

20 September 2018

LGA and NFCC Fire & Rescue Peer Support Framework

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out proposals for the LGA's revised peer support offer to members.

Recommendation

Members are asked to approve the proposals.

Actions

Officers to promote the offer to members, deliver the Peer Support framework throughout 2018/19 and to then undertake an evaluation. It is proposed that the evaluation report is brought to FSMC in March 2019.

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Background.

1. Given the introduction of the Fire Reform Programme and the HMICFRS inspection for fire and rescue services (FRSs), the LGA and National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have taken the opportunity to review the sector-led improvement offer in order to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the sector going forward.
2. A FSMC Working Group was established in October 2016, supported by officers from the LGA and NFCC, to review the sector-led improvement offer for the fire and rescue sector. The working group met three times and agreed the following objectives:
 - 2.1 In a context of the Home Office wider fire reform programme and in particular the development of an inspection regime, consider the future role and shape of Operational Assessment and fire peer challenge, including:
 - 2.1.1 To consider how the introduction of an independent inspection will affect Operational Assessment (OpA) and Fire Peer Challenge
 - 2.1.2 To identify options and proposals for any changes to the OpA and Fire Peer Challenge that will ensure there remains a strong set of tools for improvement within the sector.
 - 2.1.3 To discuss the strengths and areas for improvement of the current peer challenge process for the fire sector that would be beneficial within the changing formalised assurance environment.
 - 2.1.4 To discuss the positioning of OpA in the context of sector-led improvement and the LGA sector-led improvement offer to ensure it is complimentary to the processes introduced by central government.
 - 2.1.5 To advise on the developments needed to ensure that the peer challenge offer continues to add value to the sector.
 - 2.1.6 To advise on the promotion and communication of any changes.
3. As part of the work programme the FSMC Working Group undertook a consultation exercise with the FRS sector including the following:
 - 3.1 Chief and Senior Fire Officer Sounding Board
 - 3.2 Workshop session at the LGA Fire Conference
 - 3.3 Attendance at NFCC Improvement Seminars
4. It became clear from the consultation that the strength of sector-led improvement lies in its ability to flex and address the different needs of the fire and rescue sector. It was also clear that with the introduction of a new inspection regime, the outcomes, which are still unknown, any sector-led improvement offer needed to be able to respond to the differing needs of the sector.
5. Following this and due to significant delays in the development of the inspection regime, the working group disbanded in March 2017 with the agreement that officers should

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develop and test a Fire and Rescue Peer Support Framework, comprising of three core elements;

- 5.1 Inspection Peer Support
- 5.2 Leadership and Governance Support
- 5.3 Targeted Support

- 6 The refreshed offer provides different tiers of support depending on the intensity of the challenges being faced locally. The range of tools and support available have been shaped by what the sector has told us it needs and what would be most valuable to them. In addition we continue to maintain an overview of performance in the sector so that we are able to offer support on a proactive basis, helping those facing the most severe challenges.

Peer Support Framework

- 7 The Peer Support Framework comprises a flexible and tailored set of products to meet the changing and different needs across the sector.

Inspection Peer Support - Peer Challenge

- 8 Peer Challenge remains at the core of our offer. This is more varied than the approach to Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge but still retains the core principles:

- 8.1 Of a team of peers acting as 'critical friends'
- 8.2 The provision of constructive challenge informed by engaging with the service and authority plus a wide range of stakeholders
- 8.3 The focus being on helping the service/authority to improve

- 9 Under the Peer Support Framework, peer challenge will be flexible and complement any inspection activity but will not be constrained by it. It could:

- 9.1 Take place before or after an inspection
- 9.2 Focus on broad areas or more narrowly defined one
- 9.3 Size and make-up of the team tailored to the objectives
- 9.4 Onsite duration in a place will also vary

- 10 The peer team will provide verbal and written feedback and openness and transparency around the outputs and outcomes will be maintained with all FRS/Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) publishing the relevant materials.

Leadership & Governance Peer Support

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- 11 With changes in governance arrangements in some places, the need to strengthen scrutiny and improve the oversight by the FRA of the service, the LGA is well placed to provide peer support through its elected member peers.
- 12 In addition to the Fire & Rescue - Leadership Essentials' programme aimed at elected members with leading roles on FRAs, the LGA is keen to support FRA through peer challenge or other peer support.
- 13 Support is also available to senior leadership teams through a top team development offer. The support would be multi-faceted and dependent on the needs of the FRS/FRA.

Targeted Peer Support

- 14 Overseen by the LGA Principal Advisers based in the region, and working closely with NFCC, targeted peer support would entail a team of sector peers working alongside an FRS/FRA to address areas of under-performance identified either as part of an inspection or independently. This approach demonstrates that the sector is collectively responsible and has the capacity to address its own improvement.

How to access the sector-led improvement offer

- 15 As with support to councils, fire & rescue peer support is accessed through the LGA's regionally based Principal Advisers and/or via the NFCC leads. They are the focal point for discussions with FRS/FRAs about their improvement needs and the support we can make available.

Progress

- 16 We are still in the early stages of testing the framework and as yet do not know the outcomes of the first tranche of inspections, which will no doubt inform our offer. But to date take up has been positive and we have or are currently in the process of delivering a varied range of peer support across the sector. This includes the following:
 - 16.1 **Standard Operational Assessment & Fire Peer Challenge** with a focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Suffolk FRS
 - 16.2 **Deep Dive Themed Peer Challenge** into three core OpA areas with subject matter expert officer peers – Devon & Somerset FRS
 - 16.3 **Deep Dive Themed Peer Challenge** into Procurement – South Yorkshire FRS
 - 16.4 **Pre-Inspection Peer Support** to provide 'critical friend' challenge to their self-assessment – Essex County FRS
 - 16.5 **Leadership & Governance Peer Challenge** to review the revised governance structures and assess the organisational leadership & capacity– Dorset & Wiltshire FRS

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16.6 **Targeted Peer Support** to support Avon FRA address areas identified within the Statutory Inspection and to assess progress against their improvement plan – Avon FRA

Risks and Opportunities

17 We are aware that there are several risks associated with this approach. The main being the capacity of the FRS sector to engage in both a sector-led improvement programme and a potentially burdensome inspection regime – this is in terms of services having the capacity to have peer support and to contribute officer peers.

Implications for Wales

18 The LGA's OpA and Peer Challenge is only available to English FRAs. Welsh fire and rescue authorities are supported by the Welsh Local Government Association.

Financial implications

19 All English Fire and Rescue Services are entitled to support under the LGA 2018/19 Sector-Led Improvement programme funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government grant. We are entering a very detailed negotiation for the 2019/20 grant.

Next Steps

20 It is proposed that officers continue to deliver the Peer Support framework throughout 2018/19 and to then undertake an evaluation. It is proposed that the evaluation report is brought to FSMC in March 2019.