

24 May 2010

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## **Sector Led Improvement**

### **Summary**

This report sets out progress on the partnership approach to sector led improvement involving the LGA Group and CFOA, including outcomes of the first year of the Operational Assessment and makes suggestions for the future activity.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- Note the report
- Agree a further report be brought to the Committee in six months' time
- Agree areas for further activity.

### **Action**

As agreed by Members.

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## Sector Led Improvement

### Background

1. The Committee agreed a partnership between IDeA and the Chief Fire Officers Association to deliver the Operational Assessment (OpA) peer review programme, utilising IDeA's experience in local government peer review and drawing on CFOA's professional experience. This marked an important shift from an inspection focus to sector led improvement as part of the new performance arrangements from April 2009. The Committee received an evaluation and progress report on the first tranche of reviews in September 2009.
2. Officers have also been working with CFOA, CLG and the Audit Commission on what the next stage of development of the sector-led approach might be, including support to those authorities performing less well.

### Progress to date on OpA

3. In 2009-10, the first year of OpA, twenty one peer reviews were completed. Feedback from members and chief officers on their experience of the review has been very positive. More details on the peer review programme are available via **Appendix 1**.
4. The reviews showed learning points for the sector as a whole:
  - 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 intention to improve should develop into improved outcomes;
  - Vision and ambition for the FRS can be developed further.
5. At the FRA level the key improvement themes include:
  - Leadership, change management and culture change;
  - Internal communications, staff engagement and participation;
  - Programme and project management, including evaluation of initiatives;
  - Sharing good practice and learning across the organisation;
  - Performance management;
  - Equality and diversity;
  - External communication and engagement with communities;
  - Partnership working.
6. We will use the feedback on how the process has operated and key themes around improvement to inform revisions in the OpA process as well as tailoring

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future sector support arrangements. In parallel the CLG Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser is undertaking an analysis of the OpA process to provide Ministerial assurance. This is not unexpected for a new process but, for future years, the sector would expect its own quality assurance processes to be sufficient to provide Ministerial assurance, as it is with the rest of the local government sector.

## Next steps

7. Our experience of the first year of CAA suggests that there is significant overlap between the Organisational Assessment (OA) and OpA. Peer leads suggest that OpA strays significantly into OA territory due to the interdependent nature of service delivery with governance, resources, leadership, partnership engagement and risk planning. If OpA is to become a core plank of sector led improvement then clarity is required on where it sits with the OA process and indeed whether it can absorb some of the elements of OA. There is the potential for the Audit Commission to focus on the use of resources and performance elements of assessment alongside the OpA and Peer review approach.
8. Members are asked to consider the following areas for further actions:
  - the LGA Group and CFOA seek to develop the OpA toolkit further so that it extends further into OA and reduces the Audit Commission role to one of 'tracking the money';
  - CFOA encourages use of the OpA toolkit across the whole of the FRS;
  - the LGA Group and CFOA seek clarity on the role of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser in the future of OpA the LGA Group and CFOA develop further the sector led improvement offer to include support and challenge for those FRAs doing less well;
  - the LGA Group commission an assessment of how the financial challenges facing FRAs may be met, including with ways of doing business differently, to inform future strategy.

## Financial Implications

9. The cost of peer reviews is met by FRAs from existing budgets.

## Implications for Wales

10. The peer review approach is available to UK wide FRAs and we will work with WLGA to ensure Welsh FRAs take up this opportunity.

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