



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Final Report

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1. Introduction, context and purpose

Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Associations (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) in September 2013.

The report provides detailed information on the peer challenge's key focus areas of:

- Outcomes for communities
- Organisational capacity
- Leadership & governance
- Training & development
- Prevention

It also provides overview information on the other areas of:

- Community risk management
- Response
- Protection
- Health & safety

Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement.

The Fire Peer Challenge of Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) took place from 9 September until 12 September 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, observations and focus groups. The peer team met with elected members, officers, staff, front line firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

During the time in CFRS the peer team were well looked after and everyone the team met were fully engaged with the process, open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including the CFRS Operational Assessment (OpA) and key supporting documentation.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and was delivered to the Portfolio holder and senior officers.

Context and purpose

The OpA self-assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment the sector led peer challenge process is part of the LGA's approach to sector led improvement which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Fire Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector. It is not a form of sector led inspection and is a mechanism to provide fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

CFRS performs highly with limited resources. The financial position has driven innovation and there is a positive workforce open to challenge and change. This has ensured that CFRS continues to deliver good outcomes for its communities. Cumbria is large and diverse with a sizeable on-call cadre of firefighters. The service is embedded in the community and there is a pride in the service and a passion to deliver.

Tough decisions remain to be taken, as Cumbria County Council seeks substantial savings in the period to 2015/16.

2. The peer challenge team

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

The peer challenge team for CFRS comprised:

- Frank Swann, Chief Fire Officer, Nottinghamshire FRS
- Cllr Mehboob Khan, Chairman, West Yorkshire Fire Authority
- Gavin Watts, Area Manager, Surrey FRS
- Carlton Kerr, Group Manager, Hampshire FRS
- Don Brown, Head of Community Safety, Salford City Council
- Eamon Lally, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

3. Outcomes for local communities

Strengths

- **CFRS encompasses a great spirit**

Throughout the peer challenge the review team noted the incredible spirit of purpose embodied in the staff of Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service. An impressive and infectious “can do” attitude pervades the organisation. This is a credit to the organisation and all the more remarkable given the substantial and continuing change that Cumbria FRS is experiencing.

- **CFRS has developed some strong partnership working for example with the environment agency which has resulted in initiatives which are benefiting the community**

CFRS has developed very good working relationships with a range of partners. These partnerships have led to initiatives that help mitigate risk to individuals and their environment. An example is the partnership with the Environment Agency to create an Environmental Protection Unit (EPU) at Fire Headquarters in Penrith, which houses a specialist environmental protection vehicle and equipment.

Partnership working across the North West fire and rescue services is also advanced. Cumbria, Manchester, Cheshire, and Lancashire are collaborating on a project that will move their current control services into a single fire control centre at the purpose-built control centre building in Warrington. The project will deliver improved resilience and interoperability including the mobilisation of nearest available appliances across fire authority borders. The project which will be completed by March 2014 will save over £7 million across the four fire authorities by the end of 2020-21.

- **The organisation continues to undergo substantial change to maintain front-line services and improve the targeting and effectiveness of community safety work, which staff continue to deliver**

CFRS is continuing to deliver improved outcomes for communities in terms of a year-on-year reduction in total emergencies and strong performance on the delivery of home fire checks. CFRS has also improved the targeting of its interventions with the use of Pinpoint a community profiling software. These successful outcomes have been maintained through the innovative approach to crewing and applying resources effectively to match risk.

- **Strong commitment to equalities and diversity which runs through its policies, community risk management, and recruitment and development processes**

A strong commitment to equalities and diversity is evident across the county council and within Cumbria's Fire and Rescue Service. CFRS has targeted increasing the number of women in the service. The service has had an "Equalities Champions" programme with 20 volunteers from across the service helping to "promote an understanding of equality and to provide a point of reference for signposting to information and sources of guidance and advice". This has now been replaced by a broader scheme where staff are invited to be Council Support Workers.

Areas to explore

- **Need to continue to engage with the workforce over the rationale for, and pace of, change**

At senior and middle manager level, there is a good understanding of the rationale for service change in CFRS and the fire sector more generally. However, firefighters seemed less aware of the broader context for change expressing surprise that the sector as a whole was having to take very difficult decisions as a result of reductions in public sector funding.

CFRS has been impacted upon by front-loaded reductions to the County Council budget resulting from the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. As a result change in CFRS came early and has been prolonged. Staff across the service have coped admirably, and morale is still good, but there will be a need to continue to manage the engagement of staff around the future change process.

- **There will be a need to engage with the local communities over the financial challenges and the service changes that might be needed**

CFRS has effective means of engaging with communities and consults appropriately on service changes. The peer team reference the issue here just to acknowledge that further funding reductions are likely to lead to changes in operational services which will benefit from early engagement of communities. This will ensure they get a full opportunity to debate the issues and help shape the service around a collective understanding of the desired outcomes.

4. Organisational capacity

Strengths

- **Staff are a tremendous asset to the organisation, displaying a willingness to take on new and multiple roles and working practices as the organisation adjusts to funding reductions**

The peer team were struck by the very positive attitude displayed by staff throughout the organisation. Staff multi-task and enjoy the challenge and variety this provides. There are good working relationships across the CFRS workforce. The senior team has a corporate outlook and take on leadership roles across the council and wider partnerships. The senior team is alive to the opportunities open to the fire service and are able to pursue these opportunities innovatively.

- **Strong partnerships with services in the rest of the council**

CFRS is recognised across the council as being a good partner. In key areas such as adult social care and public health there is a high degree of trust, evidenced through joint working and very impressive levels of information sharing. For example, CFRS has information on the location of oxygen in residential buildings which is updated monthly and comprehensive information on domestic violence which is available to firefighters on turn-out sheets.

- **A willingness to innovate and to adapt services to meet wider council objectives and financial constraints such as the move to Home Accident Reduction Interventions and innovative crewing arrangements**

These organisational strengths have placed CFRS in a strong position as the council and other partners, including NHS bodies such as the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), seek to address the broader prevention agenda. The move from home fire checks to Home Accident Reduction Interventions is an example of how CFRS is flexing its services to meet the broader agenda.

Areas to explore

- **The service acknowledges that it is very thinly stretched**

CFRS has seen budget reductions of around 10 per cent to date in the current 2010 spending review period. This is likely to increase further once the budget is agreed for the 2014/15 financial year. The reductions must be seen in the context of Cumbria County Council's overall expected budget reductions of around £88 million over the same period and expected further reductions of £80 million in the three years to 2016/17.

The number of wholetime firefighters has declined by 53 (to 223) since 2010 and the number of retained firefighters has declined by 39 (to 430) over the same period. Overall the staff employed by the service has declined by around 12 per cent since 2010.

The service has adapted to ensure that front-line services are maintained. Changes have included the introduction of flexible crewing arrangements and the introduction since 2011 of four-person crewing of fire appliances.

At management level, people have taken on additional roles as staff levels have fallen.

Against this backdrop the service continues to deliver comparatively well in key areas such as home fire safety checks, accidental dwelling fires, and non-fatal fire casualties. However, given that CFRS's operation is lean there must be a question about the longer-term sustainability of the service in its current configuration, given the budget challenges faced by the County Council. Aligned to this is the need for staff at all levels to contribute to the debate about what the service is not going to do.

- **With the wholetime establishment stretched, any future decisions relating to funding reductions should continue to be risk based**

CFRS's senior team is confident that there are further changes that could be made, within the context of a revised integrated risk management plan that could generate further savings, if this is required by the county council. It is important that any changes are undertaken in a planned manner and underpinned by robust risk analysis.

Given that reductions in funding for CFRS in the 2010 spending round period have been front loaded, it is likely that savings from back office and support functions have already been exhausted. Changes to front line services require public consultation and need to be planned. This argues against a simple top-slicing approach or in-year budget reduction, which make risk-based service planning more difficult.

- **Merger might be an option but there is a need to be realistic about the timescales and a clarity around the financial and service objectives of such a move**

One of the potential options for CFRS is a merger with another fire and rescue service. Indeed it explored this option in 2011 with Northumberland FRS, commissioning a feasibility study to consider sharing fire and rescue service management up to a full merger. At that time the merger talks were not fruitful. There is one example in England of successful merger of two fire and rescue services (Devon and Somerset), and this is an option which many fire and rescue authorities will be exploring at this time.

Evidence from local authority mergers, of which there are now many, is that initial savings come from reductions in senior staff, but that the real opportunities for savings come from deeper service integration. As such, mergers do not remove the need for difficult risk-based decisions.

The processes around mergers are notoriously tricky, requiring both a sound business case and political will. There is a need to be realistic about the time needed to secure a merger and the profile of future savings.

- **Although the fire service is embedded in the council, opportunities for operational staff to better understand the councils wider agendas and implications are not fully realised**

At a senior level, both in CFRS and the wider county council, there is a good understanding of the role that the fire and rescue service can play in supporting the council's prevention agenda and its priority objectives. This was evident from the peer team's discussions with the Chief Executive and representatives from public health and adult social care.

However, at a more operational level there is a tendency to see these wider agendas as a distraction from the core firefighting role. The peer team have no specific evidence that this attitude impacts on outcomes, but as CFRS rolls out the home accident reduction checks, there is an opportunity to explore with the entire service the opportunities that the wider prevention agenda presents for CFRS to become central to the county council's plans and future success.

5. Leadership and governance

Strengths

- **The portfolio holder is a strong advocate for the service and there are good working relationships between members and officers. The Chief Executive understands the fire service and the contribution it can make to wider council priorities**

The elections in May 2013 have resulted in a new administration at Cumbria County Council. The new Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities has quickly come to grips with the fire and rescue service. He has spoken to staff from across the service and developed a good understanding of the challenges faced by the service and the options for addressing these issues.

The chief executive has a good understanding of the fire service and a vision for how the service can play an important role in the achievement of the council's priorities. In particular this relates to the role that CFRS can play in public health and in wider public safety matters.

- **Strong and committed senior and middle management team have worked hard to implement a challenging change agenda**

The peer team was very impressed with CFRS's senior and middle management from the Chief Fire Officer down. They have taken the opportunities presented by being embedded in the county council to re-orientate the service to meet the local authority's public health and social care agendas.

The senior team has also overseen substantial change including the introduction of innovative approaches to crewing, the transfer of the headquarters to Penrith from Cockermouth, the introduction of a new approach to training and the transfer of Control Room functions to Cheshire FRA and the preparation for the move in January 2014 to the new North West Control Centre in Warrington.

The pace of change has been rapid, yet morale across the organisation remains high and this is a credit to the way in which change has been managed.

- **Ethos of section 17 Crime and Disorder Act responsibility is evident throughout CFRS**

The Crime and Disorder Act provided a national framework for the establishment of Community Safety Partnerships in each area. In Cumbria County Council this partnership under the auspice of 'Safer Stronger Communities' is viewed as very much part of the broader "public safety" agenda which includes fire safety, health promotion and road safety.

It is evident and noteworthy that CFRS has embraced and fully supports this concept, which requires their staff and volunteers to go beyond their core responsibilities to support the wider issues of this agenda.

Areas to explore

- **Political leadership need to explore all options and grasp the difficult decisions that will have to be made to meet the financial challenge**

Cumbria County Council, along with the rest of local government, faces unprecedented financial pressures. Strong political leadership is required to ensure that all potential options for dealing with future financial pressures on the fire service, including reconfiguration of current services are fully considered. In almost every area of the country, fire authorities and councils are taking decisions to reduce the number of appliances and close fire stations. These are never popular decisions and there is a key political role in leading the debate, communicating the rationale and outlining the mitigation employed to reduce any negative impacts associated with these decisions.

- **Decisions should be risk-based and this approach should be used to communicate the impact to members and communities**

It is important that decisions about the financing and future configuration of the fire service are risk based. The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) ensures that fire and rescue services are planned on the basis of risk. Community risk management in CFRS is good. This should give confidence that proposals for future service delivery that emerge from this planning process will reflect a sound picture of the local risk factors. This can be the basis for discussions with local communities on the future of their fire service.

- **Scrutiny is enthusiastic, but the service needs to work with members to ensure that scrutiny provides robust and constructive challenge and support**

Effective scrutiny adds tremendous value to the delivery of all public services. CFRS has benefited from a history of engaged and enthusiastic scrutiny. The allocation of member champions to key service areas, including fire and rescue, has enabled Cumbria's Safe, Stronger and Inclusive Communities Advisory Board to gain a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the service and this has improved its capacity to provide effective scrutiny.

The role of scrutinising fire and rescue has now been subsumed into the Communities and Place Advisory Board, which now has a wide remit including the environment. Given this change it would be good if the system of member champions could be retained.

In the coming year the council has some important decisions to take in respect of the fire service. Scrutiny will have an important role to play in holding decision makers to account and providing a conduit for community involvement in the decision-making process. CFRS will need to continue to work with the Advisory Board and member champions to create and maintain the conditions for robust, constructive challenge.

- **There is a need to develop medium to long term vision for fire service**

CFRS continues to transform as it manages reducing budgets. The wider changes taking place within local government, not least in the area of public health, provide opportunities for the service and it is alive to these, particularly at a strategic level. It has taken the opportunities to broaden out its prevention remit, as evidenced by the move to Home Accident Reduction Interventions, and there is an appetite from within the council for CFRS to take on the broader public safety delivery role. As budgets are further stretched its ability to manage this transition in an ad-hoc or opportunistic way may be limited. CFRS and the wider council could reap benefits from setting out what the fire service can and ought to be doing in the medium term, including its role in delivering public health, and the route to delivering this vision.

Elements of this vision are contained in the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2014-17 which went out for consultation on 17 October 2013, the Community Fire Safety Strategy 2013-17 and the Cumbria Community Safety Agreement. The challenge now is for CFS to bring these together to take the Service forward.

6. Training and development

Strengths

- **Recently introduced structured training programme based around core skills has the potential to improve consistency and effectiveness of training for on-call personnel**

In April 2013, CFRS implemented a new training framework for on-call firefighters. The new approach contracts on-call firefighters to undertake 94 hours of operational training a year and to attend compulsory one day courses on scene safety, Compartment Fire Behaviour training and Breathing Apparatus refreshers. An annual programme of training has been established aligned to the CFOA core operational competence model. Some of the training is delivered as e-learning modules.

The feedback received by the peer team is that the training programme has been positively received by on-call staff. It is recognised that there is a comprehensive operational skills and knowledge base to maintain and that on-call staff should have the same core skills as wholetime firefighters. The training scheme is seen as an investment in the on-call staff.

It will take time for staff to adjust fully to the new training framework. The new approach requires a reasonable level of computer skills and does require on-call staff to do some of the on-line training outside of the weekly two hour training sessions. The on-line system was described as difficult to use, but it was recognised that a new and “simpler” version of the system was to be introduced in January 2014. On-call staff were also keen to do as much of their training as possible in their station teams rather than travelling to other sites. The current system provides the opportunity for this to happen and the need to travel to other sites is normally to undertake specialist training or to catch-up on elements of the core model, if these sessions have been missed in the home station.

- **On-going investment in training facilities demonstrates the commitment to firefighter safety and this is well received by staff across the organisation**

CFRS has been able to invest in new training facilities and these are valued by staff. An in-house fire behaviour training facility has been provided at Penrith and is used by both the Fire and Police service. New training facilities have also been developed in other sites as part of the North West Fire and Rescue Service PFI project, which has seen five new stations built in Cumbria: Carlisle East; Carlisle West; Patterdale; Penrith; Workington.

- **Robust assessment for incident command competence including independent assessment at middle management level**

CFRS, though its successful partnership working, has had access to Cheshire Fire Authority's state-of-the-art Incident Command Training Suite (ICTS) at its Winsford headquarters. CFRS has provided command assessments for some managers (including middle managers) through this partnership with Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service.

- **Innovation in external partnership working e.g. apprenticeships and student placements has the potential to improve future recruitment and tackle wider social issues**

In September 2012 CFRS began its Advanced Apprenticeship in Emergency Fire Service Operations, with eight young people from across the County. The apprentices were drawn from 300 prospective candidates. The apprenticeship is a rigorous and structured two year process which provides the young people with skills and nationally-recognised qualifications, including BTEC and a diploma and allows them to experience a broad range of activities such as breathing apparatus, pumps and ladders and specialist rescue techniques. The programme is only the second of its kind in the country and is of notable practice.

CFRS also works in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) to provide work placements for participants of UCLAN's BSc Fire and Leadership course.

These are both excellent examples of CFRS aligning its agenda with wider social outcomes and working with people in the community to provide skills and potential future work opportunities.

Areas to explore

- **Moving Learning and Development (L&D) to the corporate centre needs to be effectively managed so that the service continues to benefit from a broader range of L&D support**

Cumbria County Council has taken the decision to centralise the Learning and Development function, which has in the case of CFRS previously been devolved. Responsibility for operational training and the related budgets will remain with CFRS, but broader training including managerial development will be provided centrally. This should not necessarily lead to any diminution of the focus of L&D on the fire service, but it will be important for CFRS to continue to monitor the impact to ensure that its broader non-operational training needs are being met and that equality & diversity and learning & development best practice are duly considered in the development of operational training.

- **Initial implementation of the new on-call training programme has been well received, but it will need to be reviewed after the first year cycle to ensure that it is delivering the required outcomes**

The new core training programme for on-call firefighters is still relatively new and will need to be fully reviewed after its first year. Some of the issues that may be included in any review include: whether the one year cycle of training and assessment for on-call firefighters is effective in enabling the delivery of both core skills and broader operational training requirements (for example, regional standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the upcoming interoperability programme (JESIP)); the

extent to which the training programme meets the needs of on-call firefighters who provide standby duties on wholetime stations; the extent to which the learn-pro upgrade, due in January 2014, provides a more user-friendly on-line learning experience for on-call firefighters.

- **The sustainability of the training programme with current resources will need to be kept under constant review**

As elsewhere in the service capacity is a potential issue. Arrangements for implementing the new training programme depend on on-call firefighters having the capacity to maintain their cycle of training and on the availability of both trainers and assessors. If the fire service is to face any further budget pressures the training programme will need to be reviewed for its sustainability.

The move to watch managers becoming a flexible resource suggests the need for crew managers to take on assessor roles. A pilot programme is in place, which has ensured that on-call crew managers with assessor qualifications are available, but as yet this is not happening fully. CFRS will also need to ensure that there are sufficient internal verifiers to oversee assessors.

7. Prevention

Strengths

- **Strong commitment to building a safer Cumbria**
- **The development of Home Accident Reduction Interventions and the good partnership working and information sharing this entails is innovative**

The Fire Service has demonstrated the vital and important role it plays in the community, specifically by working in partnership with other public sector organisations in the areas of crime, health, education and housing. Tangible evidence of this is apparent in the scale and depth of the Home Accident Reduction Interventions which the Fire Service leads and conduct across the county. This exemplary and innovative approach to identify risk across a broad spectrum of public safety issues may ultimately ensure that Cumbria is a much safer place and provide meaningful outcomes for the variety of agencies that benefit from this 'one shop stop' approach.

CFRS works hard, often alongside other agencies or with local support, to assist young people to grow into responsible and active members of society. The fire service ethos of team working in a high-risk environment makes it well placed to help young people - especially those who believe they have been left out by society - gain self-respect and capitalise on their own abilities. Work of this kind makes a long-term contribution to every community. The Fire Service's support for Prince's Trust Volunteers is to be welcomed, as are the countless contributions made by staff to youth organisations and groups. CFRS is well placed to continue to support this work.

The Heartstart programme is another example of the commitment of CFRS to community safety. In this programme CFRS leads on the delivery of basic life support training and the use of defibrillators to members of the public and a wide

range of other stakeholders. CFRS was awarded a national Public Sector Organisation of the Year award for this work.

- **Strong engagement from volunteers**

CFRS has a volunteer force numbering just under 100. Volunteers are deployed across the county in providing fire safety messages, and working with young people and communities. This is a very committed and very valued group and there will be opportunities to explore their future role in delivering a range of services including Home Accident Reduction Interventions.

Areas to explore

- **Service might explore an evidence-based approach to Home Accident Reduction programme as an alternative to a target driven approach**

In the development of the new Home Accident Reduction programme CFRS has moved from a target for home visits to a target for interventions. This is to be welcomed as it expands the scope of activity within the programme. The performance target for annual interventions within the programme is 18,000. The Peer Team's understanding is that the target is apportioned equally across CFRS's four operational localities. The county council through its emerging County Plan is seeking a much more targeted approach. In the Peer Team's view there remains a question as to whether a performance measure that focuses on the number of interventions will deliver the outcomes that CFRS and the wider council are seeking.

CFRS has a highly developed Community Risk Management capability and an approach to Home Accident Reduction Interventions that reflects specific risk factors, lifestyles, attitudes and expressed needs could provide a more targeted and outcome based approach. Such an approach would see a much higher level of interventions in those areas that have already been identified through the strategic risk review as high risk. Cumbria FRS is currently implementing new online fire

safety checks which is helping us make progress in this area and is providing a more focused approach.

- **Explore funding opportunities with stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of the Home Accident Reductions scheme**

The collaborative community safety work undertaken by CFRS with and on-behalf of various public organisations will, if effective, lead to reduced demand and financial benefits across the public sector. How CFRS can benefit from the wider public good that it is creating is unclear. This is not just an issue for CFRS, but is common across the public sector as has been evident in the community budget pilot work. However, it might be timely for CFRS to begin discussions with a range of partners and stakeholders, including CCGs, on the model for ensuring the future sustainability of the prevention work.

- **Explore options for broader engagement with locally delivered national community safety strategies e.g. troubled families**

CFRS has skills and experience and a proven track record in using a variety of diversionary activities for youths who may otherwise get involved in criminal acts or anti-social behaviour.

National Government has assigned significant funds for the troubled families programme on a payment by results basis, with the aim of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. In Cumbria, as elsewhere, it provides an opportunity for lead agencies to go beyond conventional approaches and to develop multi-agency bespoke interventions which impact in a positive way on the life and lifestyle of families within the cohort. CFRS's engagement with young people either on a one-to-one or group basis should be an integral part of ensuring successful outcomes. As such there is scope for CFRS to be commissioned to provide interventions and for it to benefit from the outcome based rewards.

- **Achieve a better balance between general community engagement and targeted diversionary activity**

CFRS employs a range of approaches for engaging with communities. The fire service is present at a range of community events, where it is able to communicate fire safety messages.

The County Council's draft Council Plan 2014-17 expresses the intent to “ensure an effective fire and rescue service, targeted at the most vulnerable people and areas of highest risk”. With this ambition in mind and with the on-going resource constraints there is an opportunity to review the balance between general community engagement and more targeted diversionary activity. Cumbria FRS is now working to target community engagement facilities at those at greater risk anti-social behaviour, through collaborative working with the youth offending team and pupil referral units.

8. Community risk management

Strengths

- **An effective risk management approach**

The service has a good understanding of the local risks and over the lifetime of the IRMP it has driven down overall risk levels. The number of lower super-output areas registering as high risk through CFRS's risk modelling has gone down from 11 in 2012/13 to 4 in 2013/14 (these are located in Cumbria's larger conurbations: Carlisle and Barrow). Overall the level of risk has declined by 20 per cent in the five years to 2013/14.

- **Good level of partnership working, information sharing, and engagement with staff in understanding and mitigating risk**

Active risk management is dependent on a lot of work by the community safety team, firefighters, volunteers and others working to identify and mitigate risk. CFRS also has strong links into a range of agencies that enable it to identify risks more thoroughly through effective and appropriate information sharing.

CFRS also has a strong commitment to protecting the natural and built environment and mitigating the effects of natural disasters. It works with a range of partners on these matters including Natural England, The Lake District National Park Authority, The Environment Agency, The National Trust, English Heritage, and DEFRA.

The level of information sharing that has been achieved is very impressive and enables the various agencies' response to emergencies to be targeted, thoughtful, and alive to broader agendas such as safeguarding.

- **Strong resilience partnership at strategic and operational level. Fire is a valued contributor**

The resilience Unit now sits alongside the Cumbria Constabulary Civil Contingencies Unit. The co-located team is overseen by the police and this enables partners to collaborate on a daily basis. CFRS is seen as an active and important member of the resilience partnership.

9. Response

Strengths

- **Innovative approach to crewing that has enabled the service to be delivered with reduced budgets and flexible duty watch managers delivering value for money**

In response to financial challenges CFRS has introduced innovative approaches to crewing. Four firefighter crewing of appliances means that wholetime fire stations can operate with a staff of 16. The service has also introduced a flexible rostering system for watch managers and 36 hour contracts.

- **Average “On-Call” availability in excess of 80 per cent**

The peer team was impressed with the on-call availability which in some on-call stations was running at over 90 per cent and was on average just over 80 per cent. This is particularly good given the challenges nationally and locally in recruiting and retaining retained staff. It was notable that many of the retained staff we met had made a long-term commitment to CFRS and all were dedicated to delivering an effective service to their communities.

- **Good partnership working with other agencies**

CFRS has a very good reputation with its partners. The Environment Agency described CFRS as “an exemplar responder to major incidents”. CFRS has also developed a very successful partnership with Bay Search and Rescue (BS&R) a volunteer team and charity based in Flookburgh that specialises in sand and water rescue. The partnership, which was formalised in 2009, has been valuable to CFRS in responding to severe weather events.

- **Effective operational monitoring**

Operational monitoring takes place at all levels in CFRS. Weekly reviews take place at stations and localities. Issues are raised in the organisation through the assurance and performance management routes and the senior team discuss these issues at dedicated performance meetings. There is also a good feedback loop into learning and development and operational planning.

Areas to explore

- **With limited and often stretched resources there is a need to know at an organisational level appliance disposition and availability at all times**

During the visit the peer team was not able to establish whether there was a system for enabling CFRS to know appliance disposition and availability, at an organisational level. Operationally the service is split into four localities, Carlisle, Kendal, Barrow and Workington. Within the localities, locality managers will know whether a pump is off the run as this requires a managerial decision. However, the peer team raise this as a question because it was not clear whether decisions taken within a locality take into account appliance disposition in other localities and also whether there is a central system that holds the overall position.

- **Centralised crewing could benefit from a competence register to help inform crewing decisions**

One of the innovative practices operated by CFRS is a centralised peripatetic crewing capability which can be centrally deployed. This resource provides support for the core four person watches and can be used to cover leave and sickness. The peer team heard that the deployment had on occasion not taken into account the competency of individuals to operate in particular environments and with specialist equipment. A competency register would support this innovative and cost-effective approach to crewing.

- **Seek further ways to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and resilience of the On-call duty system**

CFRS's on-call firefighters are very enthusiastic and are committed to providing a good service to their communities. Recruitment remains an issue, with many retained stations located in areas with small populations, many of whom commute to the larger towns for work. This has particular implications for day-time cover and CFRS is prioritising day cover in its recruitment of on-call staff. The peer team also heard that some on-call staff were finding it difficult to be available for the hours that they had originally indicated. The role of on-call firefighters has, over the years, become much more professionalised and some on-call staff spoke of the attendant pressures this brings. Some authorities have sought to reduce the number of hours that they expect on-call staff to be available in a bid to make the role more attractive. Within this model there is potentially scope to expand the overall numbers of retained staff and improve effectiveness.

There can often be good cover at night time, but systems could be tightened to ensure that attendance and attendance payments are not more than are required

- **A revised approach to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) management could generate savings**

CFRS has done a lot of work to reduce the number of AFA activations, particularly with key organisations such as the university and NHS bodies. The number of false alarms due to apparatus fell by 13 per cent between 2011/12 and 2012/13, a fall which is over twice the national rate of reduction. CFRS has stated that it may suspend attendance to persistent offenders.

Despite this effort AFAs in Cumbria still account for nearly 30 per cent of incident attendance. Over 80 per cent AFAs occur between 0700 and 2100 hours when “the premises are actively occupied and staff present could quickly identify the cause of false alarms and prevent unnecessary turn-outs”. A number of fire and rescue

services now operate a policy of not attending AFAs during the period 0700-2100 hours unless a fire can be verified. Given the high cost of false alarms and the financial constraints that CFRS is operating under, it might be appropriate to revisit the AFA policy.

10. Protection

Strengths

- **Established risk based inspection programme which is subject to effective performance management**
- **Good track record on prosecutions**

A risk-based approach informs the inspection of premises. Risk levels are determined through remote and on-site audits. CFRS uses Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) to ensure the audit process for premises is compatible across all areas of fire and rescue service activity. CFRMIS also provides a job schedule which can be adjusted to take account of changing risk factors. The risk based model means that the overall number of audits declines as targeting becomes more effective. Around 50 per cent of the audits undertaken by CFRS in 2012/13 led to informal or formal notifications.

CFRS has also developed a proportionate and successful strategy towards prosecutions which has led to a 100 per cent success rate.

- **Net benefits from being part of the wider regional protection network**
- **Co-location with other agencies and good links into operational intelligence**

CFRS works successfully with other FRAs in the North West region to deliver training programmes for fire protection officers and to share learning and information.

CFRS also works closely with all the local authorities in the area on issues such as licensing, environmental health and conservation and planning. This enable effective sharing of information and intelligence across the regulatory functions.

Areas to explore

- **Capacity issues evidenced by backlog against the inspection programme and availability of appropriate staff**

The peer challenge team heard that there were capacity issues in the fire protection department. A backlog of inspections had developed and this in part was due to staff availability. CFRS is seeking to deliver this important function effectively and efficiently. As part of that process it will move to deliver the service using Green Book staff.

- **Monitoring the effect of the move of L&D to ensure that appropriate levels of protection training are maintained**

The learning and development (L&D) team has been centralised and it is still a question as to the level of corporate L&D resources to which CFRS will have access. It will be important to ensure that within the transfer of the L&D function sufficient resources are retained or made available to enable on-going fire protection training.

- **Further extend partnership working to private care providers and the wider business sector**

CFRS works with business to raise awareness of fire protection issues. A successful example is the work undertaken with holiday let owners to improve understanding of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. CFRS has used seminars to deliver this information which have been well received and have resulted in a more compliant sector.

There is an opportunity for CFRS to build on this model and to extend it to other key sectors such as private care providers.

11. Health and Safety

Strengths

- **Strongly embedded culture and focus on firefighter safety**

Throughout the peer challenge the team was aware of the focus and strong commitment to Health and Safety. It was a theme that ran through all of the strategic and operational interviews. Firefighter safety is a key aim of CFRS's Assurance and Improvement Team.

The January 2013 review of health and safety procedures undertaken by a review team made up of health and safety professionals from the sector found an overall improvement in CFRS's health and safety management systems.

- **Effective communications and feedback loop**

A range of mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that safety issues are understood and communicated at all levels in the organisation. This includes the introduction of locality-based weekly incident and adverse safety event reviews. This is achieved using proactive incident monitoring arrangements and post-incident briefing. Information is also fed into Learning and Development so that it can inform the training programme.

- **Very effective operational planning**

Health and safety is supported by strong operational planning. This has recently been enhanced through improvements to ICT. Operational Planning also benefits from good partnership working. An example is the work with home oxygen providers which means that CFRS has up-to-date and comprehensive information on the location of oxygen users, of which there are around 800 in Cumbria at any given time. This information is available to crews via the appliance based mobile data terminals.

- **Good investment in equipment and PPE**

CFRS has been able to invest in high quality equipment and there is a strong recognition of this at all levels in the organisation.

Areas to explore

- **Operational Assurance capacity is limited resulting in a reduction in activity against planned programme of themed audits**

As in other aspects of the service, resources are limited and a key challenge is to deliver the planned programme of operational assurance work. Limited capacity has meant that the operational themed audits have gone into abeyance. Only one, relating to Breathing Apparatus, has been delivered to date.

12. Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers and staff. Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service continues to perform well during a period of financial constraint and substantial change. There are still difficult decisions to be taken, but there are also many opportunities for the service as it embraces the wider public safety and public health agendas.

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

Eamon Lally – Senior Adviser
Local Government Association
E-mail – eamon.lally@local.gov.uk

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ
www.local.gov.uk