

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

26 JUNE 2017

1. OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

Report of the Chief Fire Officer.

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority note the content of the West Midlands Fire Service Operational Assessment (OpA) and Peer Challenge Report (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 THAT the Authority note the approach to implementing and monitoring the areas for consideration detailed within the Peer Challenge Report.
- 1.3 THAT the Authority note the Service's approach to the publication of the Peer Challenge Report in accordance with the recommendations of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 This report is submitted to inform Members of the findings of the Peer Challenge Report and the feedback received from the OpA Peer Challenge Team following the conclusion of the fire peer challenge. The Peer Challenge Report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Members are asked to note the Service's approach to implementing and monitoring the improvements required as a result of the areas for consideration identified as an outcome of the OpA and Peer Challenge. Additionally, Members are asked to note the Service's approach to the publication of the Peer Challenge report which will be in accordance with the recommendations of the NFCC and LGA.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 In support of its long standing commitment to continuous improvement, the Service has recently taken part in the fire sector specific OpA process. OpA comprises of self-assessment against seven key assessment areas and can be supported by an external peer challenge. OpA is designed to assess how well the Service leads, prioritises and delivers its prevention, protection and response activities. The seven key assessment areas were:

- Community Risk Management: How well does the Authority understand the local context and identify, plan for and prioritise the risks faced by the community?
- Prevention: How well is the Authority delivering its prevention strategy?
- Protection: How well is the Authority delivering its regulatory fire safety duties?
- Preparedness: How well is the Authority ensuring that its responsibilities for planning and preparing are met?
- Response: How well is the Authority delivering its response, call management and incident support activities?
- Health, Safety and Welfare: How well is the Authority ensuring its responsibilities for health, safety and welfare are met?
- Training and Development: How well is the Authority ensuring its responsibilities for training, development and assessment of its staff are met?

3.2 The Service carried out its OpA self-assessment during the Summer of 2016. Although not a mandatory aspect of OpA, the Service recognised that an external assessment of the Service's performance via an independent highly skilled team would provide a credibility and robustness to the self assessment as well as enabling opportunities for improvement. Therefore, a peer challenge was commissioned by the Service (to be carried out during October 2016). The Service submitted its OpA self-assessment to the Peer

Challenge Team in August 2016.

3.3 In addition to reviewing the Service's self assessment the Peer Challenge Team also considered six core questions under the heading of Leadership and Corporate Capacity.

- Does the Authority understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- How is the Authority delivering outcomes for the local community, and is it performing well?
- Does the Authority have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Does the Authority have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- Are effective governance and decision making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment?
- Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas to deliver the agreed priorities?

3.4 In addition to the areas under Leadership and Corporate Capacity, the Service requested the Peer Challenge Team to consider the following specific areas:

- Prevention linked to the Marmot Principles
- Effectiveness of the Integrated Service Delivery Model
- Governance and Decision Making
- Sections 13 and 16 Fire Services Act
- Fire Control
- Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality
- Strategic Management and Leadership
- Training and Development

3.5 The Peer Challenge Team Review took place 17 to 20 October 2016. The team was led by Chief Fire Officer Alasdair Hay of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Councillor Rebecca Knox, Chair of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority provided the Member challenge. Additionally, the

Team comprised:

- Nick Page, Chief Executive of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- Mark McAteer, Director of Strategic Planning, Performance and Communications, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Geoff Howsego, Director of Professional Services, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service
- David Sibert, Fire Safety and Integrated Risk Management Planning Advisor, Fire Brigade's Union
- Gill Elliott, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3.6 As part of the peer challenge process a wide range of employees, stakeholders and partners were interviewed including the Strategic Enabling Team (SET), the Chair and a cross party selection of Members. At the conclusion of the peer challenge the Chair and SET received initial feedback on the Service's performance pending the production of a formal report by the Peer Challenge Team. The Chief Fire Officer communicated these initial findings to Members at the Policy Planning Forum held on 12 December 2016.

3.7 The Service has now received the final and more detailed Peer Challenge Report, the content of which has been approved by SET following consultation with the LGA. The report provides a positive commentary upon the Service's performance recognising strengths across the full range of Service activity, reflecting for example that:

- 'West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is a Service that places its communities at the heart of everything and every decision it takes'.
- 'The Chief Fire Officer provides clear leadership for the Service and the Chair is clearly respected by the Authority and wider constituent partners'.
- 'The Service has a strong focus on its long term financial sustainability and future funding streams'.

- ‘Response times to incidents are impressive’, and that ‘the integrated service delivery model has enabled WMFS to be more responsive to the needs of its community’.
- ‘The Service’s strong brand earns it immediate respect and often entry into the community and people’s homes’.
- ‘Equality is embedded at all levels and staff understand the links to serving a diverse community, their prevention work and delivering within a health agenda’.

- 3.8 As is normal with any assessment process designed to encourage continuous improvement, a number of areas for consideration were identified. SET have agreed with the Peer Challenge Team to consider these suggestions for improvement and are currently working with their teams to determine the appropriate implementation approach.
- 3.9 One of the key aims of OpA is to provide SET and Members with information to provide assurance that operational service delivery is efficient, effective and robust. To this end, the Service will develop an improvement register, designed to inform Members of the Service’s progress in addressing all the agreed areas for consideration outlined in the Peer Challenge Report.
- 3.10 It is intended that the implementation of the improvements detailed within the improvement register will be treated as normal business and as such, will be integrated into the Service’s existing planning and performance frameworks. Progress of the improvement register will be reviewed by SET and monitored by the Scrutiny Committee, ensuring assurance is provided to the Authority. The improvement register will be submitted to the first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2017/18 (currently scheduled to be held in September).
- 3.11 The NFCC and the LGA encourages all Fire and Rescue Services to publish their individual peer challenge reports. The Service is committed to openness and transparency. The Service recognises the importance of evidencing its levels of performance, providing confidence and assurance to its communities, businesses and partners. The Service also recognises and promotes the sharing of learning between

peers. As a result, the Service will publish its Peer Challenge Report externally on the WMFS website. It will also be published on the fire peer challenge section of the LGA website.

- 3.12 The full findings of the Peer Challenge Team can be found within the final report, Appendix 1 West Midlands Fire Service Peer Challenge Report.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out. The matters contained in this report do not relate to policy change.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is not a legal requirement to undertake OpA or a peer challenge. However, the Service is committed to performance improvement and is fully supportive of the sector driven approach of taking responsibility for its own performance improvement.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Toolkit

Policy Planning Forum, OpA presentation by DCFO Phil Hales, 05 September 2016

Policy Planning Forum, OpA Peer Challenge Feedback presentation by CFO Phil Loach, 12 December 2016

The contact name for this report is Chief Fire Officer Phil Loach, contact number 0121 380 6909.

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER