

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REVIEW REPORT

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

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On behalf of Inspiring Business Performance Limited

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1 INTRODUCTION

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is a recognised Investor in People and deservedly so.

The last 24 months have been very challenging for everyone as managers seek to make the required savings. The Corporate Management Team have worked exceptionally hard to avoid compulsory redundancies and to protect staff and maintain operational capability. They have been very successful in managing to keep the losses to a minimum whilst at the same time ensuring that the organisation continues to develop and improve. The number of people within my interview sample that have taken on new roles and additional responsibilities is testimony to this. People continue to be supported and encouraged to develop and improve.

New ways of working are being actively explored, including investing in a combined Control Centre working with West Sussex. A great deal of time, energy and commitment has been invested, over many months, to support a strategy involving a merger between East and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. This aspiration has not been realised and will not be for the foreseeable future

Alongside all of this my visit in July took place against a background of the most significant change within the Fire Authority that the service has ever known. Changes have been proposed nationally with regard to terms and conditions that will impact on pensions. The political make up and level of experience in the new Fire Authority will have a major impact on how the organisation operates. The challenges it presents to the leadership team at East Sussex Fire and Rescue cannot be over estimated. CMT has restructured with the loss of one Principle Officer. Combined with the latest government spending review which effectively adds an additional £2 million shortfall on top of an existing £5 million, it is not surprising that people are under pressure.

There is no doubt that the level of investment and commitment there is for staff training and development is present however the pressure I referred to is now having a real effect on how CMT is able to lead, and the stretch they are under is now having an effect. An apparent disconnect is now emerging which needs to be halted. Further time and efforts now need to be focussed on including and involving the whole organisation and managers in the future development.

A number of people acknowledged that the Fire Authority had not given a clear steer in the past often not taking the tough decisions. There was a sense that with a new authority there was an opportunity to take a new approach with all those involved very clear on the challenges and the need to agree on a strategy.

There is now a real focus on providing members with a comprehensive induction and the support they need to develop a strategy to meet the immediate and longer term funding challenges.

Difficult decisions have been taken and there will be further difficult decisions that will need to be taken.

It is against this background that my visit took place in July. I found many excellent examples of highly effective leaders at all levels who are highly skilled at getting the best out of their teams. I am in no doubt that the organisation continues to invest in developing the skills of its people and in providing a great deal of support to individuals.

I am also in no doubt that, at this time more than ever, employees need to see a Corporate Management Team behaving and working as one to drive a common agenda and vision. It is the perception held by a significant number of people that there is a lack of harmony or consensus around an appropriate leadership and communication style that I am concerned about.

This report is structured to give you an understanding of why this is a concern and how this impacts on your ability to fully meet the Investors in People Standard at this stage. You continue to be recognised as an Investor in People and there is a three month window in which to successfully complete the assessment. The next step is for me to allow you to fully digest and reflect on the report and then to agree with you how to proceed.

I have structured the feedback report to:

- Section 2 - Executive Summary – An overview of the key findings and top three areas you may wish to focus on
- Section 3 - What you are doing really well- the many strengths and areas of good practice
- Section 4 - My major concern and how this impacts on the Standard
- Section 5 - Outcome of the review
- Section 6 - Areas for feedback (At the planning meeting we agreed I would look at an additional 18 evidence requirements over and above the Standard – you have met 11 of these)
- Section 7 - Next Steps

I would like to thank Hannah and Brin for their help in arranging the interview schedules. I was well received and looked after by everyone and impressed with the pride and commitment that people demonstrated to serve the community.

Finally although I recognise that not all of my findings are positive reading I know that there is a commitment to improve and be the best. I also sense that there is a real opportunity to use my visit to good effect. I will do whatever I can to work with you to enable this to happen.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has a good reputation. We lead on lots of things nationally and punch above our weight”

“We are good at sending a signal that all our team are important – Des is very good at that”

“We need to invest in Watch Managers and bring them much more into the centre – they are the link with the Firefighters

“This is a performance based organisation. When Borough Commanders present at CMT the focus is always on the red with no reference to the green. We never focus on how people achieved the green – how they got the good performance”

The four quotes above give a sense of both the positives that people identified and their ideas for improvement. There was no shortage of both during my time with the team and in many respects it sums up the pride and commitment people have for the organisation to which they belong.

I found an organisation that is good at getting things done with everyone clear not only on what they have to deliver on but also, for the most part, how to go about it. The Sussex Control Centre project is a good example of an approach that works. It is a major project, it has sponsors at CMT level, it involves a high degree of consultation and the project manager has a high degree of autonomy and support in equal measure. Members of CMT have been involved face to face with teams keeping people updated. The project presents some major technical challenges not least in aligning two systems. It is an excellent example of how the organisation manages major projects with high levels of consultation and well developed project management skills through a team that is 100% committed to the task.

I also found an organisation that continues to invest in developing leaders from Crew Manager upwards. You have many excellent managers at all levels who work hard to encourage and support their people. Often they display high levels of emotional intelligence and recognise that how they engage with people is as important as what they do. Across all the team, support and operational, both retained and whole time people are very committed to delivering for the community they are part of.

People recognise improvements in a number of areas such as the training for Retained Firefighters and the way the organisation plans although there is still more work to do to make sure that the approach to planning drives up performance.

What are the key challenges.

I found an organisation where there are frustrations and a sense amongst some people that the balance is not right. (The balance could be autonomy/authority, trust, freedom/control etc) It seems that some managers are highly effective in creating a team that is clear what they have to deliver on and have been given the levels of trust and ownership that ensure people perform because they want to. The management is there and highly effective although others may see the approach as a little relaxed. Where it works well these middle managers are in no doubt about their role in creating a team that is empowered and the approach they need to take to achieve this. Where it works less well is when these middle managers themselves find that they are on the receiving end of an approach that may be out of kilter with what they know works. E.g. less empowering.

I don't think there is any argument that East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service will ever be anything but a performance base organisation. The debate may be around how you get that best performance.

One of the key challenges may be getting the balance right so that people are clearly accountable but don't feel they are not trusted to deliver and having to account for themselves. Typically as people become more proficient managers adapt their style accordingly.

“CMT ought to say thank you for bringing to our attention that we have an issue here”

Linked to this is what is measured and I think this is another challenge that is also about a balance. The old adage is that what gets measured gets done and I would not disagree but I have some reservations. One of the strengths of the organisation is that it does measure and monitor performance. The focus is on operational outcomes, which is understandable not least because that is what you are there to do. It is also true that in future the way you work may have to be even more innovative with local teams driving efficiencies and new ways of working. What I do not see being measured and subsequently acknowledged are some of the highly developed leadership and entrepreneurial skills and behaviours exhibited by some managers who are 100% committed to building a team that is engaged.

“The monthly CMT meetings are formal – it can be a robust challenge and does not lend itself to talk about some of the softer issues” - there is never a time for us to do this”

“What do my best managers do? The best ones really engage with Watch and Station Managers. At the manager has started to have local away days and started to put in place regular meetings with Watch and Station managers so that everyone understands what is going on. The best ones have a degree of empathy- they know their staff and will support”

Another challenge for the organisation is how to ensure that people appreciate each other's roles. I am thinking here not so much about individuals but helping people to recognise how different teams such as HR and Organisation Development fit and how everyone is working to deliver against a set of top level objectives. Greater opportunities for Heads of Department to work together may be one way forward. More integrated planning may also help so that everyone recognises a more joined up approach.

“Ten years ago all Heads of Department went away to plan – it was very valuable”

“There is a common understanding of the priorities at CMT level but as it gets cascaded down it gets lost”

“We have clamped down hard on auditing of leave and will ease up on control once we have the systems in place. Firewatch is coming on board and will help”

It is clear that there is a well established rationale for the work you are doing on leave and an intention to step back once the correct controls and systems are in place. I am sure that not everyone sees it so clearly. Getting the communication right is another challenge. At the moment many managers will see themselves spending, what they see as a disproportionate amount of time overseeing leave issues. Some individuals will feel that the approach has been a bit heavy handed with not enough differentiation of approach – we are all guilty until proved otherwise. The intention at CMT level is that this is not the approach you want to take in the long term, but I am not sure this has been effectively communicated.

How to move forward

There are 3 key areas you may wish to focus on

- 1 How CMT works as a team and is seen by others.
- 2 How the strategy that is being developed is shared with everyone and the role of Heads of Department working together to deliver.
- 3 Looking at a possible shift in approach to managing and measuring performance where the good practice that exists that encourages engagement is shared and becomes the preferred way of working.

3 WHAT YOU ARE DOING REALLY WELL.

Despite some of the major challenges facing the organisation generally speaking morale was good. People do enjoy their work and there is a great sense of pride and loyalty working for colleagues and the community. This reflects well on the organisation and points to a number of areas where the organisation is very strong. These include:

Highly effective managers who get the best out of their teams

There were some excellent examples of managers at all levels, working hard to create a team that is engaged.

Within Headquarters I saw some excellent managers working hard to deliver on some challenging objectives but always making time to support and encourage their teams to develop. There is a real commitment to getting the job done with limited resources in some cases.

Borough Commanders have a difficult job not least because of pressures of time and the size of their respective teams. A number of people in this role have been highly effective at working to create a team that is engaged and want to deliver. They work hard to give Station Managers a degree of autonomy and ownership making sure that station action plans are owned locally. They also make time to get to know their teams providing a perfect balance between managing performance as well as being fair and open trusting people to deliver. In this situation Station Managers take their lead from their Borough Commander and equally trust and empower Watch and Crew Managers to deliver.

Where it works really well there is a partnership, with Station Managers receptive to the needs of their teams and knowing when individuals would benefit from a little support or contact from the Borough Commander.

“Each month Watch Managers have to complete a form that highlights where they are on the plan. In the past plans were a little artificial – we have translated them in a way that stations can relate to”

“It is all about devolving ownership down. I want to make the processes lean and have asked them to look at some things on behalf of the service”

“My Station Manager will give me a steer, e.g. Could I have a quick word with someone – It acts to help motivate people”

“We are trying to push ownership to Watch Managers and have to accept that there will be mistakes”

Within headquarters a number of managers are clearly highly committed to encouraging their team to develop and see this as one of their key responsibilities. There were some great examples of managers supporting people and encouraging people to work beyond their comfort zones including those in temporary positions.

“I could see that she was very competent and had potential – I have encouraged her to go on courses and be qualified on Safeguarding”

“One of my team has fantastic potential – I have arranged for him to attend management team meetings”

Induction to new Members

The organisation has invested a great deal of resource and expertise to put in place a comprehensive and considered induction for new members. The Corporate Management Team are directly involved and members are linked up with a mentor or buddy. Interviews confirm that the process is effective and valued by those involved.

Operational Training

The view from the majority of people was that operational training had improved in many areas. People spoke about lessons learnt and much more comprehensive refresher training. The overriding view was that the service was very well equipped and in many cases compared very well with other brigades.

“The refresher training is much better now”

“The training for Retained Firefighters has come on leaps and bounds”

“I have been lucky enough to work in other brigades – we have better equipment and exceptionally good training”

Finding time to attend the 4 day training was an issue for many retained personal but most acknowledged greater attention paid to their training.

Consultation and efforts made to communicate

On the Trade Union Side people acknowledged that senior managers had worked hard to consult and to build constructive relationships and that these were effective. Generally when asked about consultation many Firefighters were quick to say that their opinions were not sought, but some acknowledged efforts made by CMT to share information.

Support for People

One of the themes that came through very clearly was the support for individuals and strong sense of family across the service. People talked about a very professional approach to support people after incidents and a very effective Occupational Health team.

“The service is excellent at supporting people after an incident – my Station Manager is great in these situations”

4 THE CRITICAL AREA TO FOCUS ON.

The impact that CMT has on people individually and as a team.

People are exposed to the Corporate Management Team on a number of different levels. For Firefighters this will often be individually as different members of CMT carry out visits. In this situation Firefighters spoke about different approaches and styles which ranged from positive and supportive to outwardly confrontational. For a number of people at headquarters their exposure was much more in terms of how they saw the team operating.

The view here from a significant number of people was that they did not see CMT behaving as a team working together to deliver a common agenda. Additionally it seems that people see CMT as two distinct groups of people made up of 5 Principal Officers and 3 Directors. At one extreme an individual compared CMT meetings to being like a bear pit whereas another person who just wanted to see some signals that they liked and respected each other.

The consistent theme was that individual behaviours and, from that, peoples values varied greatly with competing different leadership styles that could be confrontational, aggressive and defensive as well as open and honest.

It is clear that the way CMT and in particular Principal Officers operate individually and as a team is not perceived to be effective. Where people are experiencing a leadership style at the top that varies, it is easy for people not to acknowledge what has been achieved. If there is a culture that is perceived to be confrontational and competes internally rather than presenting a united front then other teams will take their lead from this. Although structure may be a contributing factor here the key component is behaviour – how people operate and the impact this has on others.

In terms of the Investors in People Standard there is a direct impact on:
Indicator 5.3 People can explain how their managers are effective in leading, managing and developing them.

It is the “leading” aspect that is not met at this time. Not addressing this does have the potential to undermine other aspects such as the extent that people feel valued.

On a positive note addressing this does have the potential for the leadership team to collectively influence the culture with higher levels of trust, ownership and improved performance.

5 OUTCOMES OF THE REVIEW

At this moment in time the Review is continuing.
Evidence Requirement 5.3 People can explain how their managers are effective in leading, managing and developing them is not fully met.

6 AREAS FOR FEEDBACK

At the planning meeting on 20th June we highlighted an additional 19 evidence requirements built around some key areas such as values, planning and diversity. The idea was for me to explore these areas and to provide feedback that could be helpful and contribute to other work you are doing. My findings are as follows.

1 Business Strategy

To explore;

How our values contribute and drive the way people work and deliver?

Can people make a link between their objectives, those of their team and the organisations top level objectives?

How effective is our approach to planning and do people feel involved?

Additional Evidence requirements

1.7 Top Managers make sure that the organisation has a clear set of core values that support its purpose and vision

1.8 Top Managers make sure the organisation's strategy is developed through the involvement of managers, people, stakeholders and other sources

1.13 Managers can describe the organisation's core values and what this means to the way they are expected to manage.

1.14 Managers can describe how they are involved in developing the organisations strategy

1.19 People can describe the organisation's core values and what this means to the way they are expected to work

1.20 People can describe how they are involved in developing the organisations strategy.

5.5 Top Managers can describe how they act as role models when demonstrating the leadership and management capabilities in line with the organisation's values

5.9 Managers can describe how they lead, manage and develop in line with the organisations values

5.16 People can describe how their manager leads, manages and develops them in line with the organisations values

There are a number of factors that would suggest that it may be timely to revisit the values. E.g. are they fit for purpose and how do we ensure they impact on the way people work in a positive way.

Firstly it is clear that over the next few months members will have to, in conjunction with CMT, agree on a broad strategy and vision for the organisation. This may impact on the existing values and their relevance given the future may look different.

Secondly, talking to people it is clear that whilst the concept of delivering for the community is part of the organisations DNA the remaining values are not so clearly recognised or identified with. People do respect colleagues but I do not sense that continuous improvement is at the top of people's agenda. People take their lead from managers and where there are differing approaches taken do not see the values or behaviours being consistently demonstrated.

Your values do contribute but people are not consciously reflecting on how they work within the values, neither is there any sense that the values and linked behaviours are subject to any form of review or linked to appraisal in any way. Combined with variations in approach from those in a leadership role it is not surprising that some people felt that the values were not at the heart of how the organisation operates.

Without any doubt one of the strengths of the organisation is that everyone is very clear what they have to deliver. Most people could make a link between their role and the organisations objectives. People are clear that prevention is one of the main drivers for how you operate. Major projects are handled well and people are clear on their contribution and key objectives. The move to combine control centres is a good example of this with high levels of communication.

There are a number of factors that are conspiring to reduce the value and effectiveness of your approach to planning. They include;

- Variations in the approach taken at stations – some teams feel very involved others less so with a feeling that the plan has been produced by others. There was some excellent practice both operationally and at HQ where managers are very adept at using planning to engage with their teams.
- For some people any perceptions of a lack of team work at CMT level does impact on how the organisation plans, encouraging a degree of silo working. Where people are under pressure they will deliver to their managers agenda rather than recognise how they work with others to deliver the organisations agenda.
- There is no mechanism for Heads of Departments, many of whom will have key roles to play in developing plans, to come together and I sense that some may work in isolation to some extent. There may be opportunities for Heads of Departments to look at how their plans and work of their teams impact on each other. Giving more ownership to Heads of Department as an entity may encourage greater cooperation and team work. It may also help to create a middle management team that actively supports CMT.
- Currently SMV visits are restricted to operational teams with no opportunity for Headquarters staff to benefit.
- Interplan is not seen by managers as a valuable tool to help them with their planning. It is purely seen as a means of updating CMT on progress, often time consuming to complete and with a degree of guess work and subjectivity.
- A lack of a clear steer and strategy from the Fire Authority which people recognise as a broad top level plan. (I appreciate that this is being developed)

2 People Management Strategy

To explore how the approach to Inclusion and Diversity “fits” with the organisations objectives and how this impacts on the way people work.

Additional Evidence Requirements

3.12 Top managers can describe how the organisations equality and diversity strategies are linked to its business strategy and applied throughout the organisation.

Senior managers have provided strong leadership embedding equality and diversity within the organisation and this has been acknowledged externally.

It is evident that people do embrace the diverse communities that the service has responsibility for. By effectively working with partners the organisation has developed a great deal of expertise enabling it to engage with all areas of the community. Equality and Diversity champions have been established with those in a leadership role heavily involved.

I explored with people how they saw the approach to Inclusion and Diversity with the loss of a dedicated Equality and Diversity Manager. The views varied from those who acknowledged that things were changing and evolving (mainly a view expressed by more senior people) to those that were unsure now what the focus would be other than that there was now no one employed to drive this forward.

“We are in a transition period – the focus is now on inclusion and looking externally at the community we serve”

“It’s still relevant but we have moved the focus”

“Up until 6 months ago people had a good sense of Equality and Diversity. We had a high profile manager – it did make a difference”

“There is a move to reinvigorate things – I am not clear how this will work out yet”

The last quote is not untypical. It will be important to make sure that everyone is aware how you are taking forward Inclusion and Diversity building on the excellent work to date.

3 Management Effectiveness

To explore;

How good we are at encouraging a culture where giving and receiving feedback is valued?

The organisation continues to invest in management development. What do managers do to make sure that this investment impacts on performance? How would they justify the investment?

Additional evidence requirements

3.9 Top managers can describe how they have created an environment where giving and receiving constructive feedback is valued.

3.17 Managers can describe how they encourage people to give and receive constructive feedback

3.25 People can describe how they give and receive constructive feedback to improve performance

There are processes in place that are designed to review, receive and give feedback and to learn. Could more be done to make sure that lessons learnt from Operational De briefs are shared with everyone? A number of FireFighters volunteered that the De briefs were open just to officers and that the outcomes were not routinely shared beyond those that attended.

I believe that at CMT level there is a desire to engage with people and occasionally frustrations that those in support roles seem reluctant to give feedback.

A number of people acknowledged that real efforts have been made to be open and share information.

One of the outcomes from a robust and what may be seen as a challenging and combative leadership team is that this will impact directly on the extent that people feel willing to engage and give feedback.

People do not feel that feedback, especially upward feedback is encouraged or in some cases likely to be acted on.

“No one wants to give CMT bad news and they don’t”

“Some upward feedback happens but I am really not sure its encouraged”

I am in no doubt that within East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service there is, for many people, some correlation between seniority and the extent that they feel able to give feedback. In a leadership role it becomes even more critical that the team feel able to give and also to receive constructive feedback.

A number of people spoke about an over reliance on E Mail and it was interesting to see that where there was good constructive feedback taking place within teams invariably managers had worked hard to build relationships with individuals. Face to face contact and a willingness to get to know people and adapt an approach to meet different situations were all evident here.

There were some great examples of managers taking an active interest in their teams and in encouraging people to take advantage of the management development opportunities available to them. People acknowledged that it is important to continue to invest in management development and make sure that it makes a difference. One option may be to encourage people who have been developed to reflect on how they will seek feedback and continue to improve their leadership and people management skills.

4 Recognition and Reward (indicator 6)

To explore how good the organisation is at making sure that people recognise the contribution that all teams make.

Most people do recognise the contribution that everyone makes although there remains a view operationally that suggests people do not fully appreciate what happens at Headquarters.

The best Borough Commanders work hard to remind people just how interdependent different roles are. It is very easy for those in an operational role to not make the effort to appreciate the bigger picture. It places a great deal of importance on SMV visits and how you share the plan and vision for the future to ensure everyone is clear on the strategy and areas for improvement. Borough Commanders and Station Managers have a key role to play here. A number of people were pleased to see the Chief very publicly acknowledging the efforts and importance of support staff. Valuing colleagues and team work is to some extent implicit within your existing values. If you do decide to review the values in the future it may be worth considering if team work and respect for the contribution that all teams make should be made more explicit.

Improvements to the way planning takes place and greater opportunities for Heads of Department to come together as a team of managers will improve communication and help to break down any silos that may exist. Both are essential if people are to begin to fully appreciate the contribution and input from all teams.

One way of reinforcing the contribution that all teams make is to be able to share the strategy and vision for the future in a way that everyone is clear on the organisations objectives and the part they play. A number of people felt that despite the big challenges, or in fact because of them, there was now an opportunity to develop and share a much more robust strategic plan than may have been the case in the past.

A number of things do not contribute to people feeling valued. Administration teams on stations very rarely have the opportunity to sit in on SMV visits, due to the hours that they work. In the past opportunities were made for them to come together as a team and share good practice. It seems that no one is currently driving this forward.

I think that the Fire Authority has a role to play reinforcing the contribution that different teams make. I appreciate that in the short term the priority is their induction and developing plans to address the challenges, but in the long term they may wish to consider the contribution they can make in this area.

5 Involvement and Empowerment (indicator 7)

To explore the extent that people feel involved and encouraged to take ownership. What works well and what gets in the way?

Additional Evidence Requirements

7.4 Top managers can describe the consultation arrangements they have in place to encourage people to take part in decision making both at an individual level and a representative level

7.9 Managers can describe how they make sure people receive the support they need to make decisions that affect the performance of individuals, teams and the organisation, at a level appropriate to their role

7.12 People can give examples of how they take ownership for decisions that affect the performance of individuals, teams and the organisation, at a level that is appropriate to their role.

There were several examples to show that on one level CMT have been very successful in creating a team of managers that are very effective at leading their teams rather than directly managing them. These examples exist within Headquarters and operationally and exist at all levels from Borough Commander to Watch and Crew Managers.

What works well?

- Typically managers recognise that they have to manage performance but do it in a way that gives ownership and cascades decision making down to the lowest level. Teams feel that their managers are genuinely interested in them as individuals and make time for face to face contact.
- Station action plans – the process works well in cascading down top level priorities and focusing efforts where they need to be. The approach Borough Commanders take varies – the best ones actively involve people giving a strong local feel to the plans and the planning process.

- High levels of autonomy given to Watch and Crew Managers. I sense that Borough Commanders trust people to deliver and do not feel the need to micro manage and maintain regular contact. There is a balance to be struck here with any face to face contact paying dividends if used to good effect. One person made the point that they felt that their Borough Commander was only interested in PDR's and the number of home visits and not interested in them as an individual. "I have recently gained a qualification but they are only interested in home visits etc – don't feel they are interested in me as an individual" There were many examples where the opposite was true.
- Good consultation with unions and in general the view was that efforts had been made to share more information, e.g. involving people in "Pink Paper" meetings
- The use of project boards which involve end users when purchasing new equipment.
- Very positive feedback on the approach to directly involve the team at Crowborough on the refurbishment. It is a good example of how trusting people and giving them ownership has a positive impact.

What does not work well.

- For many people the change in personnel has a negative impact. People talked about 5 Borough Commanders in as many years. This rapid throughput of people is not restricted to operations with a number of roles in Headquarters where there were constant changes ***"One of the frustrations we get as Firefighters is that when they change a Borough Commander they come in with a new set of ideas and you revisit stuff that has happened before"***
- Management style. For some people the view was that the uniform can get in the way. I saw enough excellent practice to lead me to think that it is not the uniform but the skills and approach people take that make the difference.
- Getting the balance right. ***"We must trust people – I need rules and regulations but if you go too far to structure things we become like robots"***

7 NEXT STEPS

I will contact you once you have had a chance to digest the feedback report and we will agree a way forward with the intention of completing your review within 3 months.