

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**24 SEPTEMBER 2012**

1. **OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT 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) Peer Challenge Report.
- 1.2 THAT the Authority note the approach to implementing and monitoring the areas for consideration detailed within the Peer Challenge Report.

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to inform Members upon feedback received from the OPA Peer Challenge Team following the conclusion of the peer challenge fieldwork process. The Peer Challenge Team feedback report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Members are asked to note the approach to implementing the improvements required as a result of OPA and approve the publication of the peer challenge report.

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 criteria 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.

- 3.2 The Service submitted its self assessment in May 2012. Although not a mandatory aspect of OPA, Corporate Board 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 Board.
- 3.3 In addition to reviewing the Service's self assessment the Peer Challenge Team also considered three core questions under the heading of Leadership and Corporate Capacity.
- 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?
- 3.4 The Team of eight was led by Chief Fire Officer Paul Fuller of Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service. Councillor Paul Lakin from South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority provided the Member challenge. As part of their work, the Team undertook a fieldwork visit to West Midlands Fire Service. This took place from 9 to 12 July 2012.
- 3.5 During the fieldwork process a wide range of employees, stakeholders and partners were interviewed including Corporate Board, the Chair and a cross party selection of Members. At the conclusion of the visit the Chair and Corporate Board received initial feedback on the Service's performance pending the production of a formal feedback report by the Peer Challenge Team. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer communicated these initial findings to Members at Policy Planning Forum on 23 July 2012.
- 3.6 The Service has now received the more detailed OPA Peer Challenge Team Report the content of which has been approved by Corporate Board following consultation with the Local Government Association. The report provides for a positive commentary upon the Service's performance recognising strengths across the full range of Service activity, reflecting for example that:

- The Chief Fire Officer is committed to driving to improvement and efficiency.
  - The West Midlands Fire Service brand is highly regarded across organisations and partners.
  - Most areas of performance in the provision of services are good and improving
  - Response is a strong area with good performance.
  - Home Safety Checks are targeted at vulnerable groups.
- 3.7 As is normal with any assessment process designed to encourage continuous improvement, a number of areas for consideration have been identified. Corporate Board members 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.
- 3.8 One of the key aims of OPA is to provide Corporate Board 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. The improvement register will be submitted to Scrutiny Committee on 5 November 2012.
- 3.9 In implementing the improvements detailed on the OPA improvement register it is intended to treat this work as normal business and, as such, it will be integrated into the Service's existing planning and performance management frameworks. Therefore, performance updates will be provided to Members through the Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Board via the Performance Review meeting.
- 3.10 The Chief Fire Officers' Association and the Local Government Association encourages all Fire and Rescue Services to publish their individual peer challenge reports. The Service recognises the importance of this in terms of providing confidence to the community we serve as to our high levels of performance and enabling our peers to learn from us.

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 associated with undertaking a self assessment or receiving a peer challenge.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Policy Planning Forum, OPA presentation by DCFO, 23 July 2012

Audit and Performance Management Committee, agenda item 5 Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge, 11 June 2012.

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 August 2012, 14 February 2012 and 22 November 2011.

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER