

## **Fire Services Management Committee Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Working Group**

### **Purpose**

For update, discussion and approval.

### **Summary**

FSMC Members agreed to re-establish a joint Local Government Association / Chief Fire Officers Association working group to refresh the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) Operational Assessment and peer challenge offer. This paper provides an update on the group's work and seeks approval of the revised offer for the FRS sector.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- Comment on and endorse the work of the FSMC Working Group
- Provide views on the proposed offer and approach for peer challenge across the FRS Sector
- Consider the draft Operational Assessment Toolkit and approve the fire peer challenge offer for piloting

### **Action**

Officers to progress work programme subject to Members' comments.

**Contact officer:** Chris Bowron  
**Position:** Programme Manager, LGA  
**Phone no:** 07789 373625  
**Email:** [chris.bowron@local.gov.uk](mailto:chris.bowron@local.gov.uk)

## **Fire Services Management Committee Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Working Group**

### **Background**

1. Operational Assessment and fire peer challenge was jointly developed by the Local Government Association (LGA) and Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) and is seen as a key element of sector led improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities. There is a very good level of buy in to the process; all 46 FRAs have undertaken Operational Assessment and fire peer challenge over the last three years.
2. The process is reviewed periodically to ensure it remains fit for purpose and responsive to developments in the sector. Following an evaluation commissioned from Cardiff University in 2013, it was decided to update the process during 2014.
3. Members of the FSMC agreed to re-establish a member-led joint LGA/CFOA working group to review the Operational Assessment and peer challenge offer to the FRS sector.
4. This paper provides an update on the FSMC working group and presents their work in developing a revised peer challenge offer.

### **FSMC Working Group**

5. It was proposed that the following members would lead the FSMC Working Group:

Councillor Kay Hammond – Surrey  
Councillor Les Byrom - Merseyside  
Councillor Jeremy Hilton – Gloucestershire

6. At the initial meeting it was agreed that Councillor Kay Hammond would Chair the working group.

7. The following officers were advisers to the working group:

Ann Millington – CFOA Director: Corporate Services and Sector Improvement and Chief Executive Kent FRS

Joy Brindle – CFOA lead on Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge and Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Tyne and Wear FRS

Gary Hughes – LGA Programme Manager  
Andy Bates – LGA Principal Adviser

Eamon Lally – LGA Programme Manager

12 December 2014

8. The FSMC Working Group has met twice and received an e-mail update once:
  - 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014
  - 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014 (e-mail update)
  - 24<sup>th</sup> October 2014
9. In addition to the working group, a CFOA Development Team was established to review the Operational Assessment Toolkit and a CFOA Sounding Board has also contributed thinking.

### **Update and progress**

10. Working group members agreed that the current programme of sector led improvement had been successful, with all English Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) having had or planning to have an Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge. All FRAs who have had a peer challenge have published their reports.
11. It was within this context that the FSMC Working Group agreed that the approach needed a refresh rather than a radical overhaul and at their first meeting members agreed the terms of reference for the group as follows:
  - 11.1 To discuss the strengths and review the areas for improvement of the current peer challenge process for the fire sector
  - 11.2 To discuss and confirm the positioning of Operational Assessment in the context of sector led improvement and the LGA sector led improvement offer
  - 11.3 To advise on the improvements needed to the peer challenge offer focusing specifically on the peer challenge process, peer training, peer competency framework and the quality assurance of peers.
  - 11.4 To advise on the promotion and communication of outcomes from fire sector peer challenge in light of the local accountability of performance to citizens.

### **Outcomes**

12. Members considered the eight key recommendations from the evaluation of the Operational Assessment and fire peer challenge conducted by Cardiff Business School as follows:
  - 12.1 Assess whether **different types of peer challenges** might be appropriate
    - 12.1.1 It was felt that different types of peer challenges should not be offered and that the approach should ensure consistency (as this was a strength for the sector) but also be able to be tailored towards the specific needs of the FRA.

12.1.2 It was felt that by offering different types of peer challenges there was a risk of diluting the offer.

12.2 Introduce more flexibility within the process so that there is **variation in time spent on site**

12.2.1 This already happens where appropriate and is negotiated with the FRA. It was felt that 3 days was too little and that the current 4 days onsite enabled the teams to provide a robust outcome.

12.2.2 It was felt that any additional peer team capacity should be focussed around providing follow up activity.

12.3 **Update the Operational Assessment Toolkit** to further focus on transformational change, efficiency, innovation, collaborative working and finance, whilst retaining the strong operational focus which has proved successful in the past

12.3.1 It was agreed that balancing the focus on operational and corporate elements was important and that the approach should keep and strengthen the operational focus. It was also agreed that there was a need to strengthen the corporate elements, particularly around finance and transformation.

12.3.2 It was proposed that five core questions used by councils in their corporate peer challenges could be applied to the fire peer challenge. It was also important to keep the focus on delivering outcomes for communities and the current CFOA work on data could support this element. The five core questions will be supplemented with a question on outcomes being delivered.

12.4 Widen the composition of the team to **include peers from outside the sector**

12.4.1 It was agreed that this already happens but should be further developed and formalised within the toolkit.

12.5 Ensure that the **reports are robust and comprehensive**

12.5.1 This is a key responsibility of the peer challenge manager.

12.6 Formalise the current arrangements so that services may receive **additional follow up peer support**

12.6.1 It was agreed that follow up support should be offered and formalised within the Operational Assessment and fire peer challenge toolkit.

12.7 Ensure that where **performance data** exists, this is used to compare how fire authorities are performing

12.7.1 It was felt that this was a key area. The work on this by CFOA and the LGA to develop data sets for FRSs is important and will really help the sector.

12.7.2 It was advised that the work would fit with the FSMC Working Group timeframe and should be included as part of the refresh.

12.7.3 It was also agreed that the data should not be published in the fire peer challenge reports but rather used to help guide the team and to see if the FRA is using data to drive improvement.

12.8 Improve the **dissemination and signposting** to good practice across the sector

12.8.1 The Knowledge HUB (KHUB) is being used to share best practice from Operational Assessment and fire peer challenges.

12.8.2 It was also proposed to use the member bulletins to share best practice.

### **Additional Areas**

13. The FSMC Working group also discussed the:

13.1 Link between the peer challenge offer and the Statement of Assurance and recommended that the latter should be pre-requisite reading for peer teams.

13.2 Importance of having high quality officer and member peers.

### **Summary of the proposed changes to the refreshed Operational Assessment toolkit and peer challenge offer**

14. The proposed changes to the toolkit are:

- The inclusion of a separate section on Preparedness
- Integration of Mobilising and Control into the wider theme of Response
- Strengthening the focus on organisational effectiveness and change in line with the LGA's approach to corporate peer challenge
- Building an emphasis on use of data into each of the key assessment areas
- The introduction of key reference documents within the briefing sheets
- Updating the briefing sheets to take account of key operational developments

15. The proposed changes to the fire peer challenge are:

- Increased focus on:
  - leadership, governance, corporate capacity, financial planning and outcomes for communities
  - the specific priorities and challenges of the FRA – discussed and agreed at the scoping meeting
  - gathering and sharing notable practice
- Team composition – potential to include a peer from beyond the sector
- Flexible approach to on-site activity and formal follow-up
- Benchmarking – suite of comparative data being developed
- Refresh of the officer and member peer pool plus training as appropriate

16. [Here is a link to a draft copy of the revised toolkit.](#) It is proposed that the revised approach is piloted in the first part of 2015, adjusted further as necessary and then

applied to all FRAs commissioning a peer challenge to take place from April 2015 onwards. Pilots are currently being identified.

**Recommendations for next steps**

17. In order to take this work forward, the FSMC are asked to endorse the peer challenge working group's endeavours, consider the refreshed draft toolkit and Operational Assessment and peer challenge offer and approve the piloting of this approach.

**Financial Implications**

18. There are no financial implications for the FSMC work programme arising directly from this report.