

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**11 JUNE 2012**

1. **OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND FIRE PEER CHALLENGE**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

**RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 THAT Members note that following a review the concept of Operational Assessment (OPA) has been re-launched and is the fire sector standard assurance tool.
- 1.2 THAT Members note that Corporate Board (CB) has agreed to undertake an OPA self-assessment and will receive a peer challenge to provide independent assurance of the self-assessment utilised.
- 1.3 THAT Members note that in support of OPA, Members of the Audit and Performance Management Committee (APMC) may be asked to meet with the Peer Challenge Team during their fieldwork visit. The fieldwork visit will take place from the 9 July – 12 July 2012.
- 1.4 THAT Members note the intention to submit the final peer challenge report and associated improvement plans to the September meeting of the Audit and Performance Management Committee.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

Further to the email briefing paper provided to all Fire Authority Members on the 19 April 2012, this report is submitted to inform APMC of the review of the OPA concept which has been undertaken by Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA). Following this review and the consequential re-launch of OPA, CB has agreed to undertake a self-assessment using the OPA toolkit. In order to provide assurance of the findings of its self-assessment, the Service will submit its self-assessment for

peer challenge. The background paragraphs below (3.1- 3.16) provide more information on OPA and its implications for the Service and Members alike.

### 3. **BACKGROUND**

#### **OPA- Key Points**

- 3.1 In 2009, the CFOA developed the concept of OPA in partnership with the LGA. OPA comprised of a self-assessment and an external peer assessment and was a component part of the now defunct Comprehensive Area Assessment Framework.
- 3.2 As a pilot Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) played an integral part in informing and shaping OPA. As part of the pilot role WMFS provided its self-assessment in February 2009 and received its peer challenge in April 2009.
- 3.3 CFOA has undertaken a review of OPA which has determined that, subject to some amendments:
  - OPA is broadly fit for purpose;
  - has formed a sound basis to underpin sector improvement; and
  - supports the move away from centralised regulation and inspection through the adoption of sector driven approach to performance improvement.
- 3.4 Therefore, in December 2011, CFOA in partnership with the LGA re-launched OPA and the peer challenge process. Whilst not mandatory, OPA is seen very much as the 'industry standard' assurance tool. It is possible to undertake an OPA self-assessment without receiving a peer challenge. However, peer challenge is a constructive and supportive process with the central aim of helping FRSs/Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) improve. It is not an inspection nor does it award any form of rating category. It is undertaken from the viewpoint of a critical friend and will help FRSs/FRAs to meet the challenges facing them.

3.5 OPA is designed to look at how an FRA leads, prioritises and delivers the interrelated functions of prevention, protection and response in a way which is rooted in:

- a deep understanding of community risk;
- the allocation of resources in accordance with that risk;
- the marshalling of partnership resources to assist in managing the risk; and
- a high regard for operational good practice and the health, safety and development of all FRS staff.

3.6 The OPA process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service; and
- provide Elected Members and Chief Officers' with assurance that their operational service delivery is efficient, effective and robust.

3.7 The OPA will:

- assist the FRA to identify its strengths and areas for improvement;
- inform strategic improvement plans;
- deliver a robust process for assessing operational performance;
- complement and not duplicate any national requirements for financial audit;
- be used as a tool to assist FRAs in the identification and dissemination of notable practice; and
- be flexible in design, and simple in delivery.

### **Implications for WMFS**

3.8 WMFS is required to produce a self-assessment based upon the OPA toolkit. It will be required to evidence its performance across the following seven Key Assessment Areas (KAA):

- Community Risk Management.
- Prevention.
- Protection.
- Response.

- Health and Safety.
- Training and Development.
- Call management and Incident Support.

3.9 The emphasis of OPA self-assessment is on the outcome and impact of activities. The KAA are broadly the same as last time as is the evidence required to support our self-assessment. Additionally, there will be a requirement to provide evidence of how this Fire Service has managed through the actions arising from the 2009 Peer Challenge. The Strategic Planning Improvement and Risk Team (SPIRiT) has worked with lead officers responsible for the seven KAA to produce the 2012 self-assessment which must be submitted to the Peer Challenge Team by 28 May 2012. The self-assessment will be shared with Members as soon as it becomes available.

3.10 To get the best out of this peer challenge process each FRS can identify up to three KAA that it wishes the Peer Challenge Team to place an additional focus upon. CB has identified community risk management, response and protection. These areas have been proposed on the basis that they represent the greatest areas of risk to the Service, its personnel and members of the community, rather than any perceived weakness in the current systems, structures, processes or delivery mechanisms.

3.11 The Peer Challenge Team will also consider three core questions against which this Fire Service will be required to provide evidence of its performance.

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

### **Peer Challenge and Implications for Members**

3.12 Following the submission of the self-assessment, the Peer Challenge Team will undertake a four day fieldwork visit with a view to providing assurance of the self-assessment. CB has agreed that the fieldwork will take place from 9-12 July 2012. As part of the fieldwork there will be a requirement for the Chair and Vice-Chair to be interviewed. It is also likely

that an APMC Members' focus group will be held with the Peer Challenge Team. The exact content and date for the meetings and focus group has not been determined as the Peer Challenge timetable is currently being developed. As soon as the timetable is finalised SPIRiT will notify Members.

- 3.13 The Peer Challenge Team will be led by CFO Paul Fuller (Bedford and Luton FRS). CFO Fuller will be supported by Councillor Paul Lakin (South Yorkshire FRA) who has a background in overview and scrutiny, Group Manager Rob Pritchard (Merseyside FRS), ACO Joy Brindle (Tyne and Wear FRS), and the Chief Finance Officer from North Yorkshire Police, Joanna Carter. In addition, the LGA Programme Manager, Marcus Coulson will oversee the peer challenge.
- 3.14 At the end of the peer challenge the LGA will request permission to make the final peer challenge report public. This may include putting it on the LGA website. However this will not be done without the explicit consent of the WMFS and will only be done at a time that gives this Brigade the time to develop and agree an improvement action plan to accompany the findings.
- 3.15 A paper updating Members on the outcome of the OPA will be submitted to APMC in September 2012.

#### 4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out.

#### 5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The course of action recommended in this report does not raise issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

#### 6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

CFOA has confirmed that the peer challenges will be provided at no cost to the receiving Authority. However, there will be an opportunity cost to the Authority in terms of senior officer time to support the self-assessment submission and peer challenge

process.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

E-mail Briefing Note on Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge which was sent to all Fire Authority Members on 19 April 2012.

Corporate Board Report, Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Toolkit update, 14 February 2012.

Corporate Board Report, Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge, interim review update 22 November 2011

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER