

Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

At the FSMC meeting in May 2011, a Working Group was established to consider the development of the Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge. This paper sets out the Working Group's interim conclusions on the peer challenge process for the fire sector.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the progress and interim conclusions of the Working Group.

Action

Officers to progress work programme subject to Members' comments.

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Improvement and performance support in the Fire and Rescue Service

Background

1. At its meeting in May 2011, the FSMC established a member led joint Working Group between the Local Government Group (LG Group) and Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to develop a proposed method for the new fire peer challenge.
2. The working group consists of:
 - Councillor Kay Hammond – Surrey
 - Councillor Les Byrom - Merseyside
 - Councillor Paul Shannon – Greater Manchester
 - Councillor David Rowlands – Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes

The following officers were advisors to the working group:

Susan Johnson – CFOA Improvement Lead and Chief Executive Durham and Darlington FRS

Joy Brindle – CFOA Performance & Improvement Group and Title

Thomas Simms – CFOA Title

Andy Bates – Principal Advisor, Peer Support LG Group

Gary Hughes – Programme Manager, Peer Support LG Group

Eamon Lally, Senior Advisor, Programmes LG Group

3. At the initial meeting it was agreed that Councillor Kay Hammond would Chair the working group and the Working Group has met twice, on 28th June and 28th July, to discuss the development of the peer challenge. Those meetings were supported by officers from CFOA and the LG Group
4. The terms of reference for the Working Group are:
 - 4.1 To discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the current peer challenge process for the fire sector.
 - 4.2 To discuss the positioning of the new offer (and agree what to call this) in the context of sector led improvement and the LGID self regulation offer
 - 4.3 To advise on the improvements needed to the peer challenge offer focusing specifically on peer training, peer competency framework and quality assurance of peers and the peer review process.

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- 4.4 To advise on the promotion and communication of outcomes from fire sector peer challenge in light of the Governments drive to improve local accountability of performance to the public.

Interim conclusions

5. The Working Group's interim conclusions are:

5.1 The new peer challenge should continue to add value to a revised Operational Assessment Toolkit (OpA) and self-assessment;

5.2 The peer challenge should focus on the operational issues identified through individual FRS's own self-assessments and the associated corporate health elements (leadership and corporate capacity);

5.3 The peer challenge method will benefit from being piloted in a small number of FRSs in the coming months (to include examples of county, combined and metropolitan authorities);

5.4 Peer challenge will be improved by establishing a peer cohort and strengthening the training of officer and member peers;

5.5 Other opportunities such as existing conferences should also be used to communicate the peer challenge offer and to provide support and training to the peer cohort; and

5.6 There will be key role for FSMC and CFOA to promote both the self-assessment and the peer challenge.

Developing a new peer challenge offer

6. The Working Group has made substantial progress in overseeing the development of the Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge. The Working Group has drawn on the feedback from members and chief officers on their experience of the peer reviews that have taken place since 2009. The Working Group has also been able to draw on the experience of a more recent peer challenge undertaken for Suffolk FRS.

7. The feedback from the peer reviews and from the more recent work in Suffolk has been very positive and the Working Group endorses the need for both an industry standard self-assessment process and a complementary sector delivered external challenge.

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8. The development of the peer challenge is integrally linked to the update of the Operational Assessment (OpA) Toolkit which is being undertaken by CFOA. The toolkit has six themes; Community Risk Assessment; Prevention, Protection; response; Health and Safety; Training and Development; and Call Management and Incident Support. The review of the Op A toolkit has strengthened the focus on corporate leadership, resource management, understanding and engaging with communities and multi-agency working. The Working Group has also been keen to ensure that the Op A toolkit reflects the leadership responsibilities and training needs of elected Members. In revising the Op A toolkit care has been taken to ensure that it remains focused on areas of operational importance with issues of leadership and organisational capacity embedded in the key operational themes.
9. In developing the methodology for the peer challenge, the Working Group has recognised that there is value in drawing on the approach that is being used in peer challenges for councils which emphasises leadership and corporate capacity issues. Other aspects of a peer challenge would reflect issues identified in the self-assessment undertaken by individual Fire and Rescue Services.
10. The Working Group have been considering the duration of the peer challenge and believe it should be more tightly focused than the old peer review.

Peer Training and Quality Assurance

11. The Working Group has also considered the feedback by FRSs on the previous peer review programme. The success of the new peer challenge process will depend on Member and officer peers need to be equipped with the knowledge, experience and skills to support improvement. The Working Group considers that it is important for peers to be provided with clear training and guidance to enable them to successfully fulfil their role.
12. It is recognised that members and officers who have previously acted as peers could have moved organisations and that a review of the existing pool of peers is necessary. The findings of that review will need to be discussed with the LG Group's National Peers with the aim of ensuring that the peer pool is adequately resourced in order to undertake the programme of peer challenges.
14. The Working Group has considered the LG Group's existing robust quality assurance framework and is confident that this framework can be developed and adopted for the FRS peer challenge.

Peer Challenge Pilots

15. The Working Group supports the continuing development of the Peer Challenge methodology through targeted pilots and proposes that the feedback from these

pilots will be used to inform the final design of the peer challenge and strengthen the national roll out.

Next steps

16. The Working Group will conclude its work in October and will provide a final report to FSMC at its November meeting.
17. Among the issues to be addressed in the final report will be the proposals on the approach to communicating the outcomes of the peer challenges both in terms of the need to enable communities to engage more effectively with the issues faced by their Fire and Rescue Services and also to demonstrate the capacity of the sector to continue to improve.

Recommendation

18. Members are asked to consider the interim conclusions of the Working Group.