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**Fire Services Management Committee Peer Challenge  
Working Group**

**Purpose of report**

For update, discussion and approval

**Summary**

At the 16 May 2011 FSMC meeting, Members agreed to establish a joint Local Government Association / Chief Fire Officers Association working group to develop the new Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) peer challenge offer. This paper provides an update on the group's work and seeks approval on the new peer challenge offer for the FRS sector.

**Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- 1 comment and endorse the work of the FSMC Peer Challenge Working Group
- 2 provide views on the proposed offer and approach for peer challenge across the FRS Sector
- 3 consider the draft Operational Assessment Toolkit and approve the peer challenge offer for piloting
- 4 agree to reconvening the FSMC working group in 12 months time to review progress and evaluate the learning
- 5 agree the following recommendations:
  - 5.1 that a whole system approach to undertaking self assessment against the revised Operational Assessment is adopted by FRA's
  - 5.2 when undertaking Fire Peer Challenge the peer team will always consider a core set of corporate health and leadership elements, in addition to the agreed operational focus
  - 5.3 that the proposed terminology and principles are accepted
  - 5.4 the approach to elected member and officer training and quality assurance is adopted
  - 5.5 promote the peer role as a positive approach to personal and professional development
  - 5.6 encourage all FRAs to publish their peer challenge reports via their own website
  - 5.7 promote the revised Operational Assessment Toolkit and Peer Challenge offer

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**Action**

Officers to progress work programme subject to Members' comments.

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**Background**

- 1 Following presentation and agreement of the 'improvement and performance support in the Fire & Rescue Service' paper on 16 May 2011, members of the FSMC agreed to establish a member led joint LGA/CFOA working group to look at the operational assurance needs of the FRS sector and develop the peer challenge offer.
- 2 This paper provides an update on the FSMC peer challenge working group and presents the recommendations.

**FSMC Peer Challenge Working Group**

- 3 It was proposed that the following Members would lead the FSMC Peer Challenge Working Group.
  - 3.1 Councillor Kay Hammond (Chair) – Surrey
  - 3.2 Councillor Les Byrom - Merseyside
  - 3.3 Councillor Paul Shannon – Greater Manchester (part)
  - 3.4 Councillor Jeremy Hilton – Gloucestershire (part)
  - 3.5 Councillor David Rowlands – Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes
- 4 The terms of reference for the group were agreed as follows:
  - 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 LGAs improvement and 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 challenge process.
  - 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 citizens.
- 5 Members discussed and agreed the timeline and objectives for developing the new Operational Assessment Toolkit (OpA) and Peer Challenge offer for piloting with the sector.

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- 6 Meeting one – 28 June 2011
  - 6.1 Consider the outcomes from mid term review of the OpA toolkit
  - 6.2 Consider strengths and weaknesses of current peer challenge process
  - 6.3 Discuss broad principles and issues to be considered in future peer offer
  
- 7 Meeting two – 28 July 2011
  - 7.1 Discuss high level peer challenge methodology produced by officers following outcomes of meeting one
  - 7.2 Agree any further consultation work prior to consideration by FSMC
  - 7.3 Discuss possible impact of methodology in relation to:
    - 7.4 Funding resources
    - 7.5 National policy direction
    - 7.6 Political considerations
    - 7.7 Elected member appetite
  
- 8 Meeting three – 14 October 2011
  - 8.1 Finalise methodology and carry out high level risk analysis
  - 8.2 Consider FRAs communication and promotion strategy
  - 8.3 Agree any further actions or communication with wider stakeholders

**Outcomes**

- 9 The Working Group recommend that the following 8 elements form the new fire peer review offer.

**1. A core set of Key Areas for Assessment (KAAs, formerly KLOEs) which all peer challenges will examine**

- 10 The mid term review determined that OpA:
  - 10.1 is broadly fit for purpose
  - 10.2 has formed a sound basis to underpin sector led improvement
  
- 11 In the light of this, the review of the Toolkit has sought to retain two core elements of OpA:
  - 11.1 a strong operational focus which deals with the outcomes of how an organisation is run whilst also supporting discussion of the corporate contributors to this
  - 11.2 a “whole system” look at how the Authority leads, prioritises and delivers the interrelated functions of prevention, protection and

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response in a way which is rooted in a deep understanding of local community risk; the allocation of resources in accordance with that risk; and a high regard for operational good practice and the health, safety and development of all FRS staff.

- 12 These KAAs would be a prerequisite for any peer challenge.

**2. Corporate health and leadership elements**

- 13 The revised KAAs include a strengthened coverage of corporate factors including political and managerial leadership; medium to long term resource planning to ensure financial resilience; and community engagement in service design and delivery.
- 14 In addition, the peer team will always consider three core questions:
- 14.1 How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?
- 14.2 How effective is the leadership and governance?
- 14.3 How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

**3. Agreement on terminology given the different interpretations of ‘assurance’ and ‘assessment’**

- 15 It was agreed that the Operational Assessment Toolkit should be jointly promoted by LGA and CFOA as the industry standard and a way in which Chiefs and Chairs can assure themselves and support their own continuous improvement.
- 16 The Working Group agreed the following principles in relation to reporting to, and communication with CLG, on the OpA peer challenge process:
- 16.1 The OpA self assessment and peer challenge is a voluntary process and neither CFOA nor LGA can mandate its use. If a fire and rescue authority uses the toolkit and invites a peer challenge this is one mechanism to provide authority members, senior officers and local communities a level of assurance that the operational service delivery is effective, efficient and safe.
- 16.2 It will not be the responsibility of CFOA or the LGA to inform either CLG or Ministers of any operational failings identified during the peer challenge approach. The peer team leader and the peer

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manager may seek to broker high level support arrangements, professional or political, if a service is deemed to be at high risk of failure.

16.3 CFOA and the LGA will seek to produce an annual review for the sector on the common themes emerging from the OpA peer challenge reports and in particular highlight any national policy areas that have a positive or detrimental effect on the performance of the fire sector; and indicate any areas of research that could contribute to overall improved performance in the sector.

16.4 LGA and CFOA will provide appropriate resources to their members to facilitate sharing of good practice, knowledge exchange and brokering of sector support services.

**4. Training of member and officer peers**

17 Members agreed the following:

17.1 A new 'Peer Guidance Manual' to set out the new peer challenge offer and the requirements of each member of the peer team. It will include clearly described roles, for both officer and member peers, and outline the expectations and their responsibility.

17.2 A review of the existing FRS peer pool to ensure that the pool is up to date and includes officer and member peers with the relevant experience to deliver a successful peer challenge.

17.3 A new programme of training is delivered for both existing and new peers to communicate the new peer challenge offer and to develop and assess the new skill requirements.

17.4 The introduction of a new approach to the management of the peer pool through the establishment of a peer cohort and the introduction of regular communications.

17.5 Ongoing, regular and robust peer evaluation is delivered to further assess and develop peers.

**5. The quality assurance framework for the peer process**

18 Members agreed to the introduction of a new quality assurance framework to ensure the sustainability and success of the new peer challenge offer.

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- 19 The framework would consist of:
- 19.1 Development of clear role definitions for both officer and Member peers.
  - 19.2 Delivery of an ongoing programme of both officer and Member peer training and development.
  - 19.3 Implementation of a 'scoping stage' conducted by the LGA peer challenge manager. This will ensure clear identification of the FRS requirements and context enabling the matching of suitable and appropriate peers.
  - 19.4 Provision of a comprehensive team briefing for all peer team members to ensure good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the peers and the peer challenge process and expected outcomes.
  - 19.5 Ongoing evaluation and assessment of the peer team. Conducted by the LGA peer challenge manager the views of the receiving FRS and the other peer team members will be sought, evaluated and acted upon.
  - 19.6 Provision of periodic evaluation reports to FSMC and CFOA.

**6. Promoting the impact of a peer role on personal and professional development**

- 20 Members discussed and agreed to work in partnership with CFOA to explore the opportunity to link the Fire peer challenge to CFOA's wider officer leadership programme.
- 21 Officers from the LGA are developing a series of core competencies that will contribute to a specific development module that will be assessed through successful completion of the peer challenge training and whilst delivering onsite peer challenge activity.
- 22 Completion of the FRS peer challenge training and of an actual peer challenge would contribute to aspiring senior manager's continuous professional development as well as offering the module within a wider leadership development programme.
- 23 Members also agree that joint training for both FRS officers and FRA Members would be beneficial and this is being progressed by LGA officers.

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- 24 In addition CFOA and the LGA are committed to the sharing of notable practice and to the learning and continuous development of member and officer peers.

**7. Transparency and publication of reports.**

- 25 Members agreed that the LGA and CFOA should encourage all FRAs to publish the peer challenge report and action plan via their own website.

**8. Communication to the sector on the offer**

- 26 Members agreed that the final OpA Toolkit should be owned by the FRS sector and branded jointly by CFOA and LGA. It will be published and available electronically and be promoted at events and seminars. This is attached at Annex A.
- 27 It is proposed that this is piloted from October 2011 until January – March 2012 with the learning from these pilots informing the final iteration for launch, publication, promotion and roll out from April 2012.
- 28 The following FRS have been identified as pilot areas:
- 28.1 Surrey – County FRS
  - 28.2 Leicestershire – Combined FRS
  - 28.3 West Yorkshire - Met FRS – to be confirmed

**Recommendations**

- 29 The FSMC are invited to consider the 8 elements of the revised peer challenge offer (above) and endorse the peer challenge working group's recommendations.

**Financial Implications**

- 30 There are no financial implications for the FSMC work programme arising directly from this report as the Fire Peer Challenge programme is a core part of the LGA's overall Taking the Lead programme.