prevention and protection are still at risk of being at a disadvantage in relation to the focus of attention and resource.

There are significant anxieties in relation to the capacity and resilience of the fire control function. This element of the service has lived with significant

uncertainty for a considerable number of years now – such as that generated by the proposed move to Regional Control Centres – but staff working there have been resilient and simply got on with the job. The latest development – the move to establish a joint control function with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service – represents the culmination of a series of cumulative impacts which is now really having an effect, with a couple of members of staff taking the opportunity to move to another service.

This loss of staff and experience has been compounded by a decision to recruit replacements on a fixed-term basis of three months, which has proved challenging. The current staffing levels – often involving only two people scheduled to be working at any one time – is generating an issue in the resilience of the service when it comes to people being absent with illness or simply taking a comfort break during their shift. Such is the situation that the view of many people that we spoke to on the issue is that this represents a business continuity issue and it needs to be addressed.

4. Key Assessment Areas

4.1 Community risk management

All fire authorities are required to identify risks which could impact on the local community and infrastructure. This work generally forms part of the IRMP process. WFRS has demonstrated that they are carrying out on-going reviews of risk, historic data and performance to identify areas where they are finding it difficult to achieve attendance times, which will subsequently increase the risk to these areas. They have recently demonstrated a solution to addressing some of these issues through the opening of a new fire station at Gaydon.

In relation to risks to firefighters, WFRS has processes in place to identify risks to the local community and firefighters in terms of site-specific risk information. The process is supported by fire control, allowing early records of risk to be added in to the mobilising system, ensuring that the information reaches crews in a timely manner. However, having discussed the process with managers, they acknowledged that it could be streamlined through a review of the forms and the overall process. This is currently being taken forward.

There appears to be a lot of good risk analysis work taking place in the service. However, it is felt that the service could enhance the internal risk analysis process through better utilisation of partner agencies to support and enhance the work carried out within this area.

The current IRMP seems to have a limited profile within the service. It seldom featured in our discussions with people from WFRS. Instead, there was a sense that the requirement for savings was acting as the key driver rather than the aligning of resources to risk. During our discussions with service representatives as part of the peer challenge process, it was indicated that the

next IRMP, which is currently in draft form, will reflect more of a risk based focus.

4.2 Prevention

Partners congratulated staff within the relatively small Prevention function regarding the number of issues they were active in at a tactical level, from road or electrical to the 'Heart Shield' initiative. Emergency service partners highlighted that the service appeared to be stretched and that this could potentially be eased by working to deliver prevention more effectively together.

It was expressed that relationships at a senior level had only become closer more recently and that direction was still relatively unclear, but that this was seen as a real positive step.

The new IRMP process offers to build upon the tactical relationships that exist. The IRMP risk profile process engaged partner data through the WCC Observatory, although those partners interviewed stated they have limited awareness of the IRMP process itself and would have welcomed more active and direct involvement in its development. This raises questions as to whether the prevention activity is entirely appropriate. In its approach to IRMP, WFRS demonstrates, through utilising risk profiles, a data centric and intelligence-led methodology. The opportunity exists to share this approach more broadly with partners across the county.

Notable practice exists, including the Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Team (ASBIT) with Justice Centre partners delivering positive outcomes. It appears this approach could be expanded within prevention activity across individual teams in the council, including WFRS. This co-production of interventions was seen by interviewees as a real opportunity to reduce any duplication and focus upon key themes, such as working more closely with the Ambulance service on the design of 'Safe and Well Checks'.

Operational staff within WFRS appear to have a limited role in the delivery of prevention work and the service acknowledges that this has not been a key priority. WFRS is seeking to change this balance. A number of on-call staff expressed the view that they know their communities best and have been frustrated at the way in which financial constraints appear to have impeded their engagement with prevention.

Performance is monitored and measured internally and the service's performance shows that it benchmarks well nationally in relation to prevention. WFRS is looking to increase investment in prevention and, accordingly, increase the level of activity – including seeking to engage increasingly with schools and reach 10,000 pupils.

Although limited evidence was offered, the ability or perceived restrictions of information sharing across partners in dealing with vulnerable persons may be an area WFRS wishes to review. This may centre around individual staff

awareness and training or more strategically around the organisational risk associated with information sharing.

4.3 Protection

WFRS has a prevention and protection strategy for the period from 2014 to 2018 and a risk review that, alongside relevant legislation and guidance, is used to develop a risk based inspection programme. The audits from the programme are based on data and local, regional and national trends and are supported by the professional judgement of the protection management team. In 2015/16 the inspection programme saw 452 audits carried out. The supportive approach of WFRS to work with business is evidenced by the fact that although over 200 of these were initially considered unsatisfactory only 29 received formal action.

The service has a small protection team and, recognising this, has established several collaborative arrangements to improve its resilience and functions. There is a partnership arrangement with neighbouring fire services to draw on their fire engineering expertise where this is not available in Warwickshire. The WFRS team is supported by a part time secondment of an experienced protection officer from Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. Warwickshire County Council provides support from its Legal Support team and excellent relationships have now been established in this area.

There is an effective and efficient approach to workforce planning in the protection team. Inspecting Officers are now conditioned to 'green book' conditions of service and are often recruited through apprenticeships. There is likely to be a Station Commander vacancy in mid-2017 and an appointment process is already underway that reflects the technical nature of the protection role and the need to ensure the handover of the function is managed effectively to support business continuity. The service maintains the competency of its protection staff, aligning itself to the CFOA Competency Framework.

WFRS has formed strong relationships and complimentary working arrangements with a range of partner organisations. These include the Care Quality Commission, adult social care, housing associations, Planning Officers, Safety Advisory Group, Licensing Officers and Regional Regulatory Services. These partnerships are being used to good effect to support the aspirations and plans of each organisation.

The protection team have led a recent review of the service's response to automatic fire alarm calls. The service had previously introduced a risk based approach that saw a significant reduction in the service's emergency response to these calls. The recent review revisited this risk assessment and the service has taken an informed approach, adjusting the risk appetite and increasing slightly the number and type of premises that will now receive an emergency response.

The service is introducing a new IT system called Farynor that will support the work of the protection team, as well as others. The implementation of IT systems can often be complex. This system has been in the implementation phase for an extended period and this is causing some frustration for staff. The consequences of the delay are impacting on the limited capacity of teams and all parties would benefit from the system being introduced at the earliest possible moment.

WFRS has a primary focus on saving lives and this is reflected most markedly through its operational response arrangements. This has led to the protection team feeling that its work is not always fully appreciated across the wider service. Watch Commanders in district areas are provided with protection training and firefighters are now carrying out lower risk Business Fire Safety Checks. However, the rationale and benefits of these approaches are not always clearly understood by those firefighters and supervisory officers.

The protection team are clearly well motivated and passionate about their work. They have an ambition to do more in the field of protection but recognise that they are limited by their capacity and the draw towards the resilience of their 'core business'. Officers would, if capacity permitted, be keen to do more preventative business engagement to support the local economy and to look more at the potential for Primary Authority Schemes.

4.4 Preparedness

There is a good level of commitment and expertise amongst staff in this area. Partners would welcome greater continuity from key roles or, where that isn't feasible, more detailed handovers/briefings in order to support organisational preparedness. The stabilising of things in the organisation, in the form of reducing the number of roles held on a temporary basis, was welcomed.

It is unclear how the risk assessment process is driving WFRS activity, such as learning and development, exercise planning and command assessment. This could be an area to consider greater integration that fully supports organisational preparedness and focuses upon key priorities.

Partners across the Local Resilience Forum see WFRS as a pivotal and leading organisation. However, it was seen to be important to explore and expand the number of smaller scale exercises taking place across the county in order to ensure plans are appropriate to address foreseeable risk and are engaging partners on a more frequent basis.

Opportunities appear to exist for much closer collaboration between WFRS and wider council emergency planning functions, with the potential to secure better joint use of resources, an increased focus on delivering joint outcomes and ensure that statutory responsibilities are fully satisfied. Staff appear willing to commit to greater joint working but cited the number of "false starts" and relationships between partners as a perceived reason they had yet to deliver longer term outcomes.

A number of partners expressed concern about the uncertainty of direction for WFRS and the impact this may have for the future. All agreed that collaborative support and working could offer tangible benefits and they are keen to explore this area further.

Given the demands upon WFRS and views expressed both within the organisation and by partners around resilience, it does not appear that business continuity is proactively considered as a business planning tool. A review of this area, such as the application of a revised Business Impact Analysis, may greatly assist in the identification of clearer priorities and better utilisation of existing resources.

WFRS has a number of tactical work-streams with other fire and rescue services and these have real potential to be accelerated to assist with planning and preparedness, such as joint operational doctrine functions to deliver national guidance. It appears that more formal mutual assistance is integrated within its prioritising arrangements for emergency response and partners are keen to build upon this in future.

WFRS is taking a leading role within the region for Emergency Services Network (ESN), which is seen as a high risk area nationally. Neighbouring services welcome the role WFRS is playing. However, given the challenges to WFRS and Warwickshire County Council capacity and the programme timelines, this area of work must be closely monitored to ensure that during and following transition, public and firefighter safety is maintained.

4.5 Response

Within WFRS there is an over-arching focus on response, resulting in good availability especially around whole-time and strategic stations. However, there is a sense that, after the Atherstone-on-Stour tragedy, the service became very heavily focussed on response, with an imbalance emerging between prevention, protection and response. The service is now regaining a more balanced approach but this could go further.

The service has identified a number of 'strategic fire stations' where they endeavour to maintain availability 24/7. This is a recognised concept utilised by many services throughout the country. However, it is felt that the over-riding factor is ensuring that the response standard is achieved, rather than also taking in to account the risk and demand for a specific location. An example of this is a strategic station being located in an area which experiences only around 30 to 40 calls per year. Reviewing this approach may allow more resources to be directed across the strategic priorities of the service, in order to assist major project delivery and develop corporate capacity.

WFRS described to us future plans to create cluster risk profiles, incorporating community fire safety input and the utilisation of community plans. This will undoubtedly serve to further enhance the service to local communities.

However, this could be strengthened further still through the involvement of external partners within the process.

The overall competence of staff is assured through risk critical training and Active Incident Monitoring (AIM). Competence within a training environment appears to be captured well on Redkite but it has been acknowledged that improvements need to be made around AIM. It is understood that these improvements are being developed and will be implemented in the New Year.

Redkite is used as a competency-based recording system. Assurance monitoring is carried out quarterly by Station Managers using the system. The system is also checked by the training and development function prior to an individual's attendance on a course, in order to establish their related current competency levels. This process appears clear and robust and should assure the service that training records are being maintained and competence is reviewed regularly. However, it was felt that there was an element of duplication within this process ('checking the checkers') and a review of these processes could potentially be carried out in an attempt to free up managerial capacity.

The Operational Assurance Group is well established and incorporates a number of representatives from different departments. All significant issues and learning for the service passes through this group for discussion, action plans are created and accountabilities and responsibilities are identified. However, it is unclear if a review process in relation to actions is established. Is this driving learning? Senior managers believe this could be an area for improvement, but everyone agreed that the meeting was worthwhile and meaningful.

WFRS is going through a period of transition which involves the introduction of a number of different shift systems. This is an area where the 'plan, do, review' discipline could be applied and 'unintended consequences' identified to inform further roll-out. It is recognised that the service needs to establish that the changes that have been made are meeting their objectives. An example is, following the removal of Watch Managers from the watches and crewing being reduced, Watch Managers being utilised to backfill both wholetime and retained appliances on many occasions.

Fire control is integral to public and firefighter safety. The continued uncertainty of direction and under-establishment, coupled with increasing workloads, provides for lower levels of resilience and therefore questions if this is a business continuity issue. However, despite these challenges, the control operators remain committed to their role and are performing well.

4.6 Health and Safety and welfare

Health and Safety management systems are clearly in place and follow industry good practice. However, and although performance being reported at various levels, it was less clear how the Health and Safety management system is influencing continuous improvement.

Occupational Health support to staff is well received and is of a high quality. However, it is unclear what impact the function is having in changing working practices. As an example, welfare arrangements in key risk areas such as fire control do not appear to inform the service's business continuity arrangements when staff shortages occur and fall back arrangements do not appear to be routinely exercised. Better integration and liaison across functions could also be considered to increase resilience of staff and operational functions.

Numerous audit and assurance functions exist but what emerges in the way of collaborative working, feedback and learning is less clear. The potential exists to better utilise capacity with further, deeper integration of the good practice and skills in place working on collective priorities e.g. the range of assurance functions focusing upon shared priorities.

Across WFRS, the numerous activities and projects underway show a mixed picture in relation to proactively seeking Health and Safety input as early as possible. Some good examples do exist, for example when dealing with transport and equipment, but these should be built upon.

An in-house review of Occupational Health screening is taking place as it appears that current arrangements are less well received or effective than before, generating a set of challenges for the future around well-being and fitness. The Occupational Health function is well aware of these challenges and confident that managers are seeking to increase support in this area.

There are clearly anxieties across the workforce over proposed budget reductions and the impact these could have, which are exacerbated given the history of Atherstone-on-Stour. Greater engagement and demand may be placed upon the employee support offered by Occupational Health as a result and WFRS will wish to monitor this closely.

Recent leadership changes have been welcomed by staff and there is greater optimism regarding Health and Safety being seen as a priority and influencing service activities earlier.

Risk assessment processes and their assurance is already recognised as an area for improvement by WFRS, which shows organisational awareness. However, it was unclear what priority this will be given and how this will be better integrated.

A number of assurance functions exist in the organisation and dedicated resources have been reallocated from Health and Safety to Command Assurance. However, it was unclear which Health and Safety responsibilities are discharged by this function or how this is leading to improvement in Health and Safety management. Given the resource constraints facing WFRS, it may wish to consider integrating the skills and expertise it has to better focus upon key work areas and communicate these via its existing Service Improvement Board.

4.7 Training and development

As previously mentioned within this report, WFRS maintains a strong focus on response and a large part of this is the operational training delivered to crews. In speaking with firefighters it was clear that they are satisfied with the training delivered by the service both in terms of instruction and content.

Annual training planners detailing all courses further evidence the service's commitment to training and the maintenance of competence. Crews are prompted to book on courses when required and administrators ensure individuals are regularly reminded. However, it was felt that further work could be carried out to explore how and when is best to arrange courses for on-call personnel and a clearer procedure could be established for the short notice cancellation of courses or attendance at courses, in order to reduce the impact on individuals and the service.

The organisation and facilitation of a number of exercises at the Fire Service College upon the introduction of Operational Guidance on Breathing Apparatus (OGBA) is again a good demonstration of the service's commitment to operational training and competence and was well received by the crews.

However, other than the OGBA exercises, there was no reference to any other recent multi-pump exercises taking place within the service and little evidence of assurance coming out of any that did take place. However, it is understood that the establishment of cluster risk profiles throughout the county will address this issue ensuring exercises focus upon local risks in the future. To further enhance the assurance provided through exercises, the service may want to consider how they can make better use of their training instructors.

There was little evidence of the training and development function taking on board feedback from course attendees in an attempt to further enhance the quality of courses delivered. A more open approach should be established in order to ensure the service learns from all feedback, both positive and negative.

WFRS has worked to establish a Retained Duty System training planner and plans to develop one for the whole-time shifts have been well received. The service ensures all elements of operational training are completed annually.

The service have endeavoured to ensure that operational competence and the availability of resources are linked through the interface between Redkite and Gartan Availability. This appears to be a real success for the service and seems to work well, especially for fire control and the crews.

Conclusion and contact information

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

Members of the peer team would be happy to return to undertake a follow-up to the challenge in due course. Helen Murray, as the Local Government Association's Principal Adviser for your region, will act as the main contact between WFRS 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 delivering the peer challenge would like to wish Warwickshire as a place, WFRS and Warwickshire County Council every success in the future.

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Annex – Contents of the feedback presentation delivered to WFRS on Friday 25th November 2016

Understanding of local context and priority setting

- The vision for Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service – “Protecting the community and making Warwickshire a safer place to live”
- Mission - “Responding to emergencies when the public needs us most”
- An extensive risk profile exists to inform the work of the service
- The next Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) is currently in development, with a draft planned to be ready in January for consultation and the intention for the final version to be put before the Fire Authority in May 2017
- Arson is a particular issue that has been identified and the service, with partners, is responding accordingly
- Based on the latest CIPFA information, Warwickshire spends more than average on fire and rescue on a per head of population basis

Delivering outcomes for local communities

- People across the service and wider council are committed to delivering for the citizens of Warwickshire – “Being the best we can be”
- The fire and rescue service is held in high regard by the public and elected members – a trusted brand and delivering effectively
- Key areas of performance in 2015/16:
 - Target met for first attendance response time standard (75% within 10 minutes where there is a life risk)
 - Increase seen in many areas of activity and types of incident compared to the previous year or two – total incidents, road traffic collisions, property and vehicle fires, deliberate fires, non-domestic fires, false alarms

- However, there have been significant reductions in many areas of activity and types of incident when compared to five years ago
- National benchmarking shows very positive results for Warwickshire per head of population in relation to the number of primary fires and accidental dwelling fires
- More than 3,500 Home Fire Safety Checks
- Visits to over 200 schools and fire safety advice given to nearly 13,000 children

Financial planning and viability

- The service – defined by many people we spoke to as “small” – has an operating budget of £19.2m for the current year
- The service has seen a reduction in the budget in the period from 2011/12 to 2017/18 of just under £3m. This has been managed effectively and in a way that has sought to protect the frontline response element of the service
- Under the current savings plan (2014/15 to 2017/18), Warwickshire County Council is seeing a budget reduction of 18.6%. The fire and rescue service is facing a 12.5% reduction
- Capital investment is being seen in the form of a refurbishment of fire HQ, the development of a dedicated training centre incorporating a new fire station at Southam and investment in fleet and equipment
- Frontline firefighters highlight the fact they have good equipment that enables them to do their jobs effectively – with a sound process that sits behind this to ensure what is procured is right
- Along with the rest of the council, a set of savings proposals are being developed for the service to inform the budget-setting process for 2017/18
- With around 80% of the service’s budget relating to people, further budget reductions will inevitably centre in that area

Political and managerial leadership

- The way the senior management of the service engages with the frontline is welcomed and valued – open and transparent
- The management structure is seen to have stabilised following a number of changes and a series of temporary arrangements
- A new atmosphere is developing as a result, investment is being made in leadership development and the ‘cultural review’ work is shaping up
- Work is needed to develop and maintain a consistency of message and engagement through all layers of middle and senior management
- There is a strong sense of “strategic drift” regarding the future direction of the service, with a number of elements to this:
 - The fire and rescue service is part of Warwickshire County Council

- The financial context and national agenda makes ‘collaboration’ with other partners a logical avenue to explore
 - Three potential collaborations have been explored over the last few years, none of which have come to fruition
 - Further potential collaboration can be pursued but the conditions have to be right in order to enable it to succeed
- There is an immediate priority of making the relationship with the county council work – the strained relations are widely recognised and impacting negatively
 - The tragedy at Atherstone-on-Stour is still being felt and very much continues to have an impact, manifesting itself in a variety of ways
 - Joint-working with partners at an operational and local level within the county is good – a lot of activity founded on strong relationships
 - However, relationships at a more strategic level, particularly within the county council, need to be invested in much more – integral to which is involving partners earlier and valuing their potential contribution more
 - We appreciate the complexity of the partnership environment in the region and sub-region – both geographically and in terms of the range of organisations
 - The fact that the Chief Fire Officer is now involved in the Safer Warwickshire Partnership is very much valued
 - Once the strategic direction for the service is clear, it is important to that ensure capital investment is aligned accordingly – maximising opportunities for partnership and joint working

Governance and decision-making

- The Fire Cross Party Working Group of elected members is actively engaged, aids understanding of the service across the wider elected membership and is effectively supported by the service
- Overview and Scrutiny – there was a recent shift for fire and rescue from Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Resources
- The rationale for making that shift is unclear to us and it feels as though fire and rescue is competing against greater priorities when it comes to the focus of the committee
- That said, the position of the service and the issues and challenges facing it are well understood by the committee
- It feels to us as though, between the two main elected member forums linked to fire and rescue, there is a risk of duplication and dislocation – where key issues are considered, what the respective remits are, where the Portfolio Holder’s input is provided

Organisational capacity

- It is undoubtedly the case that people within the fire and rescue service are extremely busy – there is a lot of activity and a great deal going on

- However, we see a need for greater prioritisation and focus – the wide range of initiatives and projects is absorbing significant time and effort and things are not necessarily being seen through to completion
- A more comprehensive ‘plan, do, review’ approach would assist here, as would increased identification of potential risks in the form of ‘unintended consequences’
- The “strategic drift”, relationship issues and inefficient decision-making processes are absorbing precious capacity in a non-productive way
- Maintaining capacity to deliver for the public – focused on response – is understandable
- However, less prominent, but vitally important, areas such as prevention and protection are at a disadvantage in relation to the focus of attention and resource
- There are significant anxieties in relation to the capacity and resilience of the fire control function

Community risk management

- There are on-going reviews of risk, historic data and performance – driving and supporting the need for change
- Risk premises are identified and processes are in place to capture and cascade this information. However, the service acknowledges that processes could be more streamlined.
- Partnership work could serve to enhance the internal process in relation to risk analysis within local communities
- The current IRMP has a limited profile – giving a sense of the requirement for savings acting as the driver rather than aligning resources to risk
- It has been indicated that the next draft IRMP reflects more of a risk based focus

Prevention

- Partners were complimentary about staff within the service’s prevention function in relation to their enthusiasm and engagement over many areas at a tactical level
- It was felt that relationships at a senior level have become closer more recently but that a single, joint direction was still to be determined
- Emergency service partners highlighted the service appearing to be very stretched. They felt they could deliver prevention more effectively together.
- Partners indicated they have limited awareness of the IRMP process and have not been actively involved in jointly identifying risk – raising questions as to whether the prevention activity was going to be appropriate

- The service, through the use of risk profiles, is able to demonstrate a data centric and intelligence-led methodology to establishing the IRMP
- Notable practice exists, such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Intervention Team, and positive outcomes are being achieved. It appears this approach could be expanded within prevention activity across individual teams in the council, including the fire and rescue service.
- A number of internal and external stakeholders stated that greater clarity and joint direction could deliver more community outcomes
- Operational staff appear to have a limited role in the delivery of prevention work and a number of on-call staff expressed they knew their communities best but that financial constraints limited their ability to contribute
- The service's performance outputs show that it benchmarks well nationally in this area
- The current direction and priority for resources risks increasingly challenging prevention and protection alongside emergency response – although the service is looking to increase its commitment in this area

Protection

- There is a blended approach to the risk-based inspection programme – data, trends, professional judgement
- Collaborative approach to support resilience can be seen - fire engineering / H&W FRS secondment / WCC legal support
- There is an effective and efficient approach to workforce planning – green book / apprentices / Station Commander
- Good engagement with Partners – CQC, ASC, Housing, Planners, Safety Advisory Group, Licensing, regional regulatory services
- Around automatic fire alarms risk management there is a new and adjusted approach
- With the Farynor system, consequences of the extended implementation phase can be seen
- There appears to be limited appreciation within the wider service of the role of Protection
- In terms of resilience, there is a potential to impact on core functions and limit potential e.g. Primary Authority Scheme and wider business engagement

Preparedness

- Levels of commitment and expertise from staff in this area are good
- Partners across the Local Resilience Forum see the service as a pivotal and leading organisation
- Greater continuity in personnel would be welcomed within key roles, along with more structure to handovers in order to support organisational preparedness

- It is unclear how risk assessment is driving activity, such as learning and development, exercising and command assessment
- Expansion of the number of operational exercises taking place to assure plans are appropriate would be welcomed, including a wider range of people within the service and more partner involvement
- Closer collaboration between the service and the wider council in this area would increase the ability to deliver improved outcomes
- A number of partners indicated they are uncertain of the future direction of the service and the impact this may have in the future
- It does not appear that business continuity is proactively considered as a tool that may assist in the identification of clearer priorities and best utilise resources
- The service has a number of tactical work-streams with other fire and rescue services and these could be accelerated to assist with planning and preparedness
- It appears that mutual assistance is well integrated within operational arrangements
- Warwickshire take a lead role within the region for Emergency Services Network (ESN) and this has been welcomed by neighbouring services
- However, with the ESN programme timelines, county council support for the service must be closely monitored to provide confidence that during and following transition, public and firefighter safety is maintained

Response

- There is an over-arching focus in the service on response, resulting in good availability especially around whole-time and strategic stations
- Strategic stations identified that, on occasions, the over-riding consideration is the response standard – raising questions around the effectiveness of deployment in relation to risk and demand
- Challenges in the recruitment and retention of on call firefighters is a national issue. Warwickshire are doing some leading-edge work in this area that is delivering benefit.
- Future plans to create cluster risk profiles and incorporate CFS input, utilising community plans, will serve to further enhance the service to local communities. This could be enhanced further by involving external partners within the process.
- The competence of staff is assured through risk critical training and Active Incident Monitoring (AIM)
- Competence within a training environment appears to be captured well on Redkite but it has been acknowledged that improvements need to be made around AIM
- Training records are being maintained and competence / quality of evidence is reviewed regularly
- In an attempt to free up capacity it is felt that levels of duplication of the review of training records could be reduced

- The Operations Assurance Group (OAG) appears to work well and is recognised as the main platform to provide assurance within the service
- OAG produces action plans and identifies where accountabilities and responsibilities lie.
- However, it is unclear if a review process in relation to actions is established. Is this driving service wide learning? Senior managers believe this is an area for improvement.
- A number of shift systems have been introduced. This is an area where the 'plan, do, review' discipline could be applied and 'unintended consequences' identified to inform further roll-out.
- Fire control is integral to public and firefighter safety. Control operators remain committed to their role and are performing well despite the significant demands being placed upon them.
- The continued uncertainty of direction and under-establishment within fire control provides for lower levels of resilience and therefore questions if this should become a business continuity issue.

Health and Safety and welfare

- Health and Safety management systems are clearly in place and follow industry good practice
- The fact that an in-house review of Occupational Health screening is taking place has been well received
- The Occupational Health service is aware of future challenges for staff and the importance of well-being and fitness
- Staff support appears well received and of a high quality when accessed but it is unclear what impact it is having
- Welfare arrangements in relation to key risk areas don't appear to inform business continuity management arrangements in some cases
- Across the service numerous opportunities exist to ensure Health and Safety input is maximised e.g. development of business cases or areas of change management
- Numerous audit and assurance functions exist but what emerges in the way of collaborative working, feedback and learning is less clear
- Potential exists to better utilise wider service capacity with further, deeper integration of the good practice and skills in place working on collective priorities e.g. the range of assurance functions
- We are unsure how the Health and Safety management system is influencing continuous improvement, although performance reporting is considered
- Risk assessment processes and the assurance of this is already recognised as an area for improvement – showing a degree of organisational awareness. However, it is unclear what priority this will be given.
- Perceived anxieties over the consequences from reduced budgets reductions for the health safety of staff continue to figure in the organisation – which are exacerbated given the history of the service

- There is optimism that Health and Safety is increasingly becoming seen as a priority

Training and development

- Firefighters highlight the good quality of the training provided
- Annual training planners further evidence the service's commitment to training and the maintenance of competence.
- Crews are prompted to book on courses when required and administrators ensure individuals are regularly reminded
- Further work could be carried out to explore how and when best to arrange courses for on-call personnel
- Consideration of a clearer procedure for the short notice cancellation of courses needs to be established in order to reduce the impact on individuals and the service
- The organisation and facilitation of a number of exercises at the FSC upon the introduction of OGBA further demonstrates the service's commitment to training
- As the experts in relation to training and development, the service may want to consider utilising instructors to provide assurance at future operational exercises
- The establishment of a Retained Duty System training planner and the plan to create one for the whole-time shifts has been well received
- There is little evidence of training and development taking on board feedback from course attendees in an attempt to further enhance the quality of courses delivered
- There is a push to increase the amount of exercises taking place and broaden involvement in them
- The interface between Redkite and Gartan Availability ensures skills and competence are maintained enhancing assurance