



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

Operational Assessment and  
Fire Peer Challenge

Report

**January 2014**

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## **1. Introduction, context and purpose**

### **Introduction**

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Association (LGA)'s Fire Peer Challenge at East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service in January 2014. It uses the framework of the Operational Assessment (OpA) toolkit).

The report provides detailed information on the key focus areas of:

- Leadership and Corporate Capacity
- Protection
- Response
- Training and Development

It also provides overview information on the other areas of the OpA:

- Community Risk Management
- Prevention
- Health and Safety
- Call Management and Incident Support

Under the 'leadership' section, it explores three strategic questions:

- 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?

East Sussex FRS also asked the team to look additionally at the areas of:

- The issue of the size of the Service
- East Sussex FRS' improvement journey -
- The relationship between members and officers in terms of taking the agenda forward
- Engagement strategies with staff regarding cuts

These areas were addressed under the three strategic questions above.

Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector-led improvement. It is a key component of the LGA's 'Taking the Lead' offer:

[www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> January 2014 and consisted of a range of activity including interviews, observations and focus groups. The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, officers, staff, frontline fire fighters, partners and other stakeholders.

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into broad themes and a discussion of the findings was delivered to the Service's senior managers at the end of the challenge. The bullet points from the feedback session are included at the start of every section of this report.

The team appreciates the welcome and hospitality provided by the Service and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions, openness and honesty.

### **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 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. 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

East Sussex FRS (ESFRS) has a Combined Fire Authority (CFA). The political make-up of the authority has been stable for many years until 2013 with political balance shifting away from majority control to no overall control and one of the smaller parties taking the Chair. There is a new chairman and vice-chair, from different political parties, with a high proportion of new councillors on the Authority. This has presented new challenges to both the Authority and the Service. The Challenge team also recognise the enormous efforts that were made by the Service to progress a merger with West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service without benefits realisation.

## Peer Challenge Team

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. 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 is not an inspection; rather it offers an external assessment of an organisation's own judgement of itself against the OpA framework, by critical friends. The assessment is a reflection of the evidence presented to the peer team, through reading the documentary evidence submitted in advance, and the interviews and focus groups when on site.

The team was:

Lead peer: Dave Webb, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Member peer: Stuart West, Shropshire Council

Officer peer: Mick Osborne, ACFO, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service

Officer peer: Lynn Sharkey, Learning and Development Manager, Cleveland Fire Brigade

Officer peer (shadow): Julian Trout, Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service  
Challenge Manager: Becca Singh, Local Government Association

The team appreciates the welcome and hospitality provided by the Service and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions.

## **2. Key areas of focus**

### **Leadership**

#### **How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved?**

#### **Strengths**

- Excellent service being provided to the citizens.
- Achievement of attendance standards is high.
- Influential partnership working provides for quality service in multiple delivery areas.
- Partnership working is a real strength and there are notable practices

Feedback shows that residents and businesses hold ESFRS in high regard. Partners also speak very highly of the commitment and work of ESFRS.

Achievement of attendance standards is high and therefore may provide options for flexibility in future planning of the Service's operational response.

Partnership working is a real strength, with ESFRS sitting on various partnership boards, e.g. MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, the co-ordinated approach to addressing domestic violence), Safeguarding Adults Board, and Health & Wellbeing Board. All parties understand that two-way information sharing provides the most benefit to citizens. Closer working ties enable different organisations to share the understanding of risk and increase referrals to appropriate agencies. There are high levels of awareness of how people who are high risk for one partner are often high risk for another; therefore enabling good information sharing and alerting between partners.

Influential partnership working provides for quality service in multiple delivery areas. Home Safety Visits utilise information gained from partners' work to help produce the best outcome for citizens. Working practices are changing as a result of joint working and the raising of awareness. The effects of the government's austerity measures have driven greater collaboration and sharing with partners to improve outcomes.

## Areas to explore

- Expectations are very high due to previous success and may not be sustainable in the future.
- IT issues are constraining some partnership working (e.g. building control; receiving electronic consultations).
- Partners are not all clear how the Service's Transformation over the next five years will affect them.
- Strong external focus may be at the expense of continuing internal Service development.

Expectations are very high due to previous successes. Partners realise the benefits and knowledge ESFRS can bring to the table and that this level of resources contributing to community safety may not be sustainable in future. Smarter partnership working and joint training could help to reduce duplication and mitigate this risk.

Some partners have identified that they could work more closely with ESFRS if there were fewer IT issues constraining them. Implementing the results of the forthcoming Information Management Department review should help with this; allowing partners to input to and benefit from, for example, the Cube (see examples of notable practice). Common software and applications could help future partnership working.

Partners are not all clear if or how the Service's Transformation will affect current excellent partnership working, particularly community safety work. All partners are aware that changes are coming, but some clarity over timescales and effects would be useful to them.

There was some evidence provided that the strong external focus and partnership working that ESFRS has may be at the expense of continuing the internal Service development that has taken place over the last decade. ESFRS' partnership working is excellent, but it is important not to overlook staff needs particularly at a time of internal reorganisation and change.

## How effective is the leadership and governance?

### Strengths

- CFA Members are strongly engaged.
- New Fire Authority starting to develop and provide the needed support to officers.
- Stable top officer team who show great commitment to the future of the Service.
- A recognition by Members and Officers that there are some very difficult decisions to be made.
- Member Development and training is equipping Councillors to make the decisions required with confidence.

The CFA members are strongly engaged in the Service. The new CFA is starting to develop and Members have benefited from induction training which has increased their confidence to take the challenging decisions that are necessary. Members take pride in the Service and state that the officers are of high quality. There is an appreciation of the challenges officers have faced with the change in the political make-up of the new Fire Authority and the legacy of previous decisions and a willingness to improve decision-making to alleviate these difficulties.

The new Authority is beginning to work together but this is still in its infancy. It is not yet a cohesive group due to political diversity and the high number of new Members, but it is keen to stay actively involved in the governance of the Service. Politics do still appear, but there is recognition that despite political differences, the CFA has to work together to take decisions for the good of the Service.

There is now a growing body of Members who ask, challenge and scrutinise officers more than ever and are wishing to extend the role of the well established scrutiny and audit remit. They have enabled the senior management of the Service to explore a variety of options for future transformation, through increased political direction and involvement in decision-making at an early stage. Caution should be exercised by the CFA becoming too involved in operational decisions that should be delegated to the CFO, Corporate Management Team (CMT) or other managers in the Service.

The CFO and CMT are keeping the Authority (and the Chair in particular) abreast of emerging plans. There is a well established process for regular meetings between the Chair and CFO or DCFO. There are meetings between CFA Members and Principal Officers, as well as station visits that have sometimes been considered worthwhile but should always maintain focus and direction.



There is a stable top officer team who show great commitment to moving the Service forward. The CFO has regular staff briefings and staff have confidence in CMT.

### **Areas to explore**

- Do decision making and planning processes have clarity?
- Planning processes are not well understood [by staff].
- The outcomes of difficult decisions do not appear to be progressed fully.
- Are Members and Officers giving the same messages regarding the transformation of the Service?
- Is the full capacity of the organisation being realised?
- Empower all staff and have confidence in their abilities to deliver.

CMT need to avoid getting involved in decisions that are tactical or relatively minor. CMT needs to work with the CFA to make clear the distinction between operational and strategic decisions. This may help to streamline and clarify decision-making and empower managers at all levels. Staff have confidence in the CMT's skills, experience and abilities, but are concerned that CMT spend too much time taking reports on decisions that have previously been made, then not having the freedom and time to make more strategic decisions. Rationalising and delegating decision-making and budget responsibilities could help to alleviate this and release the energies of staff to help the organisation move forwards.

The CFA and CMT should ensure that the IRMP is a member-led function and commitment from the CFA to the IRMP outcomes is needed. Going forward internal planning processes would benefit from having greater clarity. This includes the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) process and the relationship with the Medium Term Financial Plan. Terminology is not consistent, and this can cause some confusion. There is some sense that ESFRS have been in transition for some time, awaiting guidance and direction, but it is not clear where the blockage is. Staff and managers are enthusiastic and keen to act, but need to be empowered and able to progress change with clear vision and direction from above. Further involvement in the planned IRMP Review of the RDS System from Retained Duty System (RDS) staff and partners would add considerable value. Managers are sometimes provided with information on IRMP outcomes only a short time before public release leading to information available publicly before staff being affected by plans were informed. A clear communication plan is needed to enable staff to be informed at the earliest opportunity

Although CFA members understand that they need to take some challenging decisions, there appears to be a reluctance to act now when the Service is in a relatively healthy position. It is better to transform the organisation now and be ahead of the curve while funding pressures are not critical, rather than delay decisions on direction and vision until it is critical. Members and Officer should seize the opportunity to demonstrate that ESFRS will need to change the way it delivers its operational service due to changes in its risk profile.

There is considerable evaluation and assessment (e.g. peer challenge, IIP) but there is a sense amongst staff that no action will be taken as an outcome of these evaluations. Avoid a sense of inertia and act quickly on the outcomes of assessment and plans to change.

Members and officers need to ensure they are giving the same messages about the transformation of the Service. Officers and members need to work together to make the difficult decisions and demonstrate to staff that there is a close working relationship.

The Service should recognise the benefits that can be derived if they harness the skills, ideas, enthusiasm and specialist knowledge of staff to maximise the opportunities for the future. The Service should consider how it might maximise the full capacity of the organisation to implement change by using the Information Management Department (IMD) review as a driver for the transformation, alongside changing customer needs and the Service overall Transformation programme. Ensuring there is the capacity within IMD and Estates, once a strategic decision has been made is crucial to success. There is a need to improve project and programme management with a clearer strategic overview of how the different reviews, projects and plans lead to the overall vision and goals of the organisation. In addition to the strategic overview there is also a need to ensure there is a focus on the corresponding detail of the major projects.

ESFRS staff have an important role to play in determining the future shape and direction of the organisation and ESFRS should maximise this at an early stage in the review process. Ensure that the CFA appreciates how involving staff in developing plans for the future would be beneficial. Harness the enthusiasm and experience of operational staff to help shape the Service's transformation programme.

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

#### **Strengths**

- The Service appears to have appropriate capacity.
- Staff appear to have the appropriate skills and demonstrate high levels of desire to achieve.
- Lead Members and senior team hold regular briefings to stay apprised of significant matters
- Officers and Members have a real pride in the Service

The Service has the appropriate capacity. It has multi-skilled leaders who recognise when and where help is needed to get to its destination. There are positive examples of using the diverse skills of volunteers, for example volunteer teachers supporting the development of potential RDS officers. Staff are highly motivated, energetic, knowledgeable and experienced and demonstrate high levels of desire to achieve. It was evident that there is willingness across the organisation to improve.

Communication (as opposed to staff engagement) has improved significantly internally and externally, although there is still room for improvement on ensuring communication channels are, and appear to be, two-way.

### **Areas to explore**

- Empowerment at all levels would release latent capacity.
- Staff are confused by mixed messages from Officers and Members
- Greater engagement from Members would be appreciated by staff and would provide real benefits.
- Once decisions are made singular messages to staff are important and would avoid confusion and improve morale.

Empowerment at all levels would utilise full capacity of the Service. There appears to be a degree of silo working within the Service. This manifests itself in conflicting structures and targets for performance with some managers feeling pulled in different directions.

Greater engagement from Members would be appreciated by staff and would provide real benefits. Communication has improved with members and officers using different channels, but there is some concern about needing to have the IT systems to support these communication methods. It is important to ensure that communication specialists within the Service are empowered to lead internal and external communication to improve two-way engagement with staff. The Communications Team is newly established as a result of a restructure. The Fire Authority was involved in the decision and staff were involved in designing the service. This is an example of the Service and FA listening and supporting an internal request to restructure communication which has and will continue to improve internal and external communications.

Staff are confused by mixed messages from senior officers and Members about the transformation. Staff would find it helpful to have a clear and firm direction for the medium term, set out by the Fire Authority

## Protection

### Strengths

- Strong leadership
- Business Safety approach transformation
- External engagement – Hoteliers Forum – other focussed campaigns, based upon risk
- Proactive specific work influencing national agenda
- Standardisation of approaches to sanctions and enforcements
- Staff – Focussed and dedicated

There is strong leadership within the Business Safety function. The emphasis on business safety has resulted in staff confident that the right protection work is being prioritised. It is delivered by focused and dedicated staff with strong leadership. Work is done based on risks identified.

There has recently been a changed focus on business continuity and education. Toolkits are being produced for borough teams and for businesses within those boroughs. The transformation to Business Safety, with the focus on education and information over hard enforcement and sanctions is seen as a positive move to engage better with the business community.

There are good examples of engagement with local businesses which have previously been disengaged. For example, holding a forum with the Hoteliers' Association in Brighton. More than 60 hoteliers attended and found it a valuable experience.

There are examples of ESFRS using its knowledge to influence the national agenda, for example, the paper on Electrical Intake fires and work in care homes (see 'examples of Notable Practice').

There are some excellent examples of standard approaches to enforcement and sanctions in relation to Business Safety issues. The flow charts and diagrams produced in an attempt to ensure a consistent approach to such matters have been well received across the Service.

### Areas to explore

- Perceived conflict between desired outcomes from Business Safety approach and current performance targets
- Potential conflict between Borough Command structure and new Business Safety structure
- IMD systems and support

There is an apparent disconnect in performance management, where Borough targets are based on the number of audits which does not match the objectives of the Business Safety function. Staff do not feel empowered to change performance targets and this impacts on both the new Business

Safety function and the Borough Command teams. There is a danger of a disconnect between boroughs using their funding to target their own areas rather than supporting the Service by jointly targeting high risk areas outside their boroughs.

There is a potential conflict between the Borough Command structure (with a team in every borough or district and the city) and the new Business Safety structure (with two/three areas). Plans to introduce the two/three Business Safety Teams may need further development and engagement with staff. Overarching expectations of delivery in the Protection areas of the Service need revisiting and perhaps to be understood better at all levels.

There are concerns about IMD systems which are holding up developments to advance the anticipated processes, and around additional ICT requirements as a result of the protection strategy change to a business safety model. Ensure that the emerging infrastructure transformation can support this new direction.

## **Response**

The team was asked to look at RDS systems, processes and training in particular.

## **Strengths**

- Strong response and resilience arrangements in place
- Recent work focussed on RDS welcomed
- RDS support officer pilot
- Staff are really motivated 'Want to do a great job'
- Good equipment

There are strong response and resilience arrangements in place and these are relatively unchanged even in light of diminishing demand over the previous decade or so. This reducing demand is as result of some excellent preventative work, as highlighted in the self-assessment report.

The recent focus on RDS improvements are seen as positive by RDS and more of this would be welcomed. There is a proposed Review within Phase Three of the IRMP to look at the future role of RDS, which is linked into other reviews and plans in particular the Medium term plan. However, the scope is not widely understood at this stage, and there is not enough clarity on how RDS and other officers can feed into that project.

The pilot of the RDS Support Officer post (WM level) appears to be working very well. The team heard excellent feedback from across the Service, from RDS, managers and other staff. Careful consideration of the outcomes of the pilot should be given to explore the opportunity of expanding this approach. This appears to be one area of notable practice, however although this is working very well as a pilot, comment was made in respect of the individual officer being the 'right fit'. The post has been very well received by RDS staff

however this could be due to the individual's personality and knowledge and should be carefully considered in developing any person specification. RDS felt listened to with action taken where necessary.

Staff are really motivated and RDS feel valued. They are offered lots of courses and consider that they are generally well informed, including around recent industrial action.

There is good equipment, enthusiasm and energy for the work. Positive hours on Day Crewed stations have been adjusted to coincide with demand and risk meaning that Firefighters are on Station at day crewed stations over peak periods.

### **Areas to explore**

- RDS review scope and direction
- Desire to be included and involved in reviews at all levels
- RDS recruitment process
- RDS new contracts
- RDS training time and flexibility
- Temporary fixed term contracts from RDS - WT
- Operational learning and feedback from incidents and de-briefs

The forthcoming IRMP review of RDS needs engagement with staff at an early stage. The scope and terms of reference need clarity. Two-way engagement, as well as clear information giving, is needed. There is a sense that outside HQ, staff are not clear about the remit of the RDS review outlined in the Medium Term Plan (MTP)

Some RDS processes would benefit from further revision, for example potentially good RDS are put off by the recruitment process taking 18 months and the electronic Personal Development Assessments (PDA) process is largely unavailable to RDS staff because of the IMD issues. However, the team understand that this is being addressed.

The new RDS contracts have had a mixed response. There are some questions over how much RDS can be locally managed, and how flexible they can be. These are hourly based contracts to enable more resilience in availability, however, crews feel the hours are restrictive and could be better managed locally. There were detailed concerns about variations to contracts which some crews feel have not been heard or understood.

Some RDS processes are time consuming which can be off-putting and lead to dissatisfaction. For example, the recruitment process for RDS is very long; there is a perception that the NVQ process can become a hindrance even though it is meant to be a process to follow on from the BTEC award. This gives firefighters in development the impression they are overloaded with information and knowledge over the level required to carry out their role. The re-assessment process for RDS can also be long as staff struggle to find opportunities to address their development needs.

The Service does understand the difficulties faced by RDS when attending training, particularly the re-qualification training. Improved communication about flexibility for split attendance for RDS on courses could allay concerns. Staff would be more understanding of Training and Development's ability to deliver training flexibly if the constraints were better understood.

Although seen as a positive way to fill whole time vacancies, temporary wholetime contracts for RDS staff can have the knock on effect of putting RDS pumps out of action due to lack of staff. Some further consideration on the implications of this would be useful. There may be a need to manage the expectations of RDS moving to wholetime as there have been examples of misunderstanding about migration.

With the exception of minor changes, no review of operational response is evidenced even though call rates and incidents have reduced significantly. Any proposed changes may be perceived as radical and therefore opposition could be great. There is also a feeling among some staff that Members get involved in decisions for political reasons, which is potentially prohibiting operational and response advancements. An example that was cited on a number of occasions was the recent response proposals for Hastings.

There is a real need to ensure that operational learning from debriefs and other events are being used effectively. The last elements of the feedback process need attention with regard to operational learning. This was an issue highlighted in a number of areas whereby it was felt that operational learning was not being shared service-wide and there were concerns that key safety issues could be missed.

## **Training and Development**

### **Strengths**

- There is a clear 'appetite' at all levels to continue and enhance collaborative and joint learning and development
- Joint training with West Sussex FRS is well received
- The Training Centre is recognised for its facilities and the delivery of first-rate development and validation courses
- The Training Centre staff have a reputation of professionalism
- Effective arrangements are in place regarding the two year operational maintenance cycle (four day course)
- National, regional and local learning outcomes from incidents are incorporated into course delivery
- A Member Development Programme is well developed

There is a clear appetite to continue and enhance collaborative and joint learning and development at all levels. The benefits of collaborative learning have been recognised with increased joint training with WSFRS. This is leading to further and closer collaboration. This demonstrates that ESFRS is open to learning from others and it adapts its own procedures, processes and training where appropriate. It is also exploring other collaborative possibilities

between the two services (see 'notable practice' section for more information). Joint and external training includes weekend use of Fire Service College Level 1 training and cross-border incident command collaboration and core training (both RDS and WDS). ESFRS supports individuals gaining qualifications including RDS for example through BTEC and NVQ methods.

There is a business case being developed for a joint WSFRS and ESFRS learning and development function. This is moving in the right direction; joint learning and development activity is not money driven but benefits driven. Outsourcing was considered and rejected. A joint function will save money for both Services.

The Training Centre is recognised for its facilities and the delivery of first-rate development and validation courses. The Training Centre staff have a reputation of professionalism. Effective arrangements are in place regarding the two year operational maintenance cycle (the four day course), including for RDS staff. It was implied there may be some flexibility for split attendance for RDS on courses but in practice this was very limited. Better informing staff as to what flexibility is actually available would make staff more understanding about the Service's ability to deliver this.

Methods of assessing candidates on training courses have changed with candidates being given pre-course learning and 'holistic assessments'. They are then given feedback and a chance to improve before the end of the courses. Through this method 94% of Operational Staff in are "in ticket" with development and validation courses.

The training centre has a fleet of appliances and equipment based on an average of the Service's available equipment held around its Stations. New and old equipment is evenly shared around Service this makes training on like equipment more accessible and relevant.

National, regional and local learning outcomes from incidents are incorporated into course delivery.

Member development is in the early stages but is on-going and the Authority were the first to receive the Charter for Member Development. There has been a mandatory induction programme and a robust on-going Member training programme, although not all Members have been able to take up all the training on offer. Due to the large number of new Members, a buddying system was established to pair a CFA Member with a senior officer in order to gain awareness of the business.

### **Areas to explore**

- Continue to explore and expand the alternative delivery methods, location and timing of development delivery for Retained Duty Staff
- Streamlining of the PDA and BTEC process for Retained Duty Staff (the developments within IMD should assist with this)



- Clear and improved communication and engagement regarding the management of expectations with regard to the migration of Retained Duty Staff to Wholetime

The Service should continue to explore and expand the alternative delivery methods, location and timing of development delivery, particularly for Retained Duty Staff. Some issues around RDS training were highlighted. This includes flexibility and capacity at the training centre, and time needed to deliver training.

Streamlining the PDA and BTEC processes, with the IMD developments, should help move from policy-based training and a laborious BTEC process.

Internal communication around the Sussex-wide learning and development function needs to be clear. Some clarity is needed on whether certain processes (e.g. PDA) have not been revised because of a potential collaborative project. This could include sharing interim stages, decision points, and clarity on where staff can input into the merger plans. Clear and improved communication and engagement regarding the management of expectations with regard to the migration of Retained Duty Staff to Wholetime is also needed.

### **3. Other Key Assessment Areas**

#### **Community Risk Management**

##### **Strengths**

- Recent merging of CRM and CFS teams producing positive outcomes
- Excellent external partnership working and engagement
- Development of the 'CUBE'
- Profiling of Health & Wellbeing visits
- Community Volunteers
- Challenges seen as opportunities to develop new ways of working

The recent merger of the Community Risk Management and Community Fire Safety teams is producing positive outcomes and the Peer Challenge team heard good feedback.

There is excellent external partnership working and engagement which is improving outcomes for residents and partners (see 'notable practice' and "outcomes for local citizens" sections)

The development of the 'Cube' database has enabled ESFRS to make more evidence-based decisions.

There is a diverse, active and growing body of volunteers who are able to take on varied activities and responsibilities, such as volunteer ex-teachers helping to improve basic skills of RDS officers. Health and Wellbeing visits are done by volunteers which is a notable and progressive approach.

Financial challenges have been seen as opportunities to develop new ways of working with partners to reduce risks in communities.

##### **Areas to explore**

- Capacity concerns with additional and competing priorities
- IMD systems and issues restricting progress
- Victims of own success!

There is some concern around ESFRS' capacity to provide information and data to inform projects in relation to IRMP as well as continuing with other current demands. These were concerns raised by staff within the Service.

There are issues with IMD systems which have restricted progress. Different systems do not currently link up, internally or with partners. However, this is being explored in the IMD review.

ESFRS may be a victim of its own success. Partners are really keen to work with ESFRS as they can see the benefits of joint working. Ensuring appropriate capacity to delivery on this in future may be a challenge.

## Prevention

### Strengths

- ESFRS can access all areas due to the trust of its community and its reputation
- ESFRS is shaping and influencing the activities and direction of local businesses and partner organisations
- The approach to prevention work and its activity has adapted to provide better outcomes for the community

ESFRS can access all areas of its community due to the level of trust its communities have of it and also because of its long term reputation of being a trusted organisation. Partners are working with ESFRS to help reduce risks affecting all public services (e.g. NHS, Adult and Children's Social Care).

ESFRS is shaping and influencing the activities and direction of local businesses and partner organisations. ESFRS involvement in Community Safety has bridged relationship that previously weren't working. The Borough Command structure has helped partnership working, as has an emphasis on partnership and inclusion.

The approach to prevention work and its activities have adapted to provide better outcomes for the community. This includes a clearer understanding of the links between various risks and risky activity, and increased knowledge that it is often the same people who pose risks for different organisations. It also includes practical measures, such as changing the hospital discharge process (see 'notable practice').

### Areas to explore

- Increase operational staff understanding of the requirement to undertake the revised approach to prevention work and how this fits into their role and the wider organisational strategy and plans
- The wider community including partners are not fully aware of the broader role of the Service and the opportunities to share, learn and interact with the common goal of safer communities

Increasing operational staff understanding of the requirement to undertake the revised approach to prevention work and how this fits into their role and the wider organisational strategy and plans would be beneficial. Some staff are not willing or reluctant to undertake prevention work or ask personal questions. Improved communication and education will help make the links between prevention work and operational roles and may help reduce the reluctance.

The wider community including partners are not fully aware of the broader role of the Service and the opportunities to share, learn and interact with the common goal of safer communities

## Health & Safety

### Strengths

- A very proactive and well-resourced section
- Clarity of the definitions of strategic and tactical health and safety matters

ESFRS has a very proactive and well-resourced section. There is a clear distinction between strategic and tactical health and safety matters and how the two work alongside each other.

### Areas to explore

- Operational de-brief outcomes not being fully used for organisational learning
- Sickness absence levels

Operational de-brief outcomes are not always being fully used for organisational learning. This has improved significantly, but there is still room for further development.

Sickness absence levels are higher than expected. The team heard that staff morale although generally high, has been dipping, and that there were some concerns about how a return to work process was approached.

## Call Management and incident support

### Strengths

- Sussex Control Centre is a good example of collaborative working (notable practice)
- Call challenge by Control Staff is good

Sussex Control Centre is a good example of collaborative working (see 'notable practice'). The merger of the Control Centres has revealed many common ways of working which have assisted compatibility between the Services and enabled similar training for all involved staff. This has also helped to develop a single way of working within the mobilising area, despite working to two IRMPs.

### Areas to explore

- Delays in SCC project (e.g. go live date) have led to drop in staff morale
- Missed opportunity to involve and engage staff at the early stages of this project
- Continue to explore the work on AFA attendance

Delays in SCC project (e.g. go live date) have led to drop in staff morale. There is no firm date yet for going live on the Joint Control Centre. As a result, savings have not yet been met.

There have been some staffing challenges, with resignations, high stress levels prior to the TUPE process and high levels of voluntary redundancy and early retirement causing pressures on other staff leading to high sickness levels. Every opportunity should be taken to involve and engage staff at the early stages of a project of with this impact on staff. Staff have not yet visited the site since it has been converted, and although equipment is not yet all in place staff would have appreciated seeing the site during its development.

Procurement of mobilising systems has revealed some problems between the suppliers and the Service which has created delays. It is important to learn from this experience to prevent similar issues in future.

Continue to explore the work on AFA attendances. This links into the business safety approach being taken within the prevention and protection directorate.

#### **4. Examples of Notable Practice**

1. Hospital Discharge: partnership working with NHS has led to hospitals including a referral to ESFRS for a Home Safety Visit (HSV) where the patient may be at risk (e.g. limited mobility, bed ridden, living alone). ESFRS sends a letter to the patient offering an HSV. This has been a really good process appreciated by all partners. This process was introduced after determining that a number of fire deaths were people who had recently been discharged from hospital.
2. Sprinkler commitment: The City Council has committed resources towards sprinklers in 2014 – 2015 with approval for sprinklers to be retro-fitted to all council properties as well as into new build properties.
3. Joint training with WSFRS: despite the merger of the two Services not progressing as planned, ESFRS and WSFRS have started to work more collaboratively. The training centre at Maresfield hosts training for both services, with courses run jointly. There are clear benefits for working together as the two share a long border and this minimises duplication. There are also cost savings to be made by having one dedicated centre to deliver training for both services. As time goes on, there are plans to merge the two Learning and Development functions.
4. Suicide prevention work: East Sussex has a high number of suicides at Beachy Head. By working closely with partners, and learning from them, officers conducting Home Safety Visits are able to help identify people who may be at risk of suicide risks and can then pass their names on to the relevant agencies for help.
5. Partnership working: There are a number of examples of notable practice through partnership working as well as those highlighted above. This includes the development of a lap blanket, specifically aimed at people who are largely (or wholly) immobile and who smoke and are therefore high risk. This group of people were identified particularly after analysing the causes of a recent spike in fire deaths. ESFRS worked with partners (particularly Adult Social Care) to identify possible solutions and subsequently worked with suppliers to develop a lightweight laptop fire blanket for this group of people. A heavily used

one has been returned and replaced and the number of cigarette burns on it that have not gone through the blanket demonstrates the blankets value. This used one is now used for training purposes, for officers from ESFRS and partners.

6. Partnership working: ESFRS provides training on home visits for partners as well as its own officers and volunteers. Joint training is a highly effective way of increasing shared knowledge and understanding and the benefits are recognised by partners as well as ESFRS.
7. Home Safety Visits include addressing concerns of partner organisations, recognising that although partners may be able to offer support to people in need, ESFRS has access to people's homes where councils or the police (for example) don't. This means that staff who carry out HSVs are noting risks such as physical and mental health, fuel poverty, non-warm homes and substance abuse as well as assessing fire safety. In addition, recognising that alcohol use contributes both to house fires and deteriorating health, HSVs are also trialling the alcohol use questionnaire developed by the NHS in Brighton & Hove.
8. Sussex Control Centre: this project has gone ahead despite the full merger with WSFRS not progressing. The site was picked as a result of its cost and location (good transport links). Although there have been delays, these have helped to bring the two Services closer together. There have been new policies and processes, such as a sickness monitoring policy and Firewatch. There has been a drop in sickness absence since the two Control services have merged. Arrangements were rolled out well before the physical merger (TUPE, structure of the Service).
9. Electrical Intake Risks – Investigations into local incidents revealed high incidence as a result of electrical intakes. ESFRS invested time and resources in finding a solution to ways of working with business to protect business, people and property. The resulting work has been written up as a case study for CFOA's notable practice.
10. The Cube is an excellent repository for a variety of datasets. It helps ESFRS to make evidence-based decisions. Partners are happy to feed into it and are envious of it whilst recognising that it has been designed with the needs of ESFRS in mind. There could be some mileage in investigating whether it could in time expand as a partnership resource, if there was the appropriate capacity.
11. RDS support Officer: This post is at Watch Manager level and is a pilot project in part of the Service. The post has been very well received, with an officer dedicated to supporting RDS, listening to and acting on their concerns.

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