

Fire Service College

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report provides background to Jez Smith's presentation to the Commission. Jez is the Managing Director of the College and this report outlines some of the changes that have been made to the College since Capita bought the College.

Recommendation

Members are invited to:

1. note this report as background information; and
2. receive the presentation from Jez Smith. Members are advised that there will also be time for questions.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

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Fire Service College

Introduction

1. In March 2013 Capita bought the Fire Service College (FSC) from the Government as a going concern for £10 million. There were a number of conditions of the sale including that:
 - 1.1. the College be preserved as a national training centre for fire and rescue authorities;
 - 1.2. it will continue to offer wider national resilience and emergency services training and exercises; and
 - 1.3. Government permission will be required if Capita wish to sell the incident ground.
2. Capita also committed to invest further in infrastructure and transforming the College to secure the long term future of the FSC and this work is now underway.

Developments at the College

Governance

3. A key part of the transformation of the College has been the creation of new governance structures. Cllr Kay Hammond holds a place on the College Management Board, alongside other key stakeholders including CFOA. The Board is chaired by Sir Ken Knight and its role as a decision making body is to shape the strategic direction of the College. Discussions at the Board so far have included the improvement works underway at the College and an update on the development of the FSC's business strategy. Cllr John Edwards and David Cartwright both attend the Customer Advisory Board for the College on behalf of the LGA, which replaced the former Fire Service College Stakeholder Board. This is an advisory body for the College Management Board, and ensures that key stakeholders are informed and their views are fed back.

Courses

4. Following concerns about the costs of the courses on offer the FSC is looking at creating shorter, more flexible courses to better suit the needs of fire authorities. The College has also offered discounts of up to 20 per cent for discrete high volume requirements from customers. There has been some discussion on the possibility of regional or local delivery to help further with this issue.
5. One of the new courses that the College is currently piloting is Training Needs Analysis for Learning and Development Managers. The aim of the course was to help FRSs to achieve their training goals whilst reducing costs through clearly identifying the needs of the organisation. There is also a newly re-designed Firefighter development course which has been developed to meet the needs of today's fire and rescue services and aims to provide new recruits with the skills they need to become a safe and effective firefighter.

6. Trainee recruits live the life of a firefighter, following a realistic shift pattern and experiencing the demands of real response training in the realistic purpose-built fire station. The course is mapped to National Occupational Standards, and meets National Fire Protection Association international standards.
7. Members will have seen the new national operational guidance on Breathing Apparatus training. The College has now built this into all their training courses, to give FRS's reassurance about the standard of training they receive at the College. In addition, as a result of the findings from Shirley Towers, the College have introduced a training rig specifically to practise dealing with the hazards associated with cables and entanglement.

Facilities

8. The sector had also previously raised concerns with the College about the quality of the accommodation available at the College, there has now been an update of the accommodation in both the Bowles and Tanner blocks. Planning permission has also now been granted for a new 100 bed accommodation block which should be completed in summer 2014. In a similar timescale the College will also be creating a new teaching and training facility for those delegates who are taking part in hot fire training. Work is already underway to demolish the first of four of its older student accommodation buildings, to make way for the new facilities.
9. The College is currently reviewing their catering arrangements to ensure that users are offered the highest quality food at an affordable price, and that all dietary requirements can be met as well as fully catering for all religious and cultural sensitivities.
10. The Simulation Suite at the College is currently being refurbished for opening in January 2014. The suite will use new simulation software designed for the Fire Service College, which will incorporate an assessment and reporting tool.
11. FSC has also now developed a new course booking system as a replacement for FireLearn. The new system, CourseBooker, went live in September. CourseBooker is an integrated pre-course learning facility. This has been introduced alongside a newly re-developed website for the College: www.fireservicecollege.ac.uk.

Appointments

12. Jez Smith is now the Managing Director of the FSC having previously worked as the Account Director for the Fire Service for Capita. Dave Auger has also joined the FSC from Babcock as Sales Director. He will be concentrating on how the College will help the fire and rescue service to develop capability. He will be looking at new delivery and commercial models, which make the most of existing resources whilst recognising the constraints in releasing staff.
13. Jon Hall is joining the College as Director of Training and Organisational Development from February 2014. Jon currently holds the position of Chief Fire Officer at Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service and he has worked in the fire sector for over 30 years. He will be bringing all that knowledge with him when he starts at the College

in February and he will act as the senior professional officer at the College and as the interface into the fire & rescue service.

Logo

14. Since the change in ownership the FSC has developed a new logo for the college, to reflect the new direction of the college as well as highlighting their heritage in the fire and rescue service.

Procurement of training for Fire and Rescue Services

15. Since the change in ownership of the College, FRAs will need to be mindful of the impact on procurement processes and will want to ensure that proper tendering processes are followed for training courses to ensure the training provider market is fully tested.

16. CFOA has offered the following commentary on the issue:

A number of Fire Services have sought legal advice on the issue of procurement with the College and some disagreement exists on whether or not formal tendering is needed. That said there is broad agreement on the need to follow best practice in procurement and the Best Value philosophy. This means that advice being given is that senior officers should package and cost the work sensibly and explore the market thoroughly before purchase and ideally they should formally tender the work.