

FRS Operational Assessment Peer Review Programme - First Phase

Summary

This report provides an update on the first phase of the FRS Operational Assessment peer review programme and assesses the impact it is having on the FRS's receiving the peer reviews. The report describes the approach taken to evaluation and considers feedback from chief fire officers, peer review teams and other FRS contacts.

Recommendations

1. The impact and evaluation report is noted
2. A further report is prepared for the committee in March 2010
3. It is noted that the systems and processes described in the report form a major part of the systems audit approach proposed by CFOA to satisfy the Assurance Model required by CFRA.

Action

1. Agenda item for 8th March committee
2. Systems audit approach is progressed by CFOA and IDeA

Contact Officer: Caroline Bosdet, Senior Improvement Manager
Phone No: 07876 106183
Email: caroline.bosdet@idea.gov.uk

Introduction

1. The FRS Operational Assessment peer review programme is delivered in the spirit of sector led improvement as an alternative to the burden of government inspection and regulation. It utilises the IDeA's tested comprehensive feedback and evaluation systems for corporate peer review. The data used in this report covers the pilot review in March 2009 and the first phase of ten reviews undertaken between May - July 2009.
2. These evaluation systems will be supplemented by additional feedback provided by the sessions held jointly by Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and IDeA and also any feedback reported through the Audit Commission CAA Steering Group for FRS, in order to further improve and develop the programme. See Appendix A.
3. The IDeA operates a corporate Quality Assurance (QA) process for all peer review programmes, including Operational Assessment, to ensure that consistent quality standards are achieved. It is intended that impact and evaluation reports will be produced twice a year for the FSMC and that they and the IDeA systems supporting their production will contribute to the assurance model required by the Chief Fire Adviser (CFRA).
4. The overarching learning points for the sector from this first phase of reviews are:
 - Self awareness – the sector will continue to develop greater self awareness as it takes on responsibility for its own improvement
 - Embedding improvements – there is a lot of change happening and the intentions to improve will develop into outcomes
 - Vision and ambition for the FRS can be developed further

Background

5. The new performance management framework for FRS, under Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), is a significant shift from an inspection regime towards sector led improvement. The new system is based on self assessment with a strong focus on within sector peer review. The key stakeholders - LGA, CFOA, the Audit Commission, Chief Fire Adviser (CFRA) of the CLG and IDeA - have worked together to develop this new approach.
6. The LGA's Fire Services Management Committee approved a partnership between IDeA and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to deliver the Operational Assessment peer review programme, utilising IDeA's experience in local government peer review and adapting it for the FRS sector.

7. An important aspect of the programme, which is under development, is joint work between CFOA and IDeA on knowledge management through the promotion of notable practice using case studies and Communities of Practice (CoPs).

Feedback and Evaluation Systems

8. The initial feedback from the first tranche of reviews has been highly positive.

Overall satisfaction:

- 100% overall satisfaction with the review from FRS contacts
- 66% of chief fire officers and 100% of FRS contacts stating that the review met their original objectives
- 100% of chief fire officers would recommend the IDeA to other FRS's considering a peer review

Outcomes

- 100% of chief fire officers felt that the peer review was well managed
- 83% of chief fire officers strongly agreed that the quality and experience of the peer review team was evident
- 100% satisfaction from the FRS contacts with the knowledge and expertise of the IDeA team.

An opportunity for learning

9. Peer review is seen as an effective way to share and transfer learning and expertise. Through the peer review our officer and member peers help other FRS's, improve and develop their own skills in the process. Members and officer who participate in Operational Assessment peer review value the learning opportunities it provides for them and their organisations:
 - 100% of peers on the Operational Assessment Peer Reviews agreed that being a member of a review team has provided them with learning that they will take back to their FRS
 - 98% of peers rated the peer review as an 'excellent' or 'good' personal development opportunity.
10. As well as the learning opportunities peer review provides for the FRS's concerned and for review team members, there is also the issue of sharing this learning throughout the FRS sector. IDeA is working with CFOA on knowledge management issues, specifically to capture the notable practice endorsed through the peer review process and intends to promote this through the IDeA standard case study model via both IDeA and CFOA websites.

Change, improvement and impact

11. The Operational Assessment Peer Review has a specific remit around the newly established Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOES) in the Toolkit developed by CFRA. These are:
 - Community Risk Management
 - Prevention
 - Protection
 - Response
 - Health & Safety
 - Training & Development
 - Call Management and Incident Support.

12. However, in all 11 first phase reviews additional cross cutting corporate issues were highlighted and identified as strengths and areas for consideration:
 - Internal communications, staff engagement and participation
 - Evaluation – learning from evaluation and acting on it, lack of it leads to unfocussed activity, initiative overload and issues of sustainability of initiatives
 - Sharing good practice and learning across the organisation
 - Programme and project management
 - Performance management - including target setting
 - Change management
 - Capacity
 - Local government re-organisation and the impact of it
 - External communication and earlier engagement and consultation with communities.

13. The impact of the Operational Assessment Peer Review as an effective improvement tool, part of the new sector led approach for FRS, is recognised in the first tranche of reviews. 83% of chief fire officers 'strongly agreed' that there would be a long-term positive impact as a result of the review.

14. The Operational Assessment Peer Review will inform improvement planning within FRS's. The experience of councils demonstrates that the peer review process is instrumental in driving forward improvements. The verbal feedback presentation and reports are used to build action plans for improvement:
 - 100% of chief fire officers 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' that the peer review provided insightful well-evidenced findings that will support future improvement
 - 95% of peers on review teams feel that the review process was 'excellent' or 'good' at identifying the key issues for the authority

Equality and Diversity

23 4

15. Equality and diversity is an identified area for development for FRS's. The IDeA peer review model strives to ensure that equality and diversity issues are taken into account in the process and onsite activities. Equality and diversity is a cross cutting theme in the Operational Assessment Toolkit. 100% of chief fire officers 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' that the peer review gave appropriate consideration to equalities and diversity.
16. IDeA promotes equality and diversity through its work in developing the Equality Standard for Local Government and the new Equality Framework and the Diversity Peer Challenge. Achievements are show cased through the development of case studies and events such as the South East Fire Improvement Partnership Operational Diversity conferences.

Value for money

17. A guidance manual is provided for the client FRS and to team members. After the onsite activity a detailed report is produced for the FRS using the IDeA's corporate quality assurance processes. The Operational Assessment Peer Review is seen as providing good value for money with 80% of the chief fire officers 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with this statement.

Further development

18. IDeA continue to work to ensure that the Operational Assessment Peer Reviews are delivered to the highest standard and represent good value for money, while increasing satisfaction ratings both in terms of quality and impact. Feedback will be sought from the Audit Commission on how the review programme has worked alongside the new CAA regime and can reduce the burden of assessment for FRSs.
19. All of the data analysis, systems and processes described in this report form part of the Assurance Model and systems audit required by CFRA. The review managers and review teams have provided useful feedback on the Toolkit that will be forwarded to CFRA for their consideration.

Financial Implications

20. None identified.

Implications for Wales

21. There are initial discussions with the Welsh LGA on using the model.

Contact Officer: Caroline Bosdet, Senior Improvement Manager, 07876 106183
Email: caroline.bosdet@idea.gov.uk