



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Report

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Introduction, Context and Purpose

Introduction

This report presents the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA's) Fire Peer Challenge at Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service (GFRS) in November 2013.

The OpA self assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

The sector led peer challenge process is part of the LGA's approach to self-regulation and improvement which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector through the use of peers as 'critical friends'. It is not a form of sector-led inspection but instead, a mechanism to provide fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it meets its operational purpose, is efficient and effective and provides value for money.

Structured into what the peer challenge team saw as key strengths and areas for exploration, the report provides the team's findings against the three key strategic questions which GFRS asked the team to focus on:

- How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?
- How effective is the leadership and governance?
- How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

Using the same structure, it also provides a focus on the Operational Assessment (OpA) Key Areas of Assessment (KAAs) on which GFRS wanted the team's views:

- Health and Safety
- Training and Development
- Community Risk management – (with a particular focus on performance management)
- Response – (with a particular focus on volunteers and co-responding)
- Prevention – (with a particular focus on how balanced an approach GFRS is taking to this)
- Protection
- Call Management and Incident Support

Fire peer challenge is part of sector led improvement. The GFRS Fire Peer Challenge took place from 26-29 November 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, observations, focus groups and visits to fire stations and community projects. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, staff, volunteers, front line firefighters, stakeholders and partners.

Throughout the period of the GFRS challenge the peer team were given every assistance and all requests for further information were met. Everyone the team met were fully engaged with the process and open and honest. This should be recognised as a significant organisational strength outside of that which would normally be captured during the OpA. Prior to the on-site visit, the peer team undertook background reading to familiarise itself with GFRS. This included the GFRS OpA self-assessment and other supporting documentation.

Context and purpose

The OpA self-assessment process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment the sector led peer challenge process aims to help Fire Authorities strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Fire Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector. It is not a form of sector led inspection and is a mechanism to provide fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust

2. The Peer Challenge Team

Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process. They help services with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge.

The peer challenge team for GFRS was:

- **Roy Wilsher** (Chief Fire Officer, Hertfordshire FRS)
- **Councillor Elizabeth Mallinson** (Cabinet Member, Cumbria County Council)
- **Steve Beckley** (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, West Yorkshire FRS)
- **Simon Barker** (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Bedfordshire FRS)
- **Clare Langshaw** (Resilience Officer, South West Ambulance Service Foundation Trust)
- **Ernest Opuni** Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3. Leadership, Governance and Corporate Capacity

3.1 How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?

Strengths

- Good engagement with local communities.
- Equality and diversity embedded at Service Delivery level
- Strong and effective culture of community support in rural areas with RDS and voluntary sector
- The Service is well regarded by Councillors and other community representatives.
- The Service is contributing to effective outcomes across all community groups, with partnership working embedded in Service culture

GFRS is very well regarded by the communities of Gloucestershire. It is clear that this is due in part to good engagement with local communities which is viewed by stakeholders as a particular strength of the Service. Equality and diversity is embedded at Service Delivery level and in common with other Fire and Rescue services, GFRS is having significant success in reducing the number of fires, deaths and injuries thus providing opportunity to deliver efficiencies.

There is a strong and effective culture of community support in rural areas with the Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters (sometimes referred to by other Services as On-call Firefighters) and the voluntary sector. RDS stations in rural areas have joined up with partners in the health sector to form a co-responding scheme to benefit their local communities. It is clear that communities value this resource and are reassured by services being provided via a diverse delivery model. This diversity puts GFRS in a positive position to engage with the commissioned services model being progressed by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) as many of the services that are likely to be delivered in this way are both within GFRS's remit and capability.

The Service is well regarded by senior Councillors and other community representatives. The good relationships the Service has with senior councillors is also assisting in the identification and focus on delivering the best outcomes for all of the county's communities. Overall GFRS's public profile is high and positive and it is a highly regarded public service.

The Service is contributing to effective outcomes across all community groups with partnership working embedded in Service culture. Tri-service working arrangements at the Gloucestershire Tri Emergency Centre (GTEC), provide an effective response to incidents that require a multi-agency response

Areas to explore

- Benchmarking is not currently providing the most challenging information to GFRS and the Service could consider how other FRs approach risk and resource allocation.
- Further integration of services should see further improvement in outcomes for citizens

- Performance management framework would benefit from review to ensure more risk based targeting of resources.
- The capacity of the Service is unlikely to match the ambitious vision and expectations may need to be revised.

The Service faces an increasingly difficult challenge to meet efficiency targets and the team would therefore encourage the Service to review its overall vision to ensure is appropriate and achievable. The capacity of the Service is unlikely to match its ambitious vision and therefore expectations may need to be revised. For example response time targets which were only recently established, may need to be revised due to the low risk nature of the county and its spread over a large geographical area which presents significant logistical challenges. More detail on this is provided in the section on community risk management below.

GFRS currently benchmark the Service against a traditional peer group and whilst sometimes beneficial, it may not provide the most challenging information. A wide variety of solutions exist in other fire and rescue services, other parts of the public sector and in the private sector and GFRS would be encouraged to look more widely than its peer group to help identify innovative solutions to meet the financial challenges it faces. For example, the Service could consider how other FRs approach risk based resource allocation. Local risk reduction plans are needed, integrating prevention, protection and response and allowing station commanders to have access to the information to deliver interventions at local level driven by a focus on effective interventions. Investment in risk reduction through prevention and protection can reap rewards from a reduction in the need for response resources.

Following a change in emphasis to a more integrated approach, the Service's Performance Management Framework would then benefit from review. The team believes the Service will get the best value out of this if GFRS focuses on assuring itself that its decisions on targeting resources are underpinned by a robust assessment of risk, not just a hazard assessment.

Further integration of services within the County Council could see improvement in impact for citizens by identifying clear outcomes that can be achieved through joined up working with other parts of GCC and other relevant agencies. For example concentrating on a more holistic approach to home safety will address a wide range of issues affecting vulnerable adults, children and at risk families.

3.2 How effective is the leadership and Governance?

Strengths

- Focus on risks and hazards facing Gloucestershire citizens and obvious passion for community protection from OLT.
- Strong support for many years from the Fire and Rescue Authority (GCC).
- Recognition by Senior Members and Officers of the challenges facing the service
- FRA plays a pivotal and influential role in multi-agency working in particular the Local Resilience Forum
- Clear vision from GCC for the future direction of the Fire and Rescue Service within the modernisation of Council services.
- Close relationship and involvement with the portfolio holder
- Opportunity for the FRS to shape its own future.

GFRS has a clear focus on hazards facing Gloucestershire citizens and there is an obvious passion for community protection from the Service's Operational Leadership Team (OLT).

The Service has benefited from the strong support it has received for many years from GCC, the Fire and Rescue Authority. There is recognition by senior Members and officers of the challenges facing the service and this is reflected in the initial view of future issues to 2025 in the new Integrated Risk Management Plan. GFRS has an understanding of the priorities it wishes to focus on and is also seeking to identify what the pressures it is likely to encounter over this period are likely to be. As an organisation GFRS is self-aware and understands the issues facing it. This is in keeping with a learning organisation which has been proactive and flexible in its response to emerging issues.

GFRS plays a pivotal and influential role in multi-agency working and in particular on the Local Resilience Forum. Another example relates to the Service's proactive work on Road Safety which is underpinned by a clear Memorandum of Understanding and is delivering in partnership to positively influence road safety measures which contributes clearly to GCC priorities. This partnership work is particularly characterised by the close work undertaken with volunteers.

There is a clear vision from GCC on how it wishes to deliver services through strategic commissioning. The team encourages the Service to view this as an opportunity for GFRS to play a lead role in shaping its own future and seeking to influence the future direction of the Fire and Rescue Service within the modernisation of Council services.

The Service enjoys a close relationship with the portfolio holder who is proactively involved in the development of the Service's future vision. Overall, there are good working relationships with elected Members including those involved with scrutiny who are being appraised of any changes to the service and the future IRMP.

Areas to explore

- Greater Member engagement at local level may improve understanding of the Service
- Senior management structure may require adjustment to meet future challenges of efficiencies, commissioning and greater integration of council services
- More visibility of the FRS in the Corporate Risk Register
- Improvements in communication will assist workforce understanding of the vision and strategy
- Use of staff energy and ideas

There are still opportunities for greater Member engagement with GFRS particularly at a local level. The team did not come across any clear political interface at ward level with the FRS and whilst there are many benefits in the cabinet style of local government, there is a need to ensure that local ward councillors understand the benefits that GFRS bring to their communities and also the challenges it faces.

GFRS's senior management structure may require adjustment to meet future challenges of efficiencies, commissioning and greater integration of council services. A significant proportion of its senior management are retiring over the next 3 years and there is an opportunity to consider the approach that GFRS can take in meeting its future challenges.

Recent changes have taken station managers away from stations and moved them to GFRS Headquarters resulting in a lighter managerial presence in some stations. The team would encourage the Service to assure itself that that has got the balance of this deployment about right and confirm that there has been sufficient emphasis on the training and development of watch managers to ensure they can fulfil a more responsible and accountable role. The positive progress in developing a robust Operational Assurance function should provide evidence of any areas for improvement.

GFRS accepts that it must be part of the council's drive towards a commissioning model however some greater clarity is required as to precisely how this will be applied to the Service. Although it is not possible to define the preferred option at this stage, it would be helpful if a list of options was produced and explained. To achieve this GFRS will need to be clear about its service standards and the true costs of its vision. The County Council will then be better informed in relation to what it is asking its citizens to pay for. This is likely to go some way towards a shared clarity and joint buy-in to the best way forward for the Service; this is critically important if any future vision for the Service is to be achievable. An effective communication strategy will then need to be developed to assist workforce understanding of the vision and strategy of the County Council and where the Service fits in this strategy. It is possible that other GCC services could commission the Fire service to deliver outcomes (for example social care).

Whichever solution(s) is considered as part of the options appraisal, the team would encourage the Service to assure itself that in any outsourcing arrangements and any

potential duplication (for example of systems and processes) are addressed as part of any future business modelling.

There is a real opportunity for the Service to utilise its staff's energy and ideas in this journey. The team observed a real willingness from staff to be more involved in developing solutions to the current challenges rather than simply implementing imposed changes. This would encourage staff to be more proactive and empower them to play a meaningful role in these considerations. The Services fortnightly publication, *Sword*, may play a key role in this process. Two way communication from senior managers is an area which was highlighted to the team as an area the Service could strengthen.

It was not immediately clear to the team as to whether there is any real focus on corporate risk relating to GFRS within the County Council's Corporate Risk Register. Without any consideration of the fire and rescue service in the corporate risk register and who has ownership of this, is there sufficient emphasis on the necessary control measures?

At a more tactical level, the team feel that business continuity plans would benefit from review. For example, it was not clear whether the Service has a documented IT disaster recovery plan and it may need to assure itself that any potential for mission critical systems becoming unavailable is being clearly managed.

3.3 How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs?

Strengths

- Effective use of the Service's role in communities
- Effective collaboration with partner organisations and the voluntary sector which is impacting positively on organisational capacity.
- A clear focus on utilising opportunities to deliver efficiencies

The Service is very aware of its financial position and the need to deliver efficiencies. It makes good use of its unique role in communities by working closely with other agencies and a number of examples of good synergies were observed.

GFRS is effective in collaborating with other services, for example its work on road safety and there is a positive perception of the service by partner agencies and others services. The co-responder arrangements with South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT) and the Tri-service arrangements with the Ambulance Service and the Police are working well. The co-responder working is now responsible for a third of all RDS firefighter incidents which is representing added public value and improved outcomes for communities.

This partnership delivery model is underpinned by formal strategic alliances which GFRS has in place with voluntary sector organisations to deliver specialist response services. The use of volunteers and co-responders to deliver a wide range of services via such partnership agreements is increasingly becoming an integral part of how GFRS does business and this relationship represents a particular strength of the service. Volunteer capabilities appear good and with some minor additions to policy could become more sustainable into the future as a part of the diversity of the Service. There are clear benefits to the service with regard to increased organisational capacity and this impacts positively on the Service's profile in the community.

The service is looking to further enhance the role of RDS firefighters to deliver Community Fire Safety (CFS) functions in rural communities. This is an example which demonstrates that GFRS is looking to deploy resources in ways which fit well with its broader strengths.

Areas to explore

- Undertake a robust assessment of emergency cover requirements to establish a baseline for options appraisal
- Review duty systems to ensure they match risk and demand and consider more innovative use of employment contracts and conditions of service.
- Use of response resources to deliver more community risk reduction work, including fire safety enforcement
- Optimise investment in assets, in particular PFI buildings
- Optimise the unique brand and value of the fire and rescue service in the wider considerations for commissioning of services

- Further integration of the service generic support functions into the county council, including consideration of joint enforcement teams.
- Further expansion of cross border/regional emergency capability sharing, including command arrangements.

Although GFRS is delivering a significant range of services very cost effectively, through its innovative approach to work with voluntary and other partner agencies, it will not address the financial challenges it faces without some impact on the level of resources it currently dedicates to its emergency response services. The team would therefore encourage the Service to undertake a robust assessment of emergency cover requirements and a risk based cost versus benefit analysis. This will allow the establishment of a baseline for the options appraisal needed as part of GCC commissioning strategy. For example, the current focus on standard response times across the county, regardless of risk and demand, remains aspirational and if this was to form the basis of the benchmark for commissioning, it would significantly increase the current cost of this element of service delivery.

Having determined a more realistic response standard based on risk and demand GFRS would then be in a position to review duty systems to ensure the most appropriate work pattern is adopted, potentially delivering efficiencies. This is where benchmarking against services outside its own traditional peer group and outside the fire and rescue sector, as referred to earlier, would be beneficial. The team recognises the conscious decision by the Service to not change Duty systems until 2018/19 due to retirement profile of the Service, which is the same approach as being adopted by most services. However there is some benefit in undertaking research in this area much sooner in order to allow for effective engagement with staff to ensure agreements and plans are in place.

As part of its work on redesigning its response service GFRS can take the opportunity to fully consider the impact of its decisions associated with co-responding. As activity in this area increases it will have a potentially negative impact on availability of RDS staff for responding to other incidents. GFRS will need to be satisfied that this impact has been fully quantified and deemed acceptable as part of its broader role.

Whilst the diverse business model of the Service is positive, delivering increased capacity and flexibility, GFRS is encouraged to assure itself that the full implications of having all the various models (and any regulations associated with such a broad range of delivery types) is fully understood and these requirements documented, fully costed and managed effectively.

There also appears to be some impact on response times caused by training exercises. The 4 PFI stations have shared training facilities which take pumps away from the base stations, which were relocated to provide better fire cover. Although the training is vitally important, there is anecdotal evidence that it is having a detrimental effect on response times. A compromise could be to undertake training at times when appliances are least likely to be required for an emergency, in conjunction with a more aggressive call reduction strategy (automatic fire arms, Pre Determined attendances etc.).

It is also important for the Service to fully optimise investment in assets and in particular assets procured through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). PFI contracts are constraining, with strict controls on the use of facilities which affects the flexibility around utilisation of assets such as SkillZONE. GFRS and the County Council are in a very different place now, compared to when the PFI contracts were first drawn up. Are the agreements likely to meet the needs of GFRS in the future?

SkillZONE is a fantastic resource, even when working within the constraints of the current PFI contract, however it may benefit from more proactive marketing incorporating a slight change of image to optimise the high value brand image of GFRS. This could be achieved without losing the original intention of aligning its activities to the wider core priorities for GCC. With greater focus on future marketing support from the County Council and more integration into the other fantastic facilities of GFRS, the potential of SkillZONE as a brand rather than simply a building could be realised. For example, the development of Skillzone outreach activities at fire stations, to complement those at the centre could see major increase in utilisation, with short taster sessions and practical demonstrations with operational crews. Outreach sessions in rural areas could also showcase the centre, and schools and other organisations would see the real benefit of a visit to the centre.

GFRS also has the opportunity to optimise the unique brand and value of the fire and rescue service in the wider considerations for commissioning of services particularly the overall delivery options for GCC Community Safety Strategy. For example. Such integrated services have been successfully delivered in other county councils. This approach could also include wider utilisation of integrated shared support functions such as fleet maintenance. Whilst GFRS have understandable concerns over the amalgamation of its emergency fleet management function into the GCC service, these concerns could be addressed if GFRS retained overall control of the commissioning of this function, delivering services for the rest of the County Council and more integration with the other blue light services.

The team would encourage GFRS to review the current time allocated for RDS training to assure itself that this sector of the workforce is able to acquire and maintain core competencies. The duration of training provided may be insufficient when looked at in the context of what many other FRS's are providing. This issue is also mentioned below in the Training and Development section where reference is made to improvements in monitoring and support.

There also appears to be scope for increasing the amount of prevention and protection work undertaken by wholetime firefighters. In particular, the current policy of not utilising operational crews for fire safety enforcement work is a lost opportunity particularly when taking into account the relatively low levels of operational activity at these stations.

4. KAAs – GFRS areas of focus

4.1 Health and Safety

Strengths

- Good self-awareness of areas for development for example:
 - Operational risk information project
 - Operational assurance and audit process
 - Meeting/discussion forums
 - New RDS training packages
 - Recognition of the need to tailor training to risk at each station
- The integration of the Service into County Council health and safety system is showing early signs of real benefits

GFRS is self-aware about the areas in which it needs to develop further. The Operational Performance Improvement Group (OPIG) is a demonstration of the Service's focus on fire fighter safety and the most senior managers in the Service are demonstrating a personal commitment to supporting further improvement in this area.

The Service's use of the operational assurance and audit process including development of a new process is starting to produce results. Some further areas for development were recognised relating to the exchange of information between enforcement teams and operational crews and more resources have been allocated to consider this further.

The Service also recognises the need to tailor training to risk at each station which has resulted in the Service developing new RDS training packages.

The integration of the Service into the County Council health and safety system is showing early signs of real benefits. The GCC view of Health and Safety in GFRS is positive and the Service's focus in this area of its function is recognised.

Areas to explore

- Continued investment in the Ops Risk Information project including MDTs
- Further refine systems to capture and disseminate risk information from other sources e.g. fire protection, prevention, trading standards etc.
- Communication and explanation of the benefits of the Operational Assurance process for Firefighter safety
- Embed working arrangements with volunteer responders into GFRS policy, risk assessments, SOPs and audit/assurance processes.
- Review and update training for operational crews in fire engineering in buildings and modern methods of construction etc.
- Reconsider the initial training and competency requirements for new RDS firefighters.

- In light of current change programme, consider the impact on staff health and wellbeing

The team would encourage GFRS to continue its investment in the Operations Risk Information project including Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs). The Service recognises that not all of its risk analysis is current and that further work is needed in this area and has an implementation plan in place to take this forward.

The working arrangements with volunteer responders are now an accepted part of the way of working at operational incidents, including practices where volunteer crews are acknowledged as being part of the safe systems of work for GFRS personnel. However, these practices do not yet appear to feature explicitly in all relevant policies, risk assessments, Standard Operating Procedures and audit/assurance processes. The team believes there is a need to clarify, formalise and document command arrangements with volunteer responders because each are subtly different potentially exposing incident commanders to some risk of confusion.

GFRS has recognised the need to review and update training for operational crews in fire engineering in buildings and modern methods of construction etc. The team agree that there is more to do in raising the understanding of operational crews about active and passive fire safety measures provided with premises. The Service is actively looking at how this capacity and learning can be developed further. GFRS may also wish to further refine systems to capture and disseminate risk information from other sources, for example fire protection, prevention, trading standards as referred to earlier.

There is more to be done in communicating the benefits of the Operational Assurance process for Firefighter safety. The rationale for why this is a valuable improvement approach is not well understood by operational crews who perceive it negatively.

In light of the current change programme, GFRS is encouraged to consider the impact on staff health and wellbeing. A number of cases of stress were mentioned to team members during the visit citing workload and pressure of change as a contributing factor. Current work programmes in terms of type and quantity are being changed on a regular basis and the team would encourage GFRS to proactively assure itself that it has an appropriate understanding of how this may be impacting on staff.

4.2 Training and Development

Strengths

- Implementation of RDS training package
- Investment in training facilities
- Freedoms for local training to address specific risks and personal development
- Electronic recording of competence is seen as a major improvement over previous process
- Integrated training with volunteer responders
- Operational Assurance process should improve confidence in effectiveness of T&D

The implementation of the new RDS training package following training needs identification is a positive move by GFRS. Training for RDS staff has been formalised and the Maintenance of Skills Training Programme (MOST) has been in place since October 2013. This will contribute positively to providing a consistent approach to training for firefighters and promoting firefighter safety.

There are freedoms for local training to address specific risks and personal development. Watch commanders have autonomy to direct the training of their own watches which is allowing for the needs particular to specific areas to be addressed in a targeted fashion.

GFRS's investment in training facilities, along with the improvements resulting from electronic recording of competence, is seen by staff as a major improvement when compared to previous processes. Training is recorded on the system and is overseen by station Commanders giving a greater degree of consistency to assessment of firefighter competence.

Integrated training with volunteer responders is also an appropriate approach for GFRS based on the delivery models it is utilising as a Service and this appears to be taking place across the service.

The recent introduction and development of the Operational Assurance process appears to represent a robust and reliable method of quality assurance for competence of crews and the feedback process should provide greater confidence in the effectiveness of Training and Development and provide evidence of any emerging training needs.

Areas to explore

- Review time allocated for RDS training as part of the evaluation of the success of the new RDS training package
- Consider use of e-learning packages to support training, including access from home for RDS
- Consider how to optimise Severn Park facility over the longer term including, if possible, a review of PFI contract to reflect change in circumstances
- Improve understanding of Elected Members in relation to fire and rescue service training and development.

There is a feeling among On-call staff that they do not feel they have enough time to train and to cover all aspects of training needed for their operational response responsibilities which is leading to some frustration. As previously mentioned, GFRS may find value in reconsidering the initial training and ongoing competency requirements for RDS firefighters. The current provision is for total basic training of 3 weeks supplemented by 2 weeks on Breathing Apparatus. This training is often delivered over several months at a rate of as little as 2 hours per week ahead of firefighters being deployed on fire appliances. Once deemed competent, the standard time allocated for maintenance of skills is two hours per week. Additional training is provided for specialist skills such as water rescue. The team would encourage GFRS to compare this level of training with that delivered in other FRS's to assure itself that these arrangements are sufficient for meeting demands of risk based training programmes and effectively communicating risk information to the fireground. The Service may wish to undertake such a review as part of the evaluation of the success of the new RDS training package.

The team would encourage GFRS to consider greater use of e-learning packages to support training, including the ability for firefighters to access these from home. This would be particularly beneficial for RDS personnel.

GFRS may wish to consider how to optimise the Severn Park facility over the longer term including, if possible, a review of the PFI contract to reflect change in circumstances. The original PFI contract included significant provision for initial Firefighter training with 25 per cent of original PFI available for training on BA and Road Traffic Collision (RTC) etc. Due to change in circumstances, in particular the recruitment freeze, the contract may no longer be providing value for money and more flexibility would allow the centre to explore alternative training. The Service may therefore wish to explore any opportunity to vary the contract which will allow for Severn Park to achieve the maximum impact desired.

GFRS has a large number of staff undertaking work on behalf of partners and also a large number of volunteers undertaking work for them. The team did not find any evidence of audits and checks of the training records for these activities. Training with volunteer responders is taking place at a local level and they appear to be fully integrated into the major exercise programme. Appropriate checks and Audits of the voluntary organisations were undertaken when delivery commenced but it would appear there is no regular ongoing audit to ensure they are maintaining skills and equipment. A representative of one volunteer organisation confirmed that such audits take place with other FRS's that they work with and it may be possible for GFRS to rely on these audits, if they can be assured they meet their needs.

Operational training in the fire and rescue service is complex and often expensive. There is a need to improve understanding of elected Members in relation to such training and development if they are to understand and support investment in this risk critical area. For example, there does not appear to be any Member engagement in Fire Training Centre at Severn Park, which represents a significant public investment. There might there be some value in increasing opportunities for Members to access the facility and other GFRS buildings to give them a better feeling for the work of the Service.

GFRS is encouraged to continue to assure itself that systems of work are as safe as they can be. Reducing capacity means that there are challenges to GFRS's ability to continue to deliver safety critical training and in some cases, training is being delivered but without the necessary investment in the equipment to utilise the skills. For example, First Person On the Scene (FPOS) training has been delivered but it is not always the case that kit and equipment has then been issued. Staff perception is that there is no money for the equipment and therefore the training was wasted.

4.3 Community Risk Management – (with a particular focus on performance management)

Strengths

- Comprehensive community risk analysis
- Unique strategy to incorporate volunteers for Response and Prevention activities.
- Strong and inclusive local resilience forum

GFRS undertakes comprehensive community risk analysis. The Service's IRMP is clear and demonstrates GFRS having a good handle on associated risk profiles. The Service has made good progress against the IRMP action plan and has commenced pre-planning for the next 10 year iteration of the plan. Overall this is providing assurance around leadership and vision, demonstrating an early appreciation of most of the emerging issues.

The Service's approach to the incorporation of volunteers for Response as well as Prevention activities is a unique strategy. This has a positive impact on how the service connects with local communities whereby GFRS is able to better understand risks in the community and is therefore better placed to manage these risks. GFRS is also very heavily involved and influential in a strong and inclusive local resilience forum

Areas to explore

- Consider more scientific risk analysis to further develop a risk based approach to resource allocation.
- Consider revising current performance management framework for community risk including more sophisticated response standards.
- Develop risk reduction strategies with appropriate investment to deliver long term efficiencies.
- Re-balance resource allocation to reflect the relative importance of all the elements of Integrated Risk Management; prevent, protect, respond

The team encourages GFRS to consider more scientific risk analysis to further develop a risk (hazard and likelihood) based approach to resource allocation rather than the current hazard only based approach. The IRMP 2015-2025 refers to the challenge of a 'risk based upon budget'. There was evidence throughout the visit that many senior officers and firefighters alike, were unwilling to acknowledge that a significant reduction in risk and demand in Gloucestershire presents real opportunity to make savings in the level of response resources.

The Service has recognised that the previous IRMP was heavily focussed on emergency response and that, with a significant amount of work done in this area over the past few years, the future plans need to be more balanced. The team would concur with this view and in order to continue to drive down risk and demand greater emphasis on prevention and protection will be necessary. This is absolutely vital in order to create capacity and at the same time deliver efficiencies and mention has already been made of the need to best use the spare capacity which exists at wholetime fire stations.

In a similar vein the Service may wish to assure itself that data storage and data sharing agreements with its partners are fit for purpose to enable all agencies to access

and share data on vulnerable people and contributing fully to the delivery of Gloucestershire's Community Safety Strategy.

GFRS may wish to consider revising its current performance management framework for community risk to include more sophisticated response standards. It has been previously mentioned that Current Performance Indicators (PIs) for response times are not being met and are unlikely to be met without significant investment. The average response standard across the County is also misleading to the public when the service acknowledges that it cannot meet those standards in many areas. Reductions in the number of fires and other incidents in higher risk areas (which are attended far more quickly), has had an impact on overall average response time performance. Whilst this reduction in the number of fires should be regarded as a success, it manifests itself in a failing performance indicator. Only by developing truly risk based performance standards and targets, integrating prevention, protection and response, will the Service be in a position to report its real successes.

The Service is therefore encouraged to develop risk reduction strategies with appropriate investment to deliver long term efficiencies. With response standards aligned to risk and activity rather than as a one size fits all (hazard based) approach, it is possible to reduce the likelihood of fire in an area and as a consequence reduce the cost of emergency response provision in that area.

4.4 Response – (with a particular focus on volunteers and co-responding)

Strengths

- Efficient use of resources to deploy a wide range of capabilities
- Use of voluntary sector
- Co-Responding
- Modern equipment and firefighting protective clothing, well regarded by staff

GFRS's co-responding/first response arrangements with SWASFT are widely recognised as a positive. GFRS was proactive in recognising the opportunities this represented through its consultation with Great Western Ambulance Service (GWAS) prior to this body becoming a part of SWASFT. The co-responders scheme has received positive reviews from SWASFT staff, patients and firefighters.

GCC support the continuation of the co-response scheme as the council recognises the benefits of this approach to the communities of the county. This support is likely to continue as long as this does not detract from the primary role of GFRS. SWASFT is also supportive of the partnership continuing as they believe it is beneficial to their patients. However their support is reliant on the model changing to a single/ immediate response model. The co-response arrangements represent an efficient use of resources in GFRS deploying a wide range of capabilities through its diverse business model and if the Service can continue to agree an appropriate payment with SWASFT for the use of firefighters as co-responders, it may also offset some of the costs associated with the RDS provision. The agreement is working well to date for GFRS, improving the 'social footprint' of the Service in local communities. Furthermore RDS firefighters are playing a key role in enhancing the medical care given to patients in the rural areas of Gloucestershire.

The Response function is benefiting from the good, strong relationship between volunteers and GFRS. The Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) has worked under the command of GFRS on incidents and is an example of the Service utilising a wide range of partners in comprehensive service delivery as a result of sound working arrangements and relationships.

The modern equipment and firefighting protective clothing provided by GFRS is well regarded by staff and they feel well supported by the Service as a result of the good standard of appliances and other equipment.

Areas to explore

- Explore further opportunities to increase the collaboration with other blue light services
- Establish a sustainable future model for emergency medical response to match GFRS and SWAST expectations
- Further consider performance standards in the Control environment as part of the overall operational assurance process.

There is a need for the establishment of a sustainable future model for emergency medical response to match both GFRS and SWASFT expectations. The position of SWASFT is clear in that they believe the co-responder scheme needs to be a Single/ Immediate responder model. This model comprises of a single member of staff who would have a vehicle available to them and be able to provide an immediate response

from their home address. This is important as this removes the need for RDS firefighters to respond to their station and wait for a colleague to join them before responding to the medical emergency. SWASFT strong line on this is based on the imperative to deliver medical care to patients within an appropriate timescale for life threatening calls. The dual response model has been used within GFRS for a number of years but SWASFT are not able to support this model in the future. Therefore the Service has a decision to make about how it addresses this moving forward.

The team would encourage the Service to ensure that there is greater consistency and integration in how operational response is managed. There would be benefits in allowing GFRS staff to have a single point of contact. Before SWASFT acquired GWAS discussions were being held on the implementation of a joint management approach between GFRS and GWAS to manage the co-responding scheme. It is clear that SWASFT is not considering the set-up of a joint management scheme at this time. However a clearly identified point of contact within GFRS would afford SWASFT a consistent and constant means of working effectively with the Service which would be an agreeable arrangement from the Trust's point of view.

The clinical governance surrounding the medical treatment of patients would benefit from being reviewed and the opportunity for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs to be supported further. This applies to all staff who are First Person on the Scene (FPOS) trained within GFRS. This could be fully incorporated into the new Ops Assurance process.

4.5 Prevention – (with a particular focus on how balanced an approach GFRS is taking to this)

Strengths

- Very well regarded by partners
- Equality and diversity clearly embedded in service delivery
- Skill zone facility is impressive and well regarded with significant potential to become integral to the county council's community safety aspirations.
- Willingness of the RDS to become more engaged in risk reduction activities provides an opportunity to adopt a more flexible approach to community safety in remote rural areas.

GFRS has a prominent profile and is very well regarded by its partners who view the Service as being excellent in meeting its statutory duties.

Equality and diversity is clearly embedded in GFRS service delivery with a wide range of delivery options available meeting the diverse needs of vulnerable people across the county. The Service has well-embedded safeguarding policies, procedures and training and in its partnership working it is prominent in contributing to the delivery of Adult Safeguarding and Children and Young People's Safeguarding, delivering positive outcomes.

The SkillZONE facility is impressive and well regarded with significant potential to become integral to the county council's community safety aspirations. GFRS has clear aims found upon the principle of 'helping people to help themselves' and the link to SkillZone is valuable to the Service's commitment to tackling cause rather than symptom through proactive public education work.

The willingness of the RDS to become more engaged in risk reduction activities provides an opportunity for GFRS to adopt a more flexible approach to community safety in remote rural areas.

The Service's Risk-Based Inspection Programme (R.B.I.P) is utilising the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) as a way of ensuring the fire safety audits are carried out and targeted on those with greater vulnerability based upon risk. It achieves this by using good risk profile models and this is contributing positively to the Service being able to meet its statutory duty.

Areas to explore

- Further development of risk reduction strategy linked to efficiency targets could be developed with local (ward level) risk reduction targets replacing station based output targets.
- Opportunity to integrate all council prevention and community safety strategies as part of commissioning considerations.
- Consider the marketing and branding strategy for Skillzone to optimise its potential including an outreach strategy aligning local delivery of community safety interventions with the specialist central resource.

Reference has already been made of the opportunity to consider the marketing and branding strategy for Skillzone to optimise its potential including an outreach strategy aligning local delivery of community safety interventions with the specialist central resource. SkillZone represents a significant level of investment which is likely to benefit from proactive marketing of the facility's 'offer'. Together, the 4 PFI stations and SkillZone represent significant opportunities in terms of community safety training delivery particularly around health and wellbeing.

There is a real opportunity for GFRS to become central to the integration of all GCC prevention and community safety strategies, including further developing the links with education and youth services as part of commissioning considerations. This may help GFRS in clarifying its future role by clearly defining the added value it brings to this broader role.

There is also an opportunity for the Service to become more involved with the health sector and in particular the Health and Wellbeing Boards where currently the service does not appear to be fully engaged.

5. Other KAAs – Protection and Call Management and Incident Support

Protection

There may be opportunities to increase capacity with GFRS the preferred delivery partner of a much wider range of services including community safety education and statutory functions such as Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Fire Protection.

Call Management and Incident Support

The New IT system in Control appears to be working well whilst other developments in IT should provide better intelligence for targeting of resources.

Within the Brigade Control environment, there are currently no call handling targets set and no plans to implement any. The rationale for this was explained and has some merit: An emphasis on time taken to handle a call can reduce the quality of the information obtained from the caller. Also, call challenge is very effective in reducing incident volume but is time consuming. However, many services do have performance management within the Control environment and have introduced a degree of sophistication in the measurement to ensure qualitative and quantitative measures are utilised to good effect. GFRS may therefore wish to revisit the current policy.

6. Conclusion and contact information

GFRS is a highly committed and proud organisation which is well regarded by partners and the community. Efficiency savings have impacted on capacity in certain areas and the challenges facing the Service will require continued strong political and professional leadership. The reduction in risk and demand presents opportunities to meet the ongoing efficiency challenges but there will need to be a realistic assessment of what GFRS can deliver and a recognition that its aspirations and expectations will need to be managed due to diminishing resources. In this context, it is clear that GFRS has opportunities to become even more established as an integral part of GCC future vision.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge of GFRS please contact:

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