



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge Report

July 2013

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1. Executive Summary

The large geographical area of North Yorkshire and reliance on a significant proportion of retained firefighters presents a number of challenges for a fire and rescue service. The overall number of incidents the Service responds to has reduced significantly over the last ten years. The number of people being killed through fires, road traffic collisions and drowning has remained at a low level over that same period.

Extensive flooding in recent years across the county has led North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service to make water rescue and flood response a priority. The focus on flood response was tested in Autumn 2012 when the county experienced significant flooding. The Service deployed its improved capability to good effect. There is extensive training on water rescue for operational crews, good working with organisations like the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water and the Service provides its crews with high quality kit. Further improvements can be made by developing incident command capability, mapping the location of national assets throughout the region and putting in place a clear prevention strategy to drive down the number of incidents.

The Service has recently introduced a range of new governance structures. It is too early to provide a definitive judgement of the effectiveness of the new structures. There is good work in progress and in the future, the Service, needs to ensure that managers continue to break down silo working and the effectiveness of the new structures are monitored to ensure they are delivering.

The Service is looking to strengthen how its elected members can play a stronger role in their own constituent authorities. Members should consider undertaking a formal quarterly briefing with their district/borough Council Leader and visiting their local station more regularly.

The Service is in a strong financial position compared to many other Services. It has made savings recently. The major financial challenge will be in planning for post 2016 building on the work it has already undertaken.

Overall, the Service is well placed to set out a new vision which illustrates the level of ambition to deliver outcomes. Leadership will be key to providing this new strategic direction. This will include leaders being more visible in the Service and communicating to staff. Longer-term financial plans can support the delivery of the ambition and help to make effective use of existing capacity and resources.

2. Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service in July 2013. 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).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 2-5 July 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activity including interviews, focus groups and visits to five fire stations.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of members, officers, front line firefighters and partner agencies. During the time in North Yorkshire the peer team were very 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 the team in advance, including North Yorkshire's summary Operational Assessment self-assessment and key supporting documentation. The peer challenge did not aim to re-run the Operational Assessment, but instead focused on areas identified in discussion with the Service. The overall scope of the peer challenge was to provide a broad 'healthcheck' across all seven of the Key Assessment Areas and to explore four areas in more depth:

- Organisational and governance structures
- Strengthening member influence in their constituent authorities
- Financial viability and the efficiency programme
- Water rescue and flood response

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a discussion of the findings was delivered to the Services' senior members and officers.

The purpose of the peer challenge was to provide external challenge to help support improvement and to reflect how the Service is performing across the areas of focus.

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.

3. The peer challenge team was:

- Sean Frayne, Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive, Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons, Vice Chairman, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- Chris Strickland, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Peter O'Reilly, Director of Prevention & Protection, Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service
- John McVay, Area Manager, Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service
- Neil Shaw, Local Government Association

4. The journey so far

In 2004 the Service set itself an overall strategic objective, captured in the strapline '125 Alive'. This aimed to ensure 125 more people were alive in the county by 2014 compared to the baseline year of 2004 based on the actions the Service planned to take. It is now time for the Authority to take the opportunity to develop a new clear vision to provide strategic direction. This can be captured in a more robust Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), which aligns financial and other resources to tackle long term challenges.

The overall number of incidents has reduced significantly in recent years: from around 10,800 incidents in 2007/08, to around 7,700 in 2011/12. The number of fatalities from accidental fires and road traffic collisions is low and has stayed fairly consistent around 2 per annum, over the last 10 years. The number of fatalities from road traffic collisions has halved since 2004.

5. Organisational and governance structures

Strengths

- **New governance arrangements are in place**
- **Aiming to achieve cross-cutting working**
- **Good relationship with representative bodies**

The Service has recently introduced a range of new governance structures. It is too early to provide a definitive judgement of the effectiveness of the new structures. However, it is possible to say that their aim is clear. This is to create forums for more cross-cutting discussions, allow issues to be dealt with at the appropriate level in the organisation, allow less senior officers to be brought into discussions when relevant and provide a 'sounding board' for key policy and procedural changes.

The new structures have pushed down some decision-making and this can create opportunities for officers to take greater accountability. The structures have also created an opportunity for key people to sit on more than one group

which can provide a 'read across' on issues and work to break down silo working.

There have been a series of changes to the Service's organisational structure. The primary driver for these is to make an overall reduction in the organisation's headcount to deliver a financial saving. This has included the loss of one post at Principal Officer level, changes to the roster system, amalgamation of administrative functions at Headquarters and previous reductions in the number of fire fighter and Control staff. Overall, this has resulted in a staffing reduction in the region of 14%.

Representative bodies play a part in the organisational/governance arrangements. Feedback from the representative bodies was positive and relationships are generally good.

Areas to explore

- **Work more collectively consistently**
- **Monitor structures to make sure they are delivering**
- **Robust and appropriate challenge**
- **Leadership capacity**

Key organisational structural changes need to be accompanied by behavioural change in some managers if the new arrangements are to break down silo working further and speak with a common voice. There is some early evidence to indicate this can work well. However, there needs to be a consistent shift in managers' approach to want to work more collectively and take responsibility on cross-cutting issues even when these are outside an officer's area of responsibility. This will include providing clarity to middle managers on their new role and clear expectations on how they can engage in the development of new strategies.

A key test of the new structures will be the ability of officers to consistently work collectively in the future. To further assist this, the Service may want to consider evolving the governance groups so that they take a more empowered and active role in bringing issues forward which will help the Service address its challenges. This might include developing groups around Service priorities or a thematic delivery plan for each group which clearly provides different managers responsibilities. For example, developing a 'People' delivery plan which encompasses all the Service's people management work, not just the work of the Human Resources function.

It is critical that the new governance structures are fit for purpose – delivering the outcomes the Service desires. There is a need to monitor their effectiveness and not be afraid to shape the structures if they are not delivering. It is important for the new governance groups to provide adequate challenge as well as oversight of key policy and procedural issues. This is a work in progress. Whilst there are some examples of challenge in the groups this needs to continue to happen consistently. Constructive challenge can add real value for the groups, especially within the Corporate Management

Board (CMB), and ensure new policies and procedures are really fit for purpose.

Leadership capacity will be a key element of ensuring the Service can steer the organisation in future years. The Service has no effective organisational development plan. Although a People Strategy exists this could be strengthened significantly. The Service will change over the next few years and organisational development needs to play an important role in enabling the change to take place. The Service now needs a robust and detailed organisational development plan which explores how the Service will deliver succession planning for senior officers, develop the talent of the Service and develop the skills and capacity of the Service to deal with the changed organisation. The organisational development strategy can provide a road map for how the Service's people will better be able to support the Service over the next few years.

Strategic planning is a key skill for any organisation. Strategies need to provide a clear future direction and be supported by clear delivery plans. There is an opportunity to further enhance the skills of those who have strategic management responsibilities by revisiting the Service's approach to developing strategies which should provide a clear roadmap for achievement which can be tracked.

6. Strengthening member influence in their constituent authorities

Strengths

- **Good relationships between members and officers**
- **Providing political input on some key decisions or challenging issues**
- **Chair and other members have worked hard and shown political maturity in building a consensus on issues across all the political groups**

The Service recognises the importance of strong political leadership for the organisation. Members understand how the Service works. There are a number of structures to engage members, including; a Steering Group, Full Fire and Rescue Authority, Audit & Performance Review Committee, a range of other sub-committees and an Informal Member Forum. These can be useful in providing political input on some key decisions or challenging issues. Their input on issues like the York and Snainton fire reviews show how members can influence and how this can add value on sensitive projects.

The Chair and other members have worked hard and shown political maturity in building a consensus on fire issues across all the political groups. The Authority works apolitically on shared priorities for the benefit of North Yorkshire's communities. The Service recognises the challenges of using Authority members to provide greater influence in their own constituent authorities. This is not easy, with a range of different authorities, with different political/organisational priorities and of different political make up.

Areas to explore

- **Provide a political steer in uncertain financial times**
- **Members becoming more involved locally**
- **Quarterly briefing with their district/borough Council Leader**

The Service will face some challenges in coming years and some decisions that need to be taken may not be palatable. Members need to be able to provide a political steer on priorities and assure themselves that the Service is coping with the challenges. This can be further strengthened by officers supporting members in more informal arenas to understand the implications of major issues like the changing financial climate.

Feedback from stations indicates that there can be limited visibility of local members. This can be improved by members becoming more involved in supporting local prevention campaigns or simply visiting their local station. Fire Authority members should consider undertaking a formal quarterly briefing with their district/borough Council Leader. This should go beyond an information update and focus on how constituent authorities can better support the Service's priorities and keep the Service on their agendas. Outcomes from these briefings can be fed back into the existing Steering Group to provide a political 'feel' for issues.

Development for Authority members focuses on boosting members understanding of Service issues, context and statutory duties. Regular contact with district managers and local fire station staff will go some way to enhance, support and develop this greater awareness and understanding. The Service relies on members constituent authorities to provide skills training. The Authority may wish to consider undertaking some softer skills development to support members strengthening their overall skills such as how to challenge even more appropriately and robustly.

7. Financial viability and the efficiency programme

Strengths

- **Strong financial position up to 2016**
- **Achieved some efficiency savings**
- **Procurement function is seeking to identify future areas for efficiency savings**

The Service is in a financially strong position compared to many other Services. It has a strong position in relation to reserves. The Service has had a strong focus on financial management for many years. The Service has shown it can make efficiencies. It initiated a series of efficiency reviews in 2012, saving £1.1m mainly through staffing reductions.

There is a sound financial plan in place for the medium term. There is a plan to reduce revenue budgets by £2.5m overall and plans in place to deliver this. The Service's procurement function is seeking to identify future areas for efficiency savings through contract renewals and in some areas, a more

mixed economy of service delivery. For example, moving vehicle maintenance to a blend of in-house and contracted delivery in the past.

Areas to consider

- **Major financial challenge will be in planning for post 2016**
- **Continue updating staff on the financial position**
- **Continuation of collaboration work with North Yorkshire Police**
- **Undertake a full fire cover review of the County**

The three-year plan to deliver the £2.5m revenue budget reduction is being kept on track by using reserves. Although savings have already been delivered, some previous savings have been recycled back into growth bids for 2013/14. This has increased the size of the savings shortfall and the Service needs to manage the financial risk around delivering the total budget reduction over the next two financial years.

However, the major financial challenge will be in planning for post 2016. There is a strong perception throughout the Authority that the financial landscape will not significantly affect the organisation in future years. There is an opportunity for the Authority to build on its current financial modelling to plan for the changing needs of the organisation and likely further public sector budget reductions. The Authority has the opportunity to take the time from now up to 2016 to develop robust financial plans in detail taking the advice of the Treasurer building on the work that has already taken place on financial modelling for the next 10 years.

A number of proposals exist to bring North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue and Police functions closer together. This includes headline proposals to co-locate some functions and bring together some business functions. Closer working might generate efficiency savings, but it will be important to develop the business case for these focusing on the added value closer working will bring as well as the efficiency saving. The Service has limited track record in sharing facilities and bringing functions together with other organisations. This is despite the fact that the Service are keen to explore sensible options to share with other agencies. There is a need to continue progressing this initiative and look across other organisations to see if there are wider opportunities for collaboration.

Reductions in staffing or the bringing together of different functions often has additional short term costs which need to be considered as part of any future savings proposals.

The Service should consider undertaking a full fire cover review of the County including consultation with local communities, and not reviews linked to each station area in isolation. It is not clear if the capital programme or the IRMP is driving the station replacement/refurbishment requirement. A more corporate approach has the potential to accrue more efficiencies whilst delivering a more effective service. This will help with the future capital programme for new stations.

8. Water rescue and flood response

Strengths

- **Service deployed its improved capability to good effect in 2012 flooding**
- **All operational crews are trained**
- **Water PPE and kit is of a good standard**
- **Support for work through campaigns such as ‘Dying to be Cool’**

The Service has made water rescue and flood response a significant priority. This is in reaction to a number of significant flooding incidents across the county over the last few years. The Service has invested in this priority which has significantly boosted the Service’s capability. Response to significant flooding in Autumn 2012 appears to have been good. The Service was able to deploy its improved capability to good effect.

Wider working with organisations like the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water has meant that resources can be released more quickly, for example, in relation to recent flooding in Malton. The Service has taken a structured approach to its water work through the Water Response Group. All operational crews are trained to level 2 – water first responder. The Service has rolled out its provision from level 2 up to level 5. This is creating a significant on-going requirement to maintain this skill level across the Service, which the Service is currently looking to meet through structured annual refresher training with accredited practitioners.

Feedback from crews indicates that water PPE and kit is of a good standard. The Service supports its water rescue work through campaigns such as ‘Dying to be Cool’, which is excellent. The Service is looking to further boost flood response capacity through training with the Swaledale Mountain and Caves Rescue Teams.

Areas to consider

- **A clear prevention strategy to drive down the number of incidents**
- **Further develop incident command capability**
- **Mapping and understanding the location of national assets**

The Service’s response to flooding incidents will be shaped in a wider context by the ability of national Government, local authorities and organisations like the Environment Agency to reduce flood risk over the long-term. Developments to improve flood management will shape the Service’s future view of flood risk. There is a need to further develop incident command capability, which the Service recognises.

There is additional benefit in mapping and understanding the location of national assets throughout the county/region. For example, the location of high volume pumps available from other organisations. This is a process which has already started. If water rescue is a Service priority then a clear prevention strategy needs to be in place to drive down the number of incidents.

9. Community risk management

North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service is a community focussed service. The Service uses a combination of FSEC toolkit, Entec and a risk calculator to provide a 'live' picture of risk. Each station has its own risk profile resulting in local action plans. Firefighters have a good awareness of their local risks. Members are aware of the community issues. The Service uses local networks to share information. The Service is a key driver in the Local Resilience Forum.

However, the Service should consider undertaking a consultation exercise with a wide range of organisations so that they can better understand the benefits that the Service can provide. There is a need to mature the IRMP analytical processes to put the organisation in a better position to prevent risks being realised. Currently community risk data is used to inform local plans. The data can be used more pro-actively to direct the activities of countywide resources.

10. Prevention

The Service supplements its understanding of risk by using the Vulnerable Persons Intervention Scheme and Multi-Agency Problems Solving (MAPS) meetings. This helps to better target prevention work. The Service undertakes a range of prevention activity. This includes delivering "battle boxes" in Boroughbridge and Knaresborough, the Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) courses for young people, fire cadets, school and community group support and supporting countywide events. Feedback from the county's community safety partnership was positive. The partnerships see the Service as a valued partner and are positive about the contribution the Service makes to prevention work. The Service uses organisations like Age UK to deliver home fire safety checks.

In a future climate of diminishing resources it will be essential for the Service to be confident that its prevention work is having a positive impact on outcomes: the Service needs to find ways to evidence that its prevention activities are leading to the reduction in incidents. Currently it is unclear how key data supports this: road traffic collision fatalities and deaths through accidental fires have stayed at a low level over the last 10 years. The number of fatalities from road traffic collisions has halved since 2004. There has been an average of 2 fire fatalities and 39 road traffic fatalities per year for the last 9 years and 2 water fatalities for the last 4 years.

There is a need to develop the relationships with social care, private care agencies and housing associations to provide more comprehensive risk data. Although information sharing protocols have been agreed, barriers are being put in place by these organisations in relation to sharing personal data. Other Services, like Tyne & Wear and Merseyside have made good progress on this issue and the Service should benefit from reflecting on their approach. Some decisions taken by other public agencies are having a negative impact on the Service to deliver outcomes on its priorities. For example, North Yorkshire

County Council's decision to significantly reduce its road safety staff. The Service needs to work with other agencies to ensure joined up decisions are taken particularly in times of reducing resources in areas that contribute to the Service's priorities. Members can play a positive role in lobbying within their constituent authorities to reinforce the Service's priorities.

The Service has an opportunity to increase its capacity for prevention work by using volunteers. The Service has trialled this in the past and is likely to see advantages in revisiting this. This is something the Service is likely to benefit from if the volunteers are recruited, trained and managed effectively. Some Services use this extensively like Cumbria and Cheshire. There may be opportunities to commission the voluntary sector to deliver this on the Service's behalf.

11. Protection

A risk based inspection programme of premises exists. Operational crews carry out basic fire protection audits within their areas. There is strong evidence of the Service successfully enforcing fire safety legislation.

However, there is a need to develop a more robust Fire Protection Strategy. There is a need to develop personnel within the function to achieve the recognised qualification standard. The Service should prioritise the integration of technical fire safety expertise into response. There is also a need to ensure that fire protection roles are attractive in comparison to other similar roles to effectively develop the workforce.

12. Response

The Service's approach to response was explored in detail earlier in the report in relation to water rescue. Overall, the Service has a number of challenges in relation to responding to incidents, not least the size of the geographical area the Service has to cover. Despite this the overall number of incidents has reduced significantly in recent years – from around 10,800 in 2007/08, to around 7,700 in 2011/12. The Service is respected by partners and seen as a 'will do' organisation. There is high availability of retained personnel. Additional hours are afforded to retained personnel for other duties including training.

However, there is a need to address the gap of basic firefighting and technical underpinning knowledge regarding the built environment. There is a need to more clearly communicate to local communities what they can expect from the Service in terms of a response. The Service has identified areas for development in middle and strategic management incident command and has commissioned this work. The Service is in the process of developing the appropriate incident command courses and it will be important to ensure this is followed through.

13. Health and safety

The Service has all the key health and safety policies in place. There has been continuous successful achievement in health and safety recognised and awarded by RoSPA over many years. All drivers have the opportunity to undergo Institute of Advance Motorist training.

The Service has placed an emphasis on accident reporting. This may explain an increase in the number of on-duty accidents over the last three years, from 53 in 2010/11 to 70 in 2012/13. This should form a focus for future accident reduction. There has been an increase in the number of accidents involving appliances when not travelling on blue lights. From 34 in 2010/11 to 45 in 2012/13. The Service needs to explore this pattern to identify ways of driving down the number of accidents. The sustainability of training provision in technical areas such as water rescue over forthcoming years will be a challenge.

14. Training and development

District trainers are supporting the development of retained staff. A network of district trainers exists to support water rescue training. There is recognition of the importance of incident command throughout the service and priority is being afforded to the project. There are regular programmed exercises. The Service chairs the local resilience forum for training and exercising. Firewatch enables training to be kept up to date. Feedback from firefighters was positive about the quality of fire training.

However, there needs to be a much stronger approach to increase the capacity required to deal with the full range of training needs across the Service for all duty systems employed. This should include a more pro-active approach to identifying training needs. The Service can use the professionalism of the qualified fire protection officers to a greater extent to disseminate relevant information across the Service in relation to technical fire safety.

15. Call management

The Service has begun discussions to look at changes to Fire Control. An agreement is in its early stages with Cornwall Fire & Rescue Service to put in place simultaneous control. Resilient fall back arrangements are in place in house and externally. Arrangements are in place with Cleveland Fire & Rescue to provide additional resilience for Control, but this needs to be tested. There is a willingness of Command and Control personnel to embrace change and explore options for future delivery of service.

However, there is a need to utilise the performance data available from the new system to influence strategic direction. Continue to progress the work with Cornwall Fire & Rescue Service to ensure the continued efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of the Control function.

Further Information

How the peer challenge aims to add value

The LGA is keen to understand how peer challenge can add real benefits for the Service. We will evaluate the peer challenge, but we are also keen to track the benefits the Service have derived from the work. The benefits will be explored sometime after the peer challenge. However, the peer team have identified the following likely significant benefits from this peer challenge:

- **Helping to shape a new vision** – the Service is looking at developing a new vision over the coming months. The peer challenge hopes to ensure that the new vision is focused on how the Service can deliver better outcomes. Also ensuring that the vision is relevant, sets out a clear strategic direction and explains how the Service’s resources are aligned and illustrates the level of ambition to deliver the outcomes.
- **Providing a longer-term focus on finance** – the peer challenge flagged the importance of planning for after 2016. Although financial modelling has taken place, the challenge aimed to raise the issue of using the next three years to get a robust financial plan in place which is understood by members and officers.
- **Providing reassurance on water rescue and flood response** - this is a major priority for the Service and the peer challenge provided reassurance on the work achieved in this area. It also flagged areas for future improvement like putting in place a clear prevention strategy to drive down the number of incidents, further developing incident command capability and mapping the location of national assets throughout the county/region.
- **Providing broad assurance across service delivery** – the peer challenge looked across all the Service’s service delivery. It confirmed that delivery is fundamentally sound.

Conclusion and contact information

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed officers. It is clear that North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service has opportunities to make further progress.

The peer team believe that by harnessing staff enthusiasm and commitment North Yorkshire can embrace the future, managing the risks and challenges along with way.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge please contact:

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www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge