



Operational Assessment Peer Review

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes
Fire Authority

October 2009



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Executive summary

1. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) is operationally effective and, where evidence has been provided, the team is of the opinion that it is meeting its statutory duties.
2. BMKFA works well with partners across its communities and is well respected.
3. The team were impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of all the staff and members that they met. The review team is of the opinion that staff are eager to move the organisation forward and in order to achieve this, effective and focused leadership is essential.
4. The organisation has produced a self assessment which demonstrates that it is self aware and indeed the team believed that BMKFA may have been overly modest in some areas. Notwithstanding this, a number of policies and initiatives are relatively new and therefore it has not been possible to obtain an informed view on their effectiveness.
5. Plans are in place to improve the alignment between performance and corporate priorities.
6. The interim Chief Fire Officer has established stability and a platform for the new senior management team to build on.

Key recommendations

7. The recommendations of the peer review team are set out under the main themes of the operational assessment's key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) plus cross cutting and equality and diversity themes, as follows:

Cross cutting themes

- The new management team must clearly prioritise the numerous initiatives and projects that are currently under way or are proposed and give clear guidance on where resources should, and should not, be focussed
- BMKFA should give serious consideration to the question of whether or not the leading Human Resource post is at the correct level within the organisation.

Equality and diversity

- BMKFA should undertake a staff survey covering workforce issues such as disabilities
- The People Impact Assessments should be reviewed and improved
- Additional effort is required to improve recruitment diversity results.

Community risk management

- BMKFA should consider the on going funding of a number of posts – e.g. the Performance and Evaluation Manager
- BMKFA should clearly communicate the Community Cohesion Policy to its staff.

Prevention

- The extensive range of partnerships in place should be reviewed to ensure that the limited resources available to BMKFA are utilised most effectively
- BMKFA should review the situation regarding operational training to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between this and community safety activities.

Protection

- BMKFA should consider what measures it could employ to improve the way it gathers risk information pertaining to the 'unknown' non-domestic premises.

Response

- BMKFA should make extra efforts to bring its staffing levels up to target
- BMKFA should consider developing a plan to extend their training and exercises in relation to resilience issues.

Health and safety

- BMKFA should implement a means of ensuring that all H&S information has been received, read and understood
- BMKFA should review its levels of H&S training for non operational staff
- BMKFA should consider the use of an IT based H&S system
- Performance information should be reported regularly to the Chief Officers Forum.

Training and development

- The appraisal system should be embedded across the organisation
- The training requirements of Retained Duty System (RDS) staff should be reviewed.
- BMKFA should consider the introduction of an electronic individual training recording system.

Call management and incident support

- BMKFA should consider what additional support it could provide to staff in relation to Regional Control Centre (RCC) matters.

Background

8. In September 2009, as part of the new performance framework for Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) within the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) arrangements, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) completed a self assessment against the toolkit for operational assessment developed by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). This was followed, in October 2009, by an operational assessment peer review to test this self assessment.
9. It was recommended by CFOA and approved by Fire Services Management Committee of the Local Government Association that CFOA and IDeA operate a partnership approach that included developing the already established IDeA local government peer review process to fully meet the fire and rescue sector requirements. The peer review process is designed to help a fire and rescue service (FRS) assess its current achievements and its capacity to change. The peer review is not an inspection. Instead it offers a supportive approach, undertaken by friends – albeit ‘critical friends’. It aims to help an FRS identify its current strengths, as much as what it needs to improve.
10. The basis for this review is the draft toolkit for operational assessment developed by CFRA and CFOA. The key lines of enquiry (KLOE) are:
 - Community risk management
 - Prevention
 - Protection
 - Response
 - Health and safety
 - Training and development
 - Call management and incident support.
11. The members of the peer review team were:
 - Anthony Duggan, former chair Bedfordshire and Luton CFA
 - Steve Lunn, ACFO, Leicestershire FRS
 - John McVay, Area Manager, Cumbria FRS
 - Dany Cotton, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade
 - Lynn McElheron, Strategic Manager, Teignbridge District Council
 - Greg Goold, Review Manager, IDeA
 - Ernest Opuni, Improvement Manager, IDeA - Shadow

12. The team was onsite from 20th – 23rd October 2009. The programme for the onsite phase included activities designed to enable members of the team to meet and talk to a range of internal and external stakeholders. These activities included:
- Interviews and discussions with councillors, officers and partners
 - Focus groups with partners, middle managers and frontline staff
 - Visits to fire stations, control room and the Haddenham, Marlow and the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) training facilities
 - Reading documents provided by the FRS, including a self-assessment of progress against the operational assessment KLOEs.
13. The IDeA would like to extend its thanks to all BMKFA staff for their hospitality and cooperation before and during the visit and to Paul Holland and David Norris, in particular, for their assistance in organising the review.
14. Our feedback to BMKFA on the last day of the review gave an overview of the key messages. This report builds on the initial findings and gives a detailed account of the review. The report is structured around the seven areas of the KLOEs listed above.

Context

15. BMKFA serves a population of around 725,000 in the South East of England. The area stretches from the outskirts of London to the South Midlands. It comprises the four districts of Buckinghamshire – Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire and Wycombe – and the emerging unitary authority of Milton Keynes.
16. The major centres of population are the designated New City area of Milton Keynes (172,033 in the 2001 Census), High Wycombe (77,178), Aylesbury (69,021), Chesham (20,343) and Amersham (17,719).
17. The area served by BMKFA includes stretches of the M1, M4, M25 and M40 motorways, a section of the West Coast Main Line, several miles of the River Thames, part of the Silverstone motor racing circuit and Chequers, the Prime Minister's country residence. Heathrow and Luton airports lie just outside the area.
18. The age structure of Buckinghamshire County is currently similar to regional and national averages with 36 per cent in the over 50 bracket. Life expectancy is above the national average with males in the top quartile and females in the top half. By contrast Milton Keynes' population is younger than the average for England and Wales as a result of sustained migration into the area.
19. Over 8 per cent of the population come from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds with the majority being of Asian or Asian British ethnicity. BME populations tend to be concentrated in the main centres of Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and High Wycombe. Milton Keynes has grown significantly in recent years and the 2004 estimates indicate that the BME communities forms 13 per cent of the population though data from schools indicates that this figure is now higher as a result of high levels of international migration in the last few years. The age profile of the BME population is also younger than the average for the population as a whole.
20. Notwithstanding the current recession, the local economy has performed strongly in recent years with employment, skill levels and productivity all comparing well against national and regional averages. The service sector pre-dominates and, for example, accounts for 83 per cent of activity in Milton Keynes with particular strengths in logistics, retail, hotels, restaurants, banking and insurance. Most industrial activity is relatively small scale and "light" in nature. In addition large numbers of people commute into London each day using the rail and tube networks.

21. The populations of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are more prosperous than the national average with average household incomes in Buckinghamshire 24 per cent higher than the UK average. However there are pockets of disadvantage especially in the urban areas of High Wycombe and Aylesbury. In Milton Keynes economic growth and performance has also been high in recent years, with 3,000 jobs created annually. However small pockets of intense deprivation exist with 9,000 people in neighbourhoods in the nation's 10 per cent most deprived areas and a further 11,000 in the 20 per cent most deprived (Woughton, Campbell Park, Lakes Estate and Fullers Slade).
22. Both the county and Milton Keynes have good transport links into London via the motorway, rail and tube networks. However North – South communication within the county is poorer and requiring us to maintain significant operational capacity in the North, Centre and South of the area we serve. Road safety is a major concern, despite recent improvements, with road traffic collisions being the largest single source of accidental death and serious injury.
23. From a fire and rescue perspective the key challenges facing the area are:
 - The ageing population profile, particularly in Buckinghamshire, where the 60 – 79 population is expected to grow by 51 per cent by 2015 compared with the 2001 census. The growth of the over 80 population is even greater at 68 per cent over the same period. Research shows that the over 80's are much more at risk of death and serious injury in fires than the rest of the population
 - The general growth of the population, urban footprint and associated infrastructure especially in Milton Keynes and the urban parts of the Aylesbury Vale, although the current recession may place a temporary check on this
 - The more transient nature of the population in certain areas due to migration trends
 - Potential increases in social deprivation associated with the current economic downturn (for example more people living in houses in multiple occupation). There is a strong correlation between fire risk and social deprivation. The recession could also result in increased levels of fire related crime and anti-social behaviour
 - The growth of higher risk groups, such as the 17 - 24 age group in Milton Keynes, riders of powerful motorcycles and foreign registered large goods vehicles may challenge efforts to further reduce the number of road traffic collisions and associated deaths and injuries
 - Over the longer term dealing with the effects of climate change and reducing our carbon footprint.

24. The operational service is delivered from 20 fire stations; six Wholetime, four Day Crewed and 10 Retained Duty System (RDS). BMKFA has a fleet of 42 frontline appliances plus specialist Urban Search and Rescue Vehicles and other New Dimension equipment and two water rescue boats. The FRS employs 719 staff of whom 517 are devoted to emergency response (206 RDS), 25 Control Room, 49 Community Safety and 128 in various support functions.
25. The total revenue budget for 2009/10 is £28.2m.
26. Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) is governed by Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (BMKFA) which comprises 21 local councillors, 14 from Buckinghamshire and seven from Milton Keynes. The Authority scrutinises the organisation's work via a series of cross party sub-committees which focus on key functions and processes. The composition of each Committee is carefully structured to ensure that they reflect the balance between the two constituent Authorities and levels of representation for each political party. The identification of lead members for specific topics is recognised as being good practice.
27. The senior management team is currently being led by an interim Chief Fire Officer (Bill Feeley) following the retirement of Damian Smith in June 2009. However, the Authority has recently recruited a new permanent chief (Mark Jones – currently the Deputy Chief at Essex FRS) who will take up his appointment in January 2010.

Cross cutting themes

Strengths

- BMKFA is meeting its statutory obligations
- Staff are energetic, enthusiastic and committed to BMKFA
- There are lots of good initiatives under way (e.g. ONP, VLI)
- The introduction of a new top management team is a great opportunity
- BMKFA has a good reputation as a partner
- Members are supportive
- Working hard to improve communications.

Areas for consideration

- A range of competing priorities
- BMKFA hides its light under a bushel
- There are issues to be addressed in HR
- The use and interpretation of data and information must be improved.

28. At every point the team were impressed by the staff that they met. Whether at the FRS headquarters or at other locations, the employees of BMKFA were found to be energetic, enthusiastic and positive and committed to BMKFA. Industrial relations appeared to be good and the levels of disciplinary action were low.
29. BMKFA has a number of successful internal communications channels (e.g. intranet and staff magazine) and is working hard to improve in this area although it should be noted that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding about the Pathfinder back office initiative.
30. In terms of both its self assessment and perhaps its general approach the team came to believe that BMKFA may in fact be guilty of over modesty in some areas. For example, several members of the review team visited the Community Safety Information Centre in the shopping mall in Aylesbury and were very impressed by its location and its work – but this doesn't seem to be mentioned at all in the self assessment.
31. The leading members that the team met during their visit were also active in their support of BMKFA and its ambitions.
32. BMKFA is well thought of by its partners and seen as a “can do” organisation that contributes well, especially at an operational level.

33. There are a number of impressive initiatives under way – with the Vulnerable Localities Index (VLI) and the Operational Neighbourhood Plans (ONP) being prime examples.
34. However, there was one strong message that was repeatedly made to the team and comes through all of the above points – namely that BMKFA tries to do too much. There are too many projects, too many initiatives and too many partnerships. It was described by one individual as a “maelstrom of activity”. Throughout the organisation individuals are becoming involved with the projects, initiatives, activities and partnerships that they believe are important but there does not seem to be a clear overarching set of priorities which govern this activity. The team believes that it is essential for BMKFA to review and prioritise its activities so that it can produce an action plan that clearly identifies where resources will be committed, which activities must consequently be delayed or dropped and how this activity fits with training requirements.
35. Perhaps a further symptom of this undirected “can do” attitude is reflected in the teams evaluation that BMKFA collects a large volume of data and information (e.g. by the Intelligence Team) which is not always effectively utilised (despite the earlier comments about VLI). There was talk of “information overload” and an impression that some staff could not “see the wood for the trees”. This links to the topic of communications and the need to ensure that there are clear purposes and objectives driving the collection, use and communication of data and information.
36. By far and away the most important cross cutting issue that the team was aware of was the situation regarding the senior management of BMKFA. Whilst the Interim Chief Fire Officer (CFO) has been successful in providing stability within the service and providing a platform on which BMKFA can build, the recruitment of a new permanent CFO, followed by a new senior management team, will provide a major opportunity for the service. In particular, the review team hopes that the new senior management team will provide the strong operational leadership and direction that is needed and will provide clear guidance on the prioritisation of initiatives, partnerships, use of resources etc. that is so vital for BMKFA to continue on its improvement journey.
37. However, there is a danger that so much hope is invested in the appointment of the new CFO that there will be some disappointment when all the outstanding issues are not resolved immediately. The new CFO must be allowed time to understand the current situation, to assess the available options and to bring a range of individuals on board before changes can be implemented.
38. One important area of concern that should be an early focus for the new CFO is in relation to Human Resources (HR) and organisational culture.

39. There are a number of issues in this area – for example,
- The systems of appraisal and development need to be formalised
 - There appears to be no process for succession planning
 - There are no exit interviews
 - There is a perception from some sections of the Service that the recruitment and promotion processes are driven by whether “the face fits” rather than by merit
40. It is vital that the new senior management team is seen to be recruited according to merit via an open and transparent recruitment process.
41. The review team recommends that the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) gives serious consideration to the question of whether or not the leading HR post is at the correct organisational level. There is much to be done in this area and the team believes this warrants a senior post to add weight to drive forward any necessary changes.

Equality and diversity

Strengths

- New Single Equality Scheme, toolkits and guidance in place
- Good training for all staff and members in place and planned
- Equality and diversity increasing in importance and understanding in the organisation
- Examples of good community engagement.

Areas for consideration

- Review the effectiveness of People Impact Assessments to drive improvement
 - Wider exploration of positive action initiatives is required to achieve a workforce that better reflects the community
 - Limited workforce monitoring – puts the organisation at risk
 - Achieving Level 2 of the new Equality Standard is an ambitious target
 - Equality and diversity – don't sell yourself short
42. There has been much progress over the past year in terms of equality and diversity policies, guidance, training and engagement. This should be celebrated both internally and externally, especially in future self assessments.
43. There are some good examples of community engagement. Work in an area of deprivation which had arson attacks and community cohesion issues resulted in a new Resident's Trust, community safety initiatives and a Community Fun Day.
44. The move of the equality and diversity function into Community Safety has worked well operationally and is increasing in importance within the organisation.
45. There is recognition throughout the workforce that equality and diversity training has improved, with a good range available for all staff, including distance learning and a national qualification for senior managers. New ways of training are also being tested, including theatre style workshops for members. The in-house delivery of equality and diversity training has resulted in ownership, buy-in and good feedback from staff.
46. The commitment to give 100 per cent of staff and members equality and diversity training by the end of the financial year is to be applauded, although there was some confusion as to whether the training is being undertaken by all staff.

47. In response to the under representation of women and the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in the workforce, BMKFA has undertaken some good community engagement with targeted groups and communities prior to the last recruitment campaign. This had a positive result, with six of the 24 new recruits being women. There are also some good examples of positive action for the future, with seminars held at mosques, and work experience and student placements planned with local schools and colleges.
48. Although the recent recruitment round did attract applications from women and BME candidates, no BME candidates were successful. A number of low level positive action initiatives were undertaken including a visit to a mosque and a local college and advertising on a BME website. This resulted in 13 per cent of the initial applications coming from women or BME candidates but very limited success rates. Although six women were successful and accessed the recruit training course at Moreton-in-Marsh, three of them have already been placed into a holding course due to sickness or injury. This might suggest the need for further fitness testing and opportunities for fitness training prior to commencement of recruit training. Wider exploration of positive action initiatives may be required to improve the overall recruitment diversity results. Assistance has been offered from the peer review team.
49. There is limited information on workforce monitoring, with no information available on those employed with a disability. This puts the FRS at risk, as well as not understanding the needs of its workforce. A staff survey is required, which would provide valuable information and enable future monitoring and targeting to be undertaken.
50. People Impact Assessments (PIAs) need to be reviewed and enhanced in order to drive improvement. Impacts have not been identified for all strands of equality, or for rural issues or areas of deprivation. Where any actions are identified, they are shown as 'positive' as it is perceived they will provide an improvement for the community, rather than identifying what the impact of the policy, decision or service could have on each strand. For instance, the PIA for the Community Engagement Strategy showed 'not applicable' against each of the six strands of equality and therefore no action identified.
51. To obtain Level 2 of the new Equality Framework (equivalent to Level 3 in the old system) by the end of March 2010 is an ambitious target and will need buy-in and commitment from all levels of management if this is to be achieved.

Community risk management

Strengths

- Use of Operational Neighbourhood Plans is innovative and driving improvement
- Appointment of a Performance and Evaluation Manager
- Examples of good community safety initiatives include Multi Agency Safety Centre and Community Safety Information Centre.

Areas for consideration

- There is an element of newness about the Community Cohesion Policy.
 - Some sectors of the workforce are concerned about the balance between delivery of community safety initiatives and operational training.
52. BMKFA demonstrated that they have an effective risk analysis based approach to identifying and targeting their community safety activities. Use of Operational Neighbourhood Plans (ONP) combining externally gathered intelligence via the Vulnerable Localities Index (VLI) and local intelligence from fire station personnel to target “at risk” communities and individuals. This is an innovative way of directing the way in which the crews implement their community safety work and cuts across a number of the KLOEs. Feedback from management, station personnel and external partners is positive.
53. BMKFA have introduced the post of Performance and Evaluation Manager whose role is to assess the ONPs using validation, assurance and performance frameworks. This post is externally funded using Local Public Service Agreement money and it has been recognised early that a bid needs to be made for future funding requirement to continue this role
54. There are several good examples of multi agency community safety initiatives including :
- The Safety Centre targeting children from across the county providing education across a wide range of safety issues
 - The Community Safety Information Centre in Aylesbury town centre which is a shared partnership resource allowing the community to directly access fire service information and services.

55. Although a new Community Cohesion Policy has been introduced, it does not seem to be widely understood and embedded. Reports from members of staff across all levels appeared to demonstrate a lack of understanding about the policy and what it means in real terms to their role and to the overall organisational objectives. This communication issue should be addressed.
56. Some sectors of the workforce are concerned about the balance between delivery of community safety initiatives and operational training. This view was expressed repeatedly and although some sectors of the workforce thought the pendulum was swinging back towards a better balance, some staff felt that operational training and performance was the poor relation often coming second place to community safety initiatives.
57. This could be addressed by ensuring that ONPs are balanced with operational training and regular monitoring takes place to ensure that training targets are being achieved. The Performance and Evaluation Manager's role in monitoring the ONPs will be key to this improvement.

Prevention

Strengths

- Commitment to making communities safer
- Operational Neighbourhood Plans
- Dedicated Performance and Evaluation manager
- Doubled the number of Home Fire Safety Checks - commitment to stretch service targets
- Partnerships established.

Areas for consideration

- Evaluation of partnerships to identify which ones are being effective
- Some sectors of the workforce are concerned about the balance between delivery of community safety initiatives and operational training – the initiatives always seem to take priority
- Longer term funding for posts which have only time limited funding
- Community Cohesion not yet understood at station level.

58. Throughout the review it was apparent through interviews and discussions with staff there is a strong commitment to community safety across the whole of the organisation. All staff are supportive of the community focus and the efforts BMKFA are making to make the communities safer.
59. The review team were impressed with the ONP which have been introduced into the service over the last 15 months. These plans give ownership to crews at a local level by enabling stations to identify the respective issues within the local area and to plan a number of community focused initiatives to help overcome these issues
60. The station “profile” directs station personnel toward the production of plans which are specific to the area and are data driven. Partnerships with neighbourhood action groups and other groups are encouraged in order that service delivery and targeted community intervention can be carried out both on and off fire service premises. The ONPs are monitored on a quarterly basis by the newly formed neighbourhood management teams. These teams include the Station Commander, Partnership Manager, Neighbourhood Planning Manager and Risk Reduction (Protection) Team Leaders.

61. Station personnel, Station Managers and Partnership Managers on an annual basis look at the Station Profile in order to determine what their local priorities are. After consulting this profile, Station Managers and personnel with the support of their Partnership Manager are to identify and plan initiatives based on the following criteria. Wholetime and Day Crewed stations - (eight initiatives per station):
 - Four initiatives covering the four community safety objectives listed in the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) – Homes, Workplaces, Communities and Roads
 - One initiative covering a priority taken from the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) plan (The partnership manager sits on the local CDRP and is therefore aware of local issues)
 - Three initiatives are selected based on any local priority – e.g. IRMP, CDRP, Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAG) etc.
62. Although these plans have only been in use for just over a year the concept is well understood across the organisation and crews interviewed were positive about the plans and the associated benefits.
63. Due to the number of different partnerships which have been developed over the years across BMKFA, and the various different initiatives carried out, it has been realised that the introduction of a dedicated Performance and Evaluation Manager would greatly assist the organisation to distinguish which partnership or initiative is actually delivering the required results and outcomes to BMKFA and / or the associated partnership.
64. The Performance and Evaluation Manager's role involves liaising, consulting, providing and informing the Community Safety Team, partner agencies and the central intelligence unit with relevant data and reports and feeding back the benefits or otherwise of being involved with the respective partnership arrangements. The Performance and Evaluation Manager also effectively plans and project manages work to ensure it is completed on time and to the appropriate standard.
65. The manager maintains a sound working relationship with team member's, key practitioners and all associated fire station managers and will liaise with the Group Manager Prevention, Crime and Disorder Act Manager, and the Community Risk and Neighbourhood Planning Managers to provide support and risk reduction initiatives to vulnerable people in Buckinghamshire.
66. The review team were impressed with the fact that BMKFA have doubled the number of Home Fire safety Checks (HFSC) which they intend to carry out on an annual basis (from 5,000 to 10,000) and that they will utilise a range of external partners to assist them with achieving this target. To further involve all members of staff in achieving 10,000 HFSC, every member of staff will be encouraged to provide firm referrals to assist with reaching the target.

67. As a general rule the HFSC is targeted at 'vulnerable' people. A person or group may be classified as vulnerable if support is needed to assist, enable or promote independent living. It is at the discretion of the person visiting that person if they consider them vulnerable. Those considered vulnerable may include;
- Older People (65 plus)
 - Those with a learning disability or physical/sensory disability
 - Those house bound through illness or with other health problems which restrict mobility
 - Families on low income
 - People suffering from a mental illness
 - Victims of dwelling burglary or other dwelling related crimes
 - Victims of domestic abuse
 - Those who are receiving, or have received services in relation to alcohol and other substance misuse.
68. The most common group is older people, and this has been this group of people who have received the majority of assessments in Buckinghamshire to date.
69. BMKFA have established a number of successful partnerships in an attempt to deliver a more community focused approach to the people who live, work or visit Buckinghamshire. This partnership approach impressed the review team and has enabled BMKFA to utilise other external agencies and partners to deliver a number of initiatives on behalf of BMKFA.
70. Examples of partnerships are listed below:
- Local CDRPs
 - NAGs
 - Multi agency Safety Centre
 - Safety Information shop
 - Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID).
71. Due to the number of partnerships which have been established within the organisation it is suggested the partnership register is reviewed to identify how much benefit each of the partnerships are giving to BMKFA and also to recognise the advantage to the external partner. The team note the post of a Performance and Evaluations Manager has recently been appointed to assist with the above. This post is pivotal in identifying which partnership arrangements are actually delivering benefits to all parties involved and the associated positive outcomes.

72. During the review it was mentioned to the review team on a number of occasions there was a perception that BMKFA did not prioritise its workloads and simply took on more and more work without quantifying the organisational benefits of taking on the work. Due to capacity issues it is suggested all partnerships are evaluated to establish the most appropriate ones. This will assist with refocusing the service priorities and will subsequently realign workstreams to improve service delivery.
73. Due to the amount of community focused activity and the number of initiatives being carried out, it was stated frequently that the community safety activities were being given priority and the operational training across the organisation was suffering and not being given the same level of importance.
74. All staff the review team interviewed realised and accepted the importance and associated benefits of community safety activity and realised these activities helped and supported the wider community safety agenda across Buckinghamshire. However, there was a strong feeling at all levels of the organisation that operational training was suffering and not given the same level of importance, it was stated that *"Training was always the first thing to fall of the end of the table"*. Various members of staff explained that operational training and maintenance of competence was essential now more than ever, it was mentioned that due to the reduction of incidents being attended and the fact that within the assessment and development process there was no assessment of operational knowledge and understanding.
75. The review team acknowledge this is a wider debate than only BMKFA and is discussed and deliberated over nationally. However due to the number of people who commented from all levels of the organisation the team feels it is an important message to be fed back to the Senior Management Team (SMT) for consideration.
76. The Community Safety Team has recently been reorganised (April 2009) and within the team there are a number of new posts which only have time limited funding. Subsequently at the end of the funding these important positions may not be able to be continued therefore leaving gaps in the community safety teams organisational provision, As stated previously the service have recently introduced the post of a Performance and Evaluation Manager, this is one example of the posts which currently only has time limited funding.
77. Due to the importance of these posts the review team feel it is appropriate to highlight to BMKFA that it is essential that longer term planning should be discussed to identify if these posts will indeed be mainstreamed in the longer term and if so, how this may be achieved.

78. It was stated in BMKFA self assessment that equality and diversity training and community cohesion training was carried out with operational crews. Following discussions and interviews with station based personnel it was identified that equality and diversity training was indeed delivered across not only the stations but cascaded wider within the organisation, however, when questioned about cohesion training and community cohesion there was a distinct lack of understanding of the difference between community cohesion and the equality and diversity agenda.
79. Again, the review team feel it appropriate to highlight these findings in an attempt to clarify the level of understanding across the station based personnel.

Protection

Strengths

- Fully developed risk based inspection programme
- The capacity of the protection team is managed effectively
- Information is shared efficiently between functions
- Teams work well together and Quality Assurance procedures have recently been introduced.

Areas for consideration

- The Quality Assurance procedures and performance indicators need to be monitored for effectiveness
 - A strategy to develop the 'Other Buildings Database' should be considered.
80. BMKFA has a good record of performance relating to the delivery of fire protection services. During the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery review in 2007 protection was identified as a particular strength.
81. The FRS headquarters facility maintains a 'hub' that receives all telephone calls and queries associated with fire protection. Functional delivery is provided from three separate offices that are located in North Buckinghamshire, South Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes; this mirrors the district arrangements.
82. The staff team is relatively small and maintains an audit ratio of just over 1,100 per Inspecting Officer and this compares favourably with the national average which currently stands at approximately 1,000.
83. BMKFA has established a robust risk based inspection programme and within the context of this, the risk analysis applicable to each premises type is strong.
84. The premises audit programme is based upon the following criteria:
- Periodic i.e. risk based inspection programme
 - Thematic i.e. based on complaints and intelligence received
 - Post – fire i.e. all non-domestic premises that report a fire are audited within seven days
 - Automatic Fire Alarms – i.e. where increased attendance at false alarms caused by automatic fire detection equipment is apparent
 - Complaints i.e. when a complaint is received about a premises
 - Site specific i.e. risk based.
85. The 'Other Buildings Database' is maintained as valid and reliable and all information resultant from periodic and planned audits are entered into the bespoke software package.

86. Any information specific to premises that is adjudged to be operationally important is shared with operational crews through ensuring amendments to the mobilisation system i.e. in instances where enforcement or prohibition notices have been served.
87. All staff (audit and Inspection Officers) are appropriately trained and qualified to undertake their roles. Periodic update training and meetings between the three teams are pre-planned.
88. Performance of the teams is measured and reported on a monthly basis and a Quality Assurance process has just been implemented. The effectiveness of these arrangements should to be monitored closely to ensure that they drive improvement.
89. The 'Other Buildings Database' only contains records of existing and new premises that have been subject to fire safety audit in the past. Albeit that all new premises are added on a routine basis, BMKFA should consider what measures it could employ to improve the way it gathers risk information pertaining to the 'unknown' non-domestic premises.

Response

Strengths

- Good use of operational evaluation tools to identify trends
- Successful initiative undertaken to reduce calls to Automatic Fire Alarms
- Changes in mobilising protocols have resulted in more targeted attendance to all incidents
- Staff appreciate high standards of operational equipment
- Positive public perception – very high level of feedback from the after the fire questionnaire
- New mobilising system and introduction of Mobile Data Terminals
- Staff have a high regard of Retained Duty System staff
- Introduction of Gartan.

Areas for consideration

- Deficiencies in wholetime and RDS establishment are impacting on operational capability and preparedness.
 - Gartan needs to be linked into Vision FX
 - Further explore availability of an electronic individual training record system
 - Consider development of a programme to exercise resilience issues
 - Rostering for duty should result in improvements being achieved.
90. BMKFA demonstrated very well that the evaluation tools they use during and post operational incidents are well developed and utilised resulting in early identification of any underlying trends allowing them to be addressed across the service. They have a number of different tools including “hot debriefs” immediately post incident; learning review of command debriefs; and a full debrief forum including the attending stations, representatives from health and safety, training, command and control and other stakeholders. Any operational issues that are identified are fed back to all staff using the Response Bulletin which is published on a needs based basis approximately 20 times a year.
91. A number of initiatives have been undertaken which have successfully reduced operational calls to AFA calls dramatically.

92. The operational, staff in conjunction with Control, have introduced effective changes in mobilising protocols which have resulted in more targeted attendance to all incidents. This has reduced appliances travelling unnecessarily and increased crew safety.
93. There is a very positive public perception – very high level of feedback from the 'After the Fire' questionnaire, amongst the top responses in the country.
94. They have introduced a new mobilising system Vision FX which will result in improved reliability and a more user friendly system. This will also reduce annual running costs.
95. BMKFA have also purchased 13 Mobile Data Terminals for their frontline operational appliances and command unit. They have done this ahead of the Firelink project and have made a very good decision to purchase the upgraded demountable version. This will allow the operational staff to utilise the data at the scene of an incident enhancing crew safety.
96. Throughout our meetings with staff, there was a comprehensive recognition of high standard of performance of RDS staff, something that is not always reflected across all fire and rescue services.
97. The operational staff were all highly complimentary about the high standards of operational equipment that they are supplied with.
98. However, there appear to be serious issues with crewing levels of both wholetime and retained staff against set targets. The current recruitment course will go some way to addressing the wholetime issue, but an urgent retained recruitment drive is needed to fill the approximately 70 vacant posts. These deficiencies are impacting heavily on BMKFA operational capability and preparedness. Examples of this are the target of availability for retained staff is 95 per cent but is currently running nearer 75 per cent with up to 12 retained appliances being unavailable during the daytime on a regular basis. There is a shortage of staff available to deliver operational training as they cannot be released from fire stations as this would result in more appliances being off the run.
99. The operational availability programme Gartan needs to be linked into the mobilising system Vision FX to be able to utilise it fully.
100. Although all staff have paper based individual training records (ITARs) this could be greatly enhanced by the introduction of an electronic recording system to use as evaluation and development tools for individual training records. This would allow these to be monitored remotely and overall trends to be identified. BMKFA have looked into some of these electronic systems but have not found a satisfactory fit yet.
101. BMKFA undertake training on a regional level with the resilience forum. However, it was suggested to the team that BMKFA might benefit from more training and exercises (whether in-house or with the resilience forum) on resilience subjects.

Health and safety

Strengths

- There is a health and safety culture through the organisation
- Health and safety training for all operational managers and members
- Personal Protective Equipment and operational equipment
- Hazard Reports further encourages health and safety awareness across organisation
- Health and safety linked in with operational debriefs
- Knowledge assessment as part of Assessment Development Centre.

Areas for consideration

- Evaluate methods of communication to ensure staff receive health and safety information
- Training for non operational staff to be formalised
- IT based system to allow service overview, health and safety trends etc
- Performance information should be provided to Chief Officers Forum
- Corporate ownership of health and safety

102. Throughout the review the team questioned various groups and individuals on their perception of health and safety and how seriously it was taken within BMKFA. It was stated that there was a good health and safety culture throughout the organisation, this was echoed by virtually everyone questioned.

103. All operational staff are given health and safety training, the level of training is dependent on the particular role and the individual's function. This training will be provided by the FRS on the following basis:

- Health and Safety Team Manager NEBOSH Diploma
- Health and Safety Advisor NEBOSH General Certificate
- FRA Members, Principal Officers IOSH Safety for Senior Execs.
- Station/Site Managers NEBOSH General Certificate
- Watch/Crew/Team Managers IOSH Managing Safely.

104. Also for non operational staff health and safety training is undertaken as part of their staff induction process.
105. During the review it was relayed to the team on numerous occasions the levels of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and operational equipment provided to the operational crews were greatly appreciated and considered to be the best available. Not once during any of the interviews or discussions was anything derogatory said about PPE or operational kit.
106. Hazard reports have been introduced across the organisation to enable all staff members to feed health and safety issues into the health and safety team based within headquarters. These reports allow staff to have ownership of health and safety issues throughout the organisation. It was considered to be an excellent initiative to involve and empower all staff to continually enhance and support the health and safety culture within BMKFA.
107. Operational debriefs are carried out within BMKFA in order to allow for continual monitoring, evaluation and reviewing of the overall performance of operational incidents and training exercises. These debriefs allow for staff to highlight good practices and the identification of poor ones.
108. The Health and Safety Department within headquarters in liaison with other heads of departments established that health and safety should be on the agenda for operational debriefs if it was considered appropriate, this has enabled any health and safety issues to be discussed and debated in order to carry the learning from the debriefs across the organisation
109. As stated previously there was concern voiced by a number of people within BMKFA regarding the amount of operational training carried out and the associated potential for a lack of operational knowledge and understanding across some of the more junior operational managers who have not studied for fire service statutory promotion examinations previously. With the Introduction of the Assessment and Development Centres (ADC) and the associated refocusing of what is expected of firefighters and managers undertaking this process this can allow for staff to be successful and complete an ADC without having studied any operational topics. This again is an area of concern across a number of FRSs nationally.
110. However, BMKFA have gone some way to overcoming and rectifying this issue by introducing a knowledge assessment of operations including health and safety. This ensures that any operational staff will be at a level of technical operational knowledge before being given an opportunity to ride in a fire appliance as an Officer in Charge. The review team considered this to be BMKFA assessing a potential risk for the organisation and therefore putting a plan in place which will hopefully rectify the identified risk.
111. It was acknowledged during the review there were lots of good health and safety information available to staff, these ranged from health and safety policies to safety messages, the methods of distributing this

information was wide ranging, from the service 'I' drive to email to paper copies being circulated. Although there are various ways to circulate the information it can be difficult to know for certain the health and safety message has been read and understood by the workforce.

112. It was felt by the review team some consideration should be given to identifying a means of ensuring staff have received, read and understood all health and safety information which has been circulated. This may be by the means of an acknowledgement slip which needs to be signed or via some other IT based system.
113. As previously mentioned above the review team considers it a strength of BMKFA that all operational staff are given formalised health and safety training. However it was discussed by the team that although some health and safety training was given during the initial induction for staff that there was no other formalised health and safety training for non operational staff. The team recommends that BMKFA consider whether all non operational line managers should receive the same IOSH training as operational Watch / Crew Managers as the course is not based on operational activity but on general understanding and awareness of health and safety.
114. During the review it became apparent that lots of information was generated and available to the organisation although it did not appear to be used in the most appropriate manner. The information available should be used to drive consistent and focused improvement across the service. Although health and safety was strong across the organisation it could be improved upon if an IT based system was purchased which would allow for a health and safety overview of the service, this would enable trends to be identified and improved upon. Also a more comprehensive reporting system could be established which can then be fed back through the appropriate meetings to further improve the health and safety culture within BMKFA.
115. During interviews it was identified there was a lack of performance information relating to health and safety forwarded to the Chief Officers Forum (COF). This was worrying for the review team as it meant that COF would not have a service overview of all matters relating to health and safety. It was however identified that health and safety information was provided on a quarterly basis to the Safety Panel, therefore making it more difficult to understand why no information was forwarded to COF for discussion.
116. Although it was apparent there was a good health and safety culture through BMKFA, it was stated that *"it felt that health and safety should be top down, however currently it feels as though it is middle out"*. This may link into the lack of performance information being provided to COF as stated above therefore COF not having a full awareness of the health and safety issues across the organisation. The review team suggest consideration should be made to ensuring COF are provided with performance information relating to health and safety and that health and safety champions should come from the most senior levels of BMKFA.

Training and development

Strengths

- Excellent training facilities across the county including Incident Command System (ICS) facility at Marlow and partnership working with Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) providing operational staff with ability to train on carbonaceous fires
- Collaboration of driving course with Oxfordshire FRS resulting in much improved driving training
- Operational assurance is secured by assessment of all officers operational capability prior to starting a new role and yearly appraisal (CFO downwards).

Areas for consideration

- Staff appraisal process needs to be developed across all levels of the organisation.
- Consider a review of training requirements for RDS personnel.
- Improved monitoring would be achieved by implementation of an electronic individual training record process.

117. BMKFA have a number of excellent training facilities across the county, especially in proportion to the size of FRS. These include partnership working with the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) providing operational staff with good facilities to train on carbonaceous fires as well as a gaseous real fire training facility.
118. BMKFA have entered into a partnership with Oxfordshire FRS to supply an enhanced emergency response driving course. This has resulted in a much higher standard of driving training including the recruitment of an ex police class one driver trainer. We received very positive feedback from candidates and managers in training.
119. BMKFA have built a modern interactive incident command training suite at Marlow Fire Station. This incorporates Vector, Hydra and Minerva training programmes that ensure all operational officers are assessed at incident command prior to undertaking an operational role. All officers from CFO down undertake regular assessments in operational command.
120. A common recurring theme that we encountered across all staff groups was that the appraisal system appears to be inconsistent and needs work to be developed across the organisation. This needs to start at CFO level and spread right across the service encompassing operational and non operational staff.
121. Another issue that was widely referred to was training for RDS staff. There were many debates about the role of RDS staff and whether they

should be involved with community safety initiatives and NVQ based systems. The general consensus was that their two hours drill night each week should be used exclusively to keep up to date with their operational training requirements. There appeared to be some issues with keeping the breathing apparatus competence of RDS staff current. This links in to the shortage of training staff which will hopefully be resolved by the new entrants when they take their place at fire stations early next year but also to the restriction of two hours drill per week. There is an option for weekend training, but staffing shortages were impacting on this option.

122. It was a consideration that a complete review of the training requirements of RDS staff should be undertaken to address this ongoing national FRS problem.
123. In line with the previous comment in the Response KLOE, it was acknowledged by managers that an electronic individual training recording process would improve the monitoring and development of staff.

Call management and incident support

Strengths

- Refresh of systems and technology has improved resilience and functionality
- Staff are well trained and work together as a team
- Evidence of some good work to facilitate cutover to Regional Control Centre (RCC)
- Incident/operational support maintained through good use of information.

Areas for consideration

- Call handling performance needs improvement
 - Further HR and general support needed in preparation for RCC.
124. BMKFA maintains its own dedicated Fire Control facility. It operates using the standard shift based duty system and crewing is maintained at a minimum of three at all times.
125. In January 2009, BMKFA implemented the 'call sign for life' strategy encompassing the introduction of national call signs.
126. During the last six months, a considerable amount of investment in the Fire Control facility has been undertaken i.e.
- Upgrade of the Fire Control system (Vision FX – Fortek)
 - Transfer from analogue to digital telephony
 - Introduction of digital wide are radio system (Firelink)
 - Incorporation of CSoft ICCS
 - Introduction of Gartan (retained availability package).
127. Staff employed in Fire Control have been key to the integration of the new systems and associated procedures. They are a well motivated team who are well trained and supported by the local managers.
128. The improvements to the system have ensured that a good level of resilience and operational preparedness is maintained at all times.
129. Further benefits are that the overall efficiency of the systems and procedures has been improved on a local and organisational level i.e. the investment cost of the Vision FX package will be offset within three years when comparison is made to the one off costs versus the lease costs of the legacy system.
130. The Gartan system provides 'live' information pertaining to retained availability and this enables a greater confidence to be appreciated in relation to operational capability.

131. Performance against call handling indicators needs to be monitored and improved. Albeit that overall performance has been impacted by the new systems and that there is a requirement to 'iron out' some minor issues with the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG), this is a key issue as migration to the RCC gets nearer.
132. BMKFA needs to consider what additional support it could provide to staff in relation to RCC matters. This should incorporate a stronger level of support from the HR function as staff indicated that they feel a little isolated. Notwithstanding this retention figures are very good.

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