



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue  
Service

Operational Assessment and  
Fire Peer Challenge

**June 2015**

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

### **Introduction**

This report captures the outcomes from the Local Government Association (LGA)'s Fire Peer Challenge at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service in June 2015 and presents the key findings.

The report provides detailed information on the key focus areas of:

- Leadership
- Organisational development and future readiness

It also provides overview information on the other areas of the Operational Assessment:

- Community Risk Management
- Prevention
- Protection
- Response
- Health and Safety
- Training and Development
- Call Management and Incident Support

Under the 'leadership' section, it explores three strategic questions:

- How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?
- How effective is the leadership and governance?
- How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

NFRS' current Strategic Management Team (SMT) was created during 2014. A new Chief Fire Officer (CFO), new Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) and new Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) were appointed through a mix of internal and external recruitment.

In common with other Fire and Rescue Services, NFRS is going through a number of significant changes and developments. The SMT is keen to ensure that NFRS is an efficient and effective service, organisationally competent and ready to face the changes and further cuts that are anticipated. The review team were asked to assess the impact of the new strategic leadership, and how leadership is developing at all levels of the organisation.

NFRS also asked the peer team to consider the service's organisational structure, prevailing culture and degree of competence in terms of being a service fit for the future. This was to include a specific interest in learning and development, and knowledge management in addition to a general check on how well the workforce is prepared for what lies ahead.

A significant Organisational Development programme was in the early stages when the peer team visited NFRS, incorporating work on cultural and organisational change, as well as dealing with financial constraints. The peer

team concluded that this programme was likely to address the 'areas to explore' identified in this report.

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

The Fire Peer Challenge took place in June 2015 and consisted of a range of activities including interviews, observations, station visits and focus groups. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, officers, frontline and support staff, partners and other stakeholders.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a presentation of the initial findings was delivered to the Service's senior managers and a representative from the Fire Authority at the end of the challenge. This report includes the bullet points from that presentation in each theme and provides more detail on each issue.

The team appreciates the welcome and hospitality provided by the service and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions, openness, enthusiasm and honesty.

## **Context and purpose**

The OpA self assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis upon which to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and;
- provide Fire Authority elected members and their Chief Fire Officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

The sector led peer challenge process is part of the LGA's approach to self-regulation and improvement, which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Peer Challenge is not a form of sector led inspection but a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector.

## **Peer Challenge Team**

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

The peer challenge is not an inspection; rather it offers an independent external assessment of an organisation's own judgement of itself against the OpA framework, undertaken by 'critical friends' from within the sector. The assessment is a reflection of the evidence presented to the peer team,

through reading the documentary evidence submitted in advance, and the interviews and focus groups when on site.

The team was:

Lead peer: James Courtney, CFO  
South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Member peer: Dave Hanratty, Liverpool City Council and  
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

Officer peer: Andrew Brodie,  
Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Officer peer: Kath Billing,  
Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service

Officer Peer: Jim Bywater  
Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

Officer Peer: Liz Jackson  
Suffolk County Council

Challenge Manager: Becca Singh, Local Government Association

## **Executive Summary**

- NFRS is very well regarded by its partners and is influencing the local agenda on fire and community safety. It is using a positive approach to fire protection, whereby enforcement notices are considered to be a last resort, but do not hesitate to enforce when necessary.
- The Strategic Management Team (SMT) is viewed positively across the Service, with a high degree of trust. Staff have high expectations of the new SMT and how they will lead the Service.
- NFRS provides varied development opportunities, including the national Executive Leadership Programme, talent spotting, and sponsorship through higher education.
- Staff across the organisation understand the need for the new SMT to find a productive way of working together. They know that further cuts are coming which are likely to mean frontline and support staff losses. They appreciate the openness that SMT have, and hope that this will continue.
- There are really good examples of co-location of departments and with partners.
- There are also several examples of schisms within the service—uniformed / non-uniformed, HQ / fire stations, and departmental insularity, which has some undesirable consequences. These include departments working separately on related issues, a number of reviews taking place at the same time with little or no influence on each other, and mini-cultures developing in parts of the organisation. Some of this may just be perception, but, nevertheless, the situation needs addressing.
- Communication is key and should be viewed as a strategic function and a strategic tool for cultural and behavioural change (internally or externally). It could be used to help educate the public more about risk and management of that risk, which will help when there are changes mooted that the general public and members of staff do not like or understand.
- The IRMP was written prior to the changes at SMT. NFRS should consider revising it to reflect the agile organisation that it plans to be and to set the clear direction of the new SMT. Performance can then be measured against what are agreed as the future strategic organisational objectives.
- An organisational development (OD) programme has commenced and the team felt strongly that so long as this programme is completed, and soon, the Service will be on a strong footing for the future.

## **2. Key areas of focus**

### **How effective is the leadership and governance?**

Incorporating the focus area of examining the impact of strategic leadership and how leadership is being developed at all levels of the organisation.

#### **Strengths**

- The benefit of partnerships, collaboration and co-location is recognised throughout the Service
- Strategic Management Team are considered to be capable, approachable and engaging
- The new approach to leadership is welcomed (cautiously) by most staff
- Most of the trade union officials regard relationships at the most senior level to be extremely good

NFRS is considered to be strong partner, for example with housing and other public sector organisations. New partnerships are developing positively and effectively, for example with LEPs and SMEs. Collaborative working is increasingly common internally and externally, for example business education in the Protection department working with local businesses to improve fire safety and project work within NFRS comprising staff from different teams and disciplines. Locating the Transport Team on a station has built understanding and professional relationships. This has provided valuable learning on co-location which could be extended to other departments and could help develop the new agile and flexible culture of the Service. It would be useful to involve the Communications team early in consideration of further co-location opportunities to ensure clear consistent messages.

SMT is seen internally and externally as closely aligned, with a united front. Staff and partners have widespread confidence in the CFO, the rest of SMT and the direction of travel they are starting to develop. Staff offer positive experiences of SMT (“approachable”, “open”, “friendly”), and believe that they will listen to ideas and take on board their views. Staff and partners welcome the honesty from SMT, who are not afraid to ask for help or ideas.

There is confidence in the empowering and collaborative approach to leadership, which is now starting to embed, although there is some indication that not all managers find it easy to adopt the same approach and some may need support through the changes.

There are extremely good employee and industrial relationships. SMT and representative body officials have professional respect for each other with an level of trust that has improved in recent years. There is a clear line of communication and mechanisms for negotiation and inclusion in the development of future change proposals. Equality and diversity work has moved on from the ‘Excellent’ level of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality

Framework (FRSEF) and now encompasses a values-led approach and a focus on the culture of the organisation.

### **Areas to explore**

- Decision making and policy development should be clearly linked to an evidence base
- Suggestions that introspection at the senior level has created a direction / information vacuum
- Are strategic objectives / aspirations / vision clearly articulated and documented?
- Staff across the organisation feel under-informed; in some areas communication and engagement are considered to be poor
- Individual performance is not managed relative to organisational objectives

NFRS should ensure that decisions and policy changes are visibly linked to evaluation and the evidence that is used to make them. Establishing a systematic transparent process, including Communications at an early stage, would enable staff to have confidence in how decisions are made. For example, the Fire Cover Review was based on externally scrutinised evidence but several officers expressed views that the evidence had been found to fit decisions already made.

There is a high level of understanding amongst staff that the new SMT needed time to gel in order to work well together but this appears to have left an information vacuum, where rumour and conjecture may have overtaken facts and evidence, particularly around restructures and cuts. The peer team heard a number of times that staff feel that there is a sense of 'waiting for change to happen' which has made some departments and many individuals anxious about the future.

The strategic vision and the three key focus areas and values for the Service were not well known outside Service HQ or below Group Manager level. Communication needs to be clearer using different engagement mechanisms across different levels of staff. Open invitations to workshops are not always reaching all staff groups and some people feel overlooked. NFRS should consider an informal process of targeted encouragement to ensure that all staff departments and groups are represented (for example stations, training centre, control, disabled staff, and women). This should help to ensure that the Service is working as one cohesive organisation towards a common goal.

The peer team heard differing views and levels of understanding about the part everyone needs to play in the future direction of the Service and the behaviours necessary for the new culture. Good and varied communication mechanisms can be used as a strategic tool and an agent for behaviour and cultural change. Inviting the skilled Comms Team to be part of thinking and planning will help to minimise the effect of rumours, and will ensure a consistent message at all levels of the Service. Frontline staff reported that they often prefer informal settings (for example, at the mess table on stations)

to more formal briefings. There is widespread acceptance that SMT cannot always share everything but there appears to be a sticking point at Station and Group Manager levels whereby messages may be lost, misinterpreted or misrepresented.

There is a high number of individual Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) but there is no apparent 'golden thread' linking individual performance to the performance of the Service as a whole. All staff should be clear about where their efforts fit in with the overall objectives of the service. The peer team suggest that NFRS should consider revising the IRMP in the light of the new SMT, direction and culture of the Service. This should set out organisational objectives to which individual objectives can be linked.

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

Incorporating focus areas of Organisational Design (OD), culture and competence for the future

#### **Strengths**

- Strategic Management team is recognised as committed and capable.
- Organisational development objectives are capable of moving the Service forwards
- People recognise that cultural change does take time and would like direction in the meantime
- People are keen to be involved and are enthusiastic about their work.
- NFRS is highly valued by partners

Staff believe that the SMT appear closely aligned and show a united front. SMT are willing to have mature and open conversations with staff and are able to admit that they don't have all the answers, but they will take responsibility for decisions. This is demonstrating the new style of leadership.

Plans for organisational development are wide-ranging and seen as very positive. The peer team feels these have the potential to address the areas to explore set out in this report around leadership and organisational capacity if they are fully implemented. This will support improving outcomes for citizens.

There is a widespread understanding that cultural change is a slow process. NFRS should consider how strategic direction might be maintained during the change process in order to maintain confidence and support from staff. Some managers may need more support than others in adapting to this inclusive leadership style and the change process could be difficult for them.

NFRS staff were enthusiastic about their work, with widespread interest in being involved in the OD programme, although this did not always translate into volunteering to be part of workshops. Some targeted encouragement to these workshops should be considered, as well as asking for volunteers. This

positive attitude bodes well for the forthcoming OD work and offers a good platform for the Service going forward.

Partners value the different ways that NFRS has worked with them. It is considered to be a committed and valuable partner that contributes constructively. Examples included strategic partnerships (the Local Resilience Forum), advisory work (with housing providers) and community work (with local schools and community groups).

### **Areas to explore**

- There is a perception of departmental insularity and a collective view that this impedes progress
- Where do people fit in the jigsaw – does anyone know what the picture on the lid looks like?
- Fragmented approach to projects / reviews, the people selected to undertake them and potential for duplication
- Schisms are variously reported to exist
- Performance management is not integrated across the Service

Several teams were described as working in isolation, with little joint working or communication with other teams, particularly when working on projects and service reviews. This contrasts with senior officers where good collaborative working is reported. The peer team felt that increasing collaboration and project co-ordination would enable quicker progress and minimise duplication for example on individual service reviews. This has already begun to improve, with an increase of people considering cross-functional perspectives. Increasing co-location of projects and departments would mainstream different ways of working as ensuring that communications is seen as an integral part of everyone's work, rather than a separate function, perhaps by inviting the Comms team to join projects at the planning stage.

NFRS is currently going through change and is developing its strategic visions. There was some sense that while this was happening, different parts of the Service were lacking overall direction. There are committed teams and staff working hard and achieving goals but they are not always clear what the strategic vision was. This is likely to improve once the OD programme gets underway.

NFRS should consider establishing visible strategic co-ordination of the various service reviews and projects taking place. Several people working on reviews reported being isolated, and working with a lack of clear parameters or boundaries, finding out about the impact of their review on other teams by chance rather than design. Although this freedom may be intended to be empowering, it can be intimidating or overwhelming, particularly at the start of a review. Existing management mechanisms could be used to help.

The team heard several references to barriers and divisions within the Service with language used reinforcing these; “grey/green” references to uniformed / non-uniformed staff and “them and us” indicating Service HQ and other

locations. This should be addressed by the OD work that is taking place, although care should be taken to ensure that all staff feel involved. The peer team is aware that some of these issues were already identified by SMT at meetings with GMs, and have fed into the OD programme and objectives.

There has recently been a positive move to a more coaching style of performance management but this is not consistently applied. There were reports of little managerial oversight on operational competence where poor performance is not always challenged. This is at odds with the strong organisational emphasis on learning and development to ensure individual competence. The 'Expectations Document' (setting out NFRS expectations of its employees) appears to be of limited value. Setting clear objectives for the Service through the IRMP would enable NFRS to measure its organisational competence and manage individual performance consistently.

## **Training and Development**

### **Strengths**

- Approach to blended learning
- Positive feedback on external mentoring and talent spotting, secondments and placements.
- Opportunities for development through courses provided by NTU are seen as a real positive
- Training facility and positive proactive approach to operational training
- Vision for the future and progression of learning and development.

There is a clear appreciation that although there are benefits to e-learning, it is not the answer for everything. NFRS is exploring different ways of using e-learning, for example in support of face to face training, for background modules before classroom or practical training takes place, or as a supplement and reference tool for the induction of new staff.

NFRS aims to have high quality staff by investing in development opportunities (for example mentoring, secondments and work placements). This develops an individual's understanding of the wider organisation which they then share with their operational colleagues. The peer team hope that the Service will continue this investment and continue to provide similar opportunities in the future. The means of identifying appropriate people ('talent spotting') is perceived to be ad hoc and a more formal process may identify a wider range of beneficiaries. This could then create a more diverse work force at managerial level. However, the current less formal way should not be lost.

NFRS also demonstrated a commitment to staff development by sponsoring attendance on FE and HE courses, including relevant degrees. This is highly commendable and has resulted in highly motivated and knowledgeable staff. The peer team heard fears that this may not be financially sustainable and suggest that NFRS considers the risks and impact for future leaders and the

perceived inequality of development opportunities, particularly for non-uniformed staff in any exploration of this issue.

Training is well planned with a clear 12 month programme of exercises which need to be undertaken, designed around the new Operational Guidance for Breathing Apparatus (OGBA). There is a clear passion in the Service Development Centre to see people develop and grow and a dedication to operational training linked to a variety of risks and emerging operational guidance.

The Service Development Centre has a clear vision for its future and its staff are highly committed to ensuring that NFRS has highly competent and motivated staff. There is a blended approach to learning and development, and the Centre is always looking to the future for opportunities to improve the training it provides. There is collaboration with other FRSs where premises do not allow for certain practices.

### **Areas to explore**

- Equality of opportunity for all staff
- L&D need to capture the benefits and outcomes of the master classes
- No existing clear strategy for L&D
- Ensure the Service understands that 'softer skills' underpin operational competence
- People don't understand the self-service training system
- Consider providing leadership and change support for managers during the transformational phase
- Identify competency requirements for all roles across the Service

There is a view in NFRS that non-operational employees have fewer opportunities for career progression than operational staff. This is not uncommon across the sector but addressing this would be advantageous for the Service, particularly given the developing culture and shape.

There was positive feedback about the master classes (identified as good practice by the team) although this does not appear to have been captured and analysed in a systematic way. Evaluating the benefits of such events and capturing the learning would help to shape the OD work. This way the master classes can be used as staff development and will undoubtedly, if attendance continues to be high, work towards internal cultural change of the service.

The Service Development Centre has a vision, but the team saw no clear Learning and Development Strategy that sets out how the Service will use training and development opportunities to enable its staff to work productively in the organisation it aspires to be. The team understand that this may be because the Service is undergoing a process of change and development, but suggest that, ultimately, this will help NFRS move forward.

Staff demonstrated a high level of understanding of the varying needs of different communities and individuals, but did not necessarily make the link

between that knowledge and operational competence. It may be that the equality and diversity work is seen by some as an extra, rather than integral to every day working. Clearer understanding is needed for all service personnel to appreciate why community knowledge and 'softer skills' are important to underpin operational competence.

There were varied views about the new self-service system for learning and development and some confusion as to how much is going to be electronic. There are some anxieties about how all staff will learn to use the new system, and to understand which courses they need to book themselves onto. Communication at early stages of implementation will help to address confusion.

NFRS staff need to feel comfortable during changes when it may feel somewhat chaotic. Staff across the Service understand that all roles may need to adapt to the changed organisation:

*"we need to change the role of the fire fighter, not just the Watch Manager, if we are spreading thinner" (fire fighter)*

but some managers may need extra support as they develop their understanding of how they and their direct reports should respond to change.

NFRS will benefit from establishing a collective corporate approach to exploring and managing risks, in conjunction with outcomes from major incidents, to ensure organisational competency. This could involve improved links between different teams for example, Ops Assurance, Health & Safety, Risk Management and Performance and Planning. Some of this is beginning to happen, for example by siting relevant managers in the same office and developing evaluation and risk management processes across different disciplines. These will subsequently identify operational training needs.

### **3. Other areas**

#### **How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?**

##### **Strengths**

- Excellent examples of partnership working delivering quality outcomes for vulnerable citizens
- NFRS are described as enthusiastic partners who are eager to learn more about their communities and addressing their needs
- New mobilising system will realise significant service improvements

Partners highlighted that working with NFRS's Risk Reduction Team was particularly valued. These teams (North and South) are a real credit to the Service. Skilled workers have, and continue to develop relationships with partners, enhancing the reputation of NFRS and building strong links with different diverse communities. The work with schools and voluntary organisations encourages active involvement of the public in prevention work. Individual watches and the Risk Reduction Teams are working together, although this is not consistent. The work being undertaken is clearly achieving benefits for communities and vulnerable people. Consideration should be given to capturing and evidencing this good work and using it as notable practice to promote this throughout NFRS.

There were other examples of partnership working, for example, the Local Resilience Forum view current working arrangements as excellent, with NFRS engaging in constructive dialogue. Communications are co-ordinated across partners regionally, and are used appropriately in recent major incidents, which improved outcomes for citizens. For example, during the recent Radford Fire, regular updates on Twitter and Facebook kept the public informed, away from the area and enabled crews on the ground to be as effective as possible.

The new mobilising system is expected to give improved access to data via MDTs, enabling the right resources to be at the right place at the right time. Currently, appropriate resourcing relies heavily on individual Control staff. The new system has built in resilience with numerous failsafe systems and a new approach to risk data. This will deliver more efficient and effective mobilising.

##### **Areas to explore**

- Fire Cover Review is perceived to be driven by professional judgement rather than data – is it statistically robust
- Staff groups not always consulted on new policies and introduction of equipment
- Community Safety activity appears to be District-led and fairly ad hoc rather than distinctly IRMP-related.

There was a common view among staff that reviews (particularly the Fire Cover Review) were driven by individual opinion, and data subsequently sought to justify the decisions made. NFRS has worked with Nottingham Trent University to verify its methods and statistics but this perception remains strong. Good communications at an early stage in reviews in future will help to minimise this perception.

Ensure appropriate staff groups have been involved in decisions around policies and new equipment and be transparent where this has happened. New structures and mechanisms that have been put in place will take time to take effect.

The team did not see an overarching Community Safety Strategy showing clear links with the Fire Cover Review and the IRMP. This may be because the IRMP needs to be updated to reflect the changed situation within the Service (see 'Leadership and Governance'). Ensure that there is a systematic mechanism for collecting, analysing and using feedback from the community in order to improve outcomes for citizens. Crews need to appreciate what they are trying to achieve through their community safety work.

## **Community Risk Management**

### **Strengths**

- Very positive working relationships with partners to reduce risk
- Good data sharing with partners to target vulnerable people

Partners gave very positive feedback about working with NFRS, citing innovative approaches to locality working, sharing facilities and premises and developing integrated service models and collaborative working. Communications were co-ordinated well across partnerships during major incidents. NFRS has been able to use its good brand to help police reach communities and develop a joint understanding of risk.

There are examples where NFRS uses partner data, and shares its own, to identify hazards, trends and patterns of behaviour. This all works to manage risk. Work with the LRF, the Midlands Strategic Communications Group and work on the TriService Control project all illustrate this notable practice.

### **Areas to explore**

- Consider the production of a new or interim IRMP with a clear strategy to support its delivery
- Consider using wider range of partner and other risk information to inform IRMP and decision making

The current IRMP was written when NFRS was in a different position and with a different SMT in place. The peers suggest that NFRS considers revising the IRMP to be a flexible, agile document which could provide a clear five year vision and Service objectives. A clear strategy would be needed to support

the delivery of the IRMP, and other strategies would flow from it, for example, Community Risk Management, Training and Development, and Workforce Strategies as well as individual objectives through the PDR process.

A co-ordinated approach to collecting and using risk data to inform decision making would be helpful. There is a wide range of risk information available to NFRS, both from partners and its own data from incidents. This is being effectively used in individual teams but could be used more comprehensively to inform a new IRMP and help decision making processes. Consider using Prevention, Protection and Response data as a blended approach to community risk reduction.

## **Prevention**

### **Strengths**

- Work with Prince's Trust and Safety Zone has good links with partners and clear outcomes
- Strong links with community – Dementia referral initiative and BME week of action. Issues found within businesses and dwellings were resolved
- Home Safety Checks targeted at the most vulnerable
- Multi-agency work through the hoarding framework and partnership with Burns Unit, Adult Access Services and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

There were numerous examples of clear and successful outcomes from work with children and young people. Prince's Trust workers have a clear understanding of their purpose developing young people. They lever in funding from colleges and businesses and have a 70% success rate getting young people into employment. Fire Fighters are increasingly involved with this work now that it takes place on stations, which is seen as very beneficial to the young people involved. However, there was limited evidence of evaluation and tangible documented outcomes did not seem to be visible (although known by teams involved). Consideration should be given to an evaluation process and a case study/good practice process to celebrate success and disseminate this good work across the wider Service.

The strong links with the community, particularly through the Risk Reduction Teams have helped to change behaviours of the general public. The Risk Reduction teams have worked with NFRS Comms team evaluating initiatives and looking at how to change behaviour. Other departments could learn from the successful involvement of the Comms Team in evaluation. Fire Protection teams have demonstrated commitment to local communities through work with local businesses. They have built relationships with some of NFRS' highest risk businesses.

Home Safety Checks (HSCs) are now very targeted, although the annual total quoted seemed low (2,700). NFRS continues to ensure that a wide range of data is used to help target the most vulnerable people and consideration

given to the opportunity to review who does HSCs in future, for example more partnership working or using latent capacity on operational watches.

### **Areas to explore**

- Cement and develop links with health
- Establish systematic evaluation of initiatives
- Establish stronger links with performance management
- Consider the value of RDS doing community safety work

Relationships with partners are generally very good but there is room for further developments, specifically with health partners. This is acknowledged by NFRS and attempts are being made to improve this.

A systematic evaluation of initiatives would enable NFRS to target its work, when mapped over the community risk data that it holds. A strategy to link all plans, stating priority areas, could help to focus the excellent community safety work being done. Stronger measures could be implemented to focus prevention activities where they are most needed, and to measure against demand and wider community knowledge.

Risk Reduction Teams appear to understand the links with performance management but, apparently, there is no systematic internal reporting on their performance. Formulating appropriate measures will help to ensure that NFRS knows why what it is doing is appropriate and achieving good outcomes.

There were some questions about the policy not to involve RDS fire fighters in community safety work. NFRS may want to revisit this as part of its OD programme, maximising the local knowledge that RDS staff have. However, the team recognises that this policy was made specifically to reduce costs.

### **Protection**

#### **Strengths**

- The emphasis is on business support and education although the need for enforcement is recognised
- Strong examples of partnership working, led by the Fire Safety group
- Good mix of both uniformed and non-uniformed inspecting officers
- Post-inspection survey is a valuable initiative

NFRS focus on educating business to prevent the need for enforcement action, which effectively helps to manage risks and reduces costs for businesses. The Business Education Advocate role which leads on this is seen as positive by the Service and partners and the peer team felt that having this role demonstrated notable practice. Enforcement action is taken when necessary but this usually leads to on-going activity to minimise further enforcement action. For example, enforcement action with one housing provider has led to collaborative working to improve fire safety with a number

of local housing providers, thus reducing the risk with one of the highest risk sectors in the area.

The Fire Safety Group links NFRS with the main housing providers and has led to policy changes. For example Nottingham City Homes has committed to fitting domestic sprinkler systems into all new builds. They also have a clear set of fire safety performance measures as a result of work with NFRS. This shows that NFRS is exercising leadership in the local area and working to change behaviours of individuals and businesses.

The mix of uniformed and non-uniformed inspecting officers enables a diversification of the workforce. Officers without an operational background learn about fire behaviour from attending incidents and incident de-briefs as well as knowledge transfer between personnel in the team. There is structured liaison between Fire Safety and operational crews such that fire fighters are able to pass on information about issues they are concerned with, for Fire Protection to investigate.

### **Areas to explore**

- Consider wider measures linking to business growth and economy
- Sustainability of separate Fire Investigation and Enforcement teams
- Explore regional opportunities for collaboration
- Should RDS undertake site specific risk inspections?

NFRS sees the benefit locally of a growing economy and the role the Service can play in supporting this. However, clearer links with business organisations such as the LEP, Councils' Trading Standards and Environmental Health teams, local business forums or Chamber of Commerce will help to link fire protection work directly with business and local economic growth.

NFRS may wish to explore further collaboration in order to maintain its levels of Fire Investigation and Enforcement teams. The separation of the roles may not be sustainable in the long term.

Views were expressed that RDS could be undertaking site specific risk inspections. NFRS could explore how best to use and develop RDS knowledge and expertise, perhaps with more involvement in Protection and Prevention work.

### **Response**

#### **Strengths**

- Positive partnerships and working relationships are well established with LRF partners
- The Operational Intelligence and Operational Assurance teams are seen as positive by crews

- Corporate functions are taking a positive approach to improving resources for the Response Function
- Self- rostering duty system is a real positive work-life balance
- NFRS / DFRS contingency arrangements are to be commended

Positive and engaging partnerships are well established and continue to develop as circumstances change which demonstrates that NFRS has an innovative, pragmatic approach. NFRS clearly works hard on building relationships with organisations and individuals and this is appreciated and respected by them. There is a shared understanding of priorities at senior levels.

Crews see the benefit of the Operational Intelligence and Operational Assurance teams. They are willing to learn from incidents and understand the value in thorough debriefs.

The Response function of the Service is supported by corporate functions. There are improvements being made to IT. Care should be taken to ensure that this work is done in consultation with end users, including the Service Development Centre. Future plans for co-location could consider learning from how well locating Transport on a station with Fire Protection and fire fighters has worked.

The peer team heard positive feedback about the introduction of a self-rostering duty system, enabling fire fighters to have a good work-life balance and helping to maintain motivation and commitment.

Contingency arrangements during periods of industrial action are to be commended. NFRS pooled available resources with Derbyshire FRS to cover the M1 corridor together, whilst maximising availability elsewhere. The team felt that this was notable practice and clearly improves outcomes for citizens.

### **Areas to explore**

- Operational staff have a real passion to get involved with the changes which are needed. They want to be able to influence the decisions
- Consider having a more formal approach to the quality assurance of operational incident response

Operational personnel are knowledgeable and are keen to get involved with the changes that are needed. They understand the reasons for the changes, and want to be able to influence the debate. However, they are generally not aware that the SMT want to involve people in decision making processes. Consider using a targeted approach to getting a wide range of key staff involved, rather than open invitations.

A more formal approach to quality assuring operational incident response could further improve the link between risks and operational learning.

## **Health & Safety**

### **Strengths**

- There is clear leadership in, and championing of, Health and Safety at Officer and Member level
- Health and Safety systems are based on good practice, industry standards and are well established
- The approach to Health and Safety enables and supports rather than limits.

There is an active Health and Safety Committee, chaired by the ACFO who drives health and safety activity in the Service. Representative bodies are included and there is also a member champion. It is clearly perceived to be important across the Service.

Management systems are solid and appropriate and are based on HSG65. Audit Processes are established in order to ensure compliance with statute and legislation. Non-compliance is actively pursued.

Although necessarily operationally focused, the Health and Safety Team is clear about discharging its duty across all areas of the service. It has a pragmatic approach enabling rather than shackling activity and response. There is good awareness of how to use occupational health to support staff well-being. For example, trends were observed in sickness absence which led to the appointment of a fitness adviser.

### **Areas to explore**

- Education, explanation and justification of the move to less prescriptive procedures and the introduction of guidance and discretion

There is a general misconception about the reason for changes in procedures. Clear briefings and explanations may be necessary to allay fears and give clarity on why the changes have happened and the benefits to Service.

## **Call Management and Incident Support**

### **Strengths**

- Control Room staff are trusted and professional. They are empowered to use judgement and initiative.
- The new control system will boost resilience, functionality and improve data management

Work on the TriService Control project means that the team were able to add little to the knowledge that NFRS already has about its strengths and areas to explore in this area.

#### **4. Examples of Notable Practice**

**Fire Protection** – the Fire Safety Group was established as a result of enforcement action that had to be taken against a housing provider. In order to improve the service it provides to its customers, and reduce the risk of further enforcement action, the housing providers established the Fire Safety Group to advise them. NFRS is an active part of this group and it has resulted in a reduction in investigations and enforcement action.

**Safety Zone** – Prevent action. There are a number of partners that come together to improve child safety including the Police, ambulance service, local colleges, local councils, the RNLI and the National grid. They work in sections delivering safety talks on several subjects. Although this isn't unique to Nottinghamshire, the delivery and enthusiasm amongst NFRS staff and partners was particularly good.

**DB1 forms** - The DB1 form is a relatively recent addition to the Service and provides means of feedback across all areas of the service so that all staff have the opportunity to view learning and where necessary implement this learning themselves. Forms are filled in following incidents or issues and are posted on the intranet as a form of 'lessons learnt'. Staff reported that these were used and were enabling geographically spread staff to learn from colleagues and partners

**Staff suggestions** – there is a formal mechanism to ensure that staff suggestions are taken seriously. Individuals keep ownership of their ideas, which hugely boost self-worth and importance. Individuals suggest an idea that gets discussed and worked up (with support if necessary) first at SMF< then CMB and finally SMT can agree to resource or approve it to go ahead. A firefighter gave an example of a suggestion he had put forward. The idea was not 'stolen' from him, rather he was encouraged to develop it himself and he presented it personally to every tier in the organisation. It raised his sense of self value and made clear that ideas are welcome whoever they come from.

**DFRS / NFRS collaboration during strikes** – Both Nottinghamshire FRS and Derbyshire FRS had very limited resources available during periods of industrial action. They effectively pooled resources along the M1 corridor to avoid overprovision along this shared boundary. This released much needed resources to cover other areas of each county.

**First Contact** form – This is a good example of partnership working and achieving positive outcomes for the community. It allows those who are delivering frontline community safety services to get other agencies involved where more complex issues are identified and require a joint approach. The form is designed to allow the sharing of information between agencies that come into contact with vulnerable members of the community during their day to day activities. Crews are trained to recognise safeguarding needs and can provide the information they have to other agencies that can provide the

support or care needed. The Community Safety Team have introduced this approach which is linked in with the adult safeguarding board, the MASH and health so that referrals can be made regardless of who identifies the vulnerable person.

**Risk Reduction Teams** – establishing, maintaining and developing excellent partnerships and community links in order to minimise community risk and achieve good outcomes for local citizens. There are excellent examples of involving partners and community organisations (as well as individuals) in improving the safety of residents and businesses in the local area. Outcomes include the Dementia Referral Scheme with Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, use of University Students to break down language barriers, a positive move from enforcement to education to reduce risk, Safe Places Scheme,

**Work with housing providers** – Social housing is potentially a high level of risk for NFRS. As a result of enforcement action, NFRS now works with housing providers to prevent enforcement action from being necessary (although it will take action if necessary). NFRS has established a Business Education Advocate role, which works with many businesses following this approach. With the main housing providers, NFRS sits on the Fire Safety Group which identifies risks, trends and patterns from data and advises the providers on action to take in order to minimise risk and prevent enforcement action. It educates, which has a long-term positive effect as providers' understanding develops and appropriate fire protection measures are built into their standard procedures, processes and planning.

**Master classes** – These are aimed at creating a more inclusive and understanding workforce, learning around a topic or sharing good practice from inside or outside NFRS. For example, the June 2015 event was a Transgender Masterclass and included guest speakers including Katie Cornhill from Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. There was good feedback on this individual master class, but also the concept for a learning organisation. Masterclasses are open to all personnel within the Service and are attended on a voluntary basis for personal development or interest. The frequency and topics will be decided by the Organisational Development Team. Consideration could be given to having clear aims and objectives and a method of evaluation to evidence the clear benefits (whilst retaining the informal and voluntary nature); the benefits can be used to provide evidence of the organisational development which is a key focus of the service.

**Organisational Development Programme** – this looks excellent and if it does achieve the outcomes which it aims to, this will be a model which other services may want to adopt based on organisational sustainability and achieving a workforce which is fully inclusive and understands the ever changing needs of its communities.

**Operational Intelligence and Assurance team** – this team provides a robust structure for the assuring operational competence across the organisation, providing links across a number of functions to ensure this was maintained. With ops always being at the forefront of fire and rescue services minds and

as the role expands, this structure could provide a model for other services to use.

## **5. Signposting to areas of good practice**

**Measuring Prevention work** – Staffordshire FRS has set up a layered approach to measures working closely with its intelligence team. This links prevention activity with demand reduction. The top layer is a strategic overview and the middle tier links activity with where and who needs it the most including targeted home fire risk checks. The bottom layer is gathering feedback from the community through revisits and postal questionnaires using volunteers.

**Staff Briefings on the financial situation** - Staffordshire FRS have conducted financial briefings and workshops to engage the work force and update on work progressing.

**Integrated Risk Management Planning** – Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service are taking a more integrated approach to risk, becoming more focussed on a holistic approach to community risk. NFRS may find it useful to see how this has allowed for efficiencies through closer working with partners.

**Community Risk Reduction** – Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service has designed a process which allows risk to be identified at a local and station level through a Risk Based Evidence Profile. This looks at a number of factors and data sets to formulate an intelligence base on which to plan activities to reduce risk.

**Partnership Governance and Evaluation** – Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service or Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service. If Notts FRS plans to develop work within their at risk communities using different partners, consideration could be given to setting up a governance framework which includes ensuring the ethical standards of the partners. Hampshire and Cornwall FRS both offer examples of this. The Service will be benefiting from the partnership arrangement and a clear exit strategy.

**Encouraging initiatives and evaluation** - Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service supported Cornwall FRS in their Initiative and Evaluation and have an excellent understanding of the methods of evaluating community based activities in order to evidence the outcomes and benefits for communities. This process also ensures the service is targeting their activities based on risk priorities.

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