



CFOA
Chief Fire Officers
Association



Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge

Report

September 2015

Report Contents:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Introduction, context and purpose | Page 3 |
| 2. The Peer Challenge Team | Page 5 |
| 3. Executive Summary | Page 6 |

Leadership, Governance and Corporate Capacity

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 4. How effective is the Leadership and Governance? | Page 8 |
| 5. How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved? | Page 11 |
| 6. How effective is the organisational capacity to meet current requirements and future needs? | Page 13 |

Key Areas of Assessment - KAAs

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 7. Community Risk Management | Page 17 |
| 8. Prevention | Page 21 |
| 9. Protection | Page 26 |
| 10. Response | Page 28 |
| 11. Health and Safety | Page 29 |
| 12. Training and Development | Page 32 |
| 13. Call Management and Incident Support | Page 35 |
| 14. NIFRS Areas of Focus – Headline messages | Page 37 |
| 15. Conclusion and contact information | Page 40 |

Introduction, Context and Purpose

The first phase in developing the Operational Assessment (OpA) and fire peer challenge approach for Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) was to have a facilitated discussion with the organisation's Corporate Management Team (CMT) who were the requester and commissioner of the peer challenge.

There were two such meetings. The first one took place on 10 July 2014 ahead of the originally proposed October 2014 Peer Challenge. Following the postponement of the Peer Challenge to June 2015, a second meeting on 16 April 2015 took place to finalise the scope and key areas of focus for the peer challenge of NIFRS.

The OpA Toolkit developed by the LGA and CFOA has been passed to the fire and rescue sector to use flexibly. The Toolkit has been updated and modernised, with input from across CFOA as well as from the LGA. It includes a greater focus on managerial leadership, engagement and medium to long term planning to support financial resilience in these challenging times.

However it maintains the "whole system" approach and the seven Key Assessment Areas which form the backbone of the self-assessment. These are detailed below and overleaf:

Organisational Capacity

All Fire Peer Challenges cover the core elements of Outcomes, Leadership & Capacity with the focus of the challenge agreed with each individual FRS and further informed by the Service's own OpA self-assessment.

As part of this strategic focus the team will look at the building blocks required to identify and establish a fit for the future fire and rescue service within Northern Ireland and within this context ask:

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

NI FRS asked for the greatest focus of this Fire Peer Challenge to be upon areas linked strongly to these three core Leadership and Corporate Capacity questions. The NIFRS CMT requested that the Peer team look at a number of specific areas in the role of a critical friend. Such observations would provide extra insight which would be valuable for NIFRS going forward. These areas were:

1. Organisational structures
2. Accountability at all levels including service delivery models;
3. Training facilities;
4. Retained Duty System (RDS) issues;
5. Financial planning and procurement;
6. Estates issues;
7. Performance management and
8. Strategic ICT infrastructure.

It was agreed prior to the team arriving onsite that these areas of focus would be best picked up under the 3 Corporate Capacity questions.

Key Assessment Areas

The Key Assessment Areas (KAA) are:

1. **Community Risk Management** – How well is the service identifying and prioritising the risks faced by the community?
2. **Prevention** – How well is the service delivering its community safety strategy?
3. **Protection** – How well is the service delivering its regulatory fire safety strategy?
4. **Response** – How well is the service delivering its response activities?
5. **Health and Safety** – How well is the service ensuring its responsibilities for health, safety and welfare are met?
6. **Training and Development** – How well is the service ensuring its responsibilities for training, development and assessment of its staff are met?
7. **Call Management and Incident Support** – How well is the service delivering its call management and incident support activities?

It was proposed that NIFRS utilise the industry standard toolkit to develop the Service's OpA self-assessment. The OpA self-assessment process is designed to (i) form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service and (ii) provide it with information that allows the Service to challenge its operational service delivery to ensure this is efficient, effective and robust.

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment, the sector-led peer challenge process aims to help Fire and Rescue Services strengthen local accountability and support the way they evaluate and improve services.

Fire Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector. It is not a form of sector-led inspection. Rather it is a mechanism to provide fire authorities and Chief Officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

2. The Peer Challenge Team

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

The peer challenge team for NIFRS was:

- **Lead Chief Fire Officer Peer** – CFO Dave Etheridge (Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service)
- **Senior FRS Officer Peer** – DCFO Lee Neale (West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service)
- **Senior FRS Officer Peer** – DCFO Glen Ranger (Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service).
- **Senior FRS Officer Peer** – ACFO Steve Apter (Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service)
- **Senior FRS Officer Peer** - Guy Goodman, Head of Corporate Services (Solicitor and Monitoring Officer) (Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service)
- **LGA Peer Challenge Manager** – Ernest Opuni

3. Executive Summary

NIFRS operates in an environment that is unique within the UK in terms of its history. Nonetheless, against this backdrop, NIFRS has always been, and remains, a highly respected and credible partner. This contributes positively to its ability to support and contribute effectively to the delivery of multi-agency lifesaving initiatives for those at risk. Support staff, firefighters and officers at all levels are passionate about protecting citizens through effective response which is delivered alongside their counterparts in the Police and Ambulance Services. The dedication and pride in the operational capability of the Service is tangible and consistent across the organisation.

The Service is benefitting from a more focused Corporate Management Team. The addition of Support Directors who bring specialist non-operational skills to the Service is a positive influence in improving the corporate governance of the organisation. This has been particularly key in getting the Service to focus on the future whilst dealing with the legacy of a series of previous inspections of NIFRS dating back to 2009. Stability throughout the organisation will assist the cultural change journey.

Good progress is being made in relation to the development of a forward looking Corporate Plan. At the time of the visit wider staffing groups were still to be consulted with on the Corporate Plan. Wider engagement with staff in the production of this plan will improve communication of it so as to ensure wider 'buy in'.

This plan presents the Service with a real opportunity to construct and communicate a clear and compelling narrative about its vision for the future. To further embed and sustain service transformation, the organisational development and personnel skills identified and associated with the outcomes derived from the future IRMP would benefit from being included in a Workforce Development Strategy (WDS). The WDS could refocus or encompass the HR strategy already in place as well as the existing Learning and Development Strategy which is currently being finalised. The WDS could cover such matters as the health, safety, training and development of the whole work force regardless of the conditions of service under which they are employed.

The Service could consider further supporting the IRMP outcomes and the WDS through a comprehensive and forward looking Asset Management Strategy (AMS). The AMS should be a vehicle which identifies the resources required to address the community risk profile and service delivery model. This strategy ought to focus on such matters as buildings location, type, age, fleet and equipment to promote public and fire-fighter safety. The AMS should include, and be supported by, IT software systems which can ensure contemporary recording of assets location and testing regime, avoid duplication and ensure accurate performance reporting.

The direction of travel concerning the IRMP, WDS and AMS will enable a conversation to commence with the Fire Board, the Northern Ireland Assembly Sponsoring Department and other stakeholders. The Service needs to take responsibility for medium to long term financial planning which can run in parallel with the annual budgetary planning process. This will ensure that risks can continue to be targeted in an efficient and effective manner thus promoting a more sustainable approach to public and fire fighter safety.

In light of the outcome of the Local Government Review in Northern Ireland there is clear recognition at all levels from within the Service that the current structural arrangements and organisational design are no longer fit for purpose. The CMT, in conjunction with the Fire Board, needs to reaffirm their commitment to the existing

vision and mission within the Corporate Plan in order to fully identify the future function of NIFRS. This will then enable for there to be a clear way forward in terms of the form under which the future Service should operate which, in turn, will assist in helping shape future structures.

Any future restructure of NIFRS should take cognisance of the wider restructure of Local Government and also other structures of public bodies and delivery arms particularly those associated with the Department of Justice (DoJ) and the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). The organisational structure going forward should enable the Service to continue to advance its current status as a trusted delivery partner of choice of other agencies, delivering a wider agenda leading to a safer Northern Ireland.

Notwithstanding the overt pride in operational response NIFRS would benefit from focussing on ensuring that it is well-placed to address some areas which could pose clear and present risk. Whilst there is recognition of the need for all firefighters mobilised to operational incidents to be competent in role, NIFRS should assure themselves that those riding in charge of fire appliances are equipped with the command skills relevant to the level required.

4. Leadership, Governance and Corporate Capacity

4.1 How effective is the leadership and governance?

Areas of strength

- Newly appointed Corporate Management Team (CMT) is seen to be strong and competent
- General feel that foundations are now in place and that the Service is ‘turning a corner’
- Immense pride in the Service at all levels
- Recognition that the timing and opportunities for a restructure coincides with the local government review
- There is recognition of potential benefits from the proposed move to Department of Justice (DoJ) from Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)
- Commitment by the Board and CMT to clearing legacy issues with new management and governance arrangements in place
- A comprehensive corporate plan with a clear mission, vision and values

Areas to explore

- Potential move to DoJ is an opportunity to renew trust and relationships and to set a clear vision for the service supported by a comprehensive narrative
- The Board has an opportunity for greater organisational scrutiny and challenge to help drive performance and change
- Service should consider a comprehensive restructure based upon the results of the review of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to enhance firefighter and public safety and business support
- Future structure of the service to consider co-terminus administrative boundaries with the 11 super councils
- Future structure to promote a ‘Team NIFRS’ ethos via more joined up working through all areas and functions of the Service in order to avoid duplication and encourage smarter data collection
- Future revision of the IRMP to be owned by CMT and Board
- Service to consider further involvement with Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CFOA) to provide a platform for future exchange of ideas
- Service to recognise that communications and engagement of all employees will be key to delivering transformational change
- Consider ways to publicly celebrate success and more clearly demonstrate the appreciation of the good work of all staff
- Consider ways of recognising support given by RDS employers and family members

There was a clear view from the top of the organisation that the quality of the Corporate Management Team (CMT) has been improved. The addition of Support Directors who bring specialist non-operational skills to the Service is seen to be a positive influence in improving the corporate governance of the organisation. This has been particularly key in getting the Service to focus on the future whilst dealing with dealing with the legacy of a series of previous inspections of NIFRS dating back to 2009.

Staff across the Service were aware of the challenges facing the Service from the point of view of both these legacy issues and the likelihood of future austerity measures. However this has not dampened their high commitment to public service and the strong pride in NIFRS that they communicated clearly to the team. This was especially true of staff working in the Service's Headquarters who were particularly positive in their views of NIFRS.

There was some recognition across the Service that local government reorganisation provides an opportunity for the Service to refresh its current structures which have been in existence for the last 15 years. Overall, the reorganisation is viewed by all staff as a good opportunity for the Service to focus its attention on tackling the future positively. There is also a view that the potential change in Sponsoring Department for NIFRS may provide the opportunity to strengthen the Service's relationship with civil servants and the Fire Minister.

A project management approach based on a clustering of issues on a thematic basis has been developed to move the Service away from past challenges. Together with increased Board scrutiny this is providing a good platform to move the Service into the future with renewed purpose and focus.

Good progress is being made in relation to the development of a forward looking Corporate Plan. There is an opportunity to increase the engagement with staff in the production of this plan and to improve communication of it so as to ensure wider 'buy in'.

This plan presents the Service with a real opportunity to construct and communicate a clear and compelling narrative about its vision for the future. Bearing in mind the goodwill that exists in relation to the Service, and its overall positive reputation, there is little doubt that the Service can count upon support of all of its stakeholders (both internal and external) if it focuses on doing this effectively.

This will be important as there seems more to do for the Service in articulating this clear vision for how it wishes to deliver its services going forward and therefore the most appropriate structure to adopt in doing this. A message often repeated to the team was that staff would welcome increased visibility and clearer communications from the CMT. Whilst there has been some previous engagement, both through station visits and the core briefing, some staff based away from the NIFRS Headquarters indicated a desire to be able to better engage with CMT.

Staff would also welcome greater stability underpinned by ever clearer and visible leadership. There are early indications of an improving CMT whose impact could be further embedded with clear visible leadership engaging with staff outside of HQ as well as with external partners and stakeholders. Staff indicated to the team that they would welcome greater clarity about what the future holds for them and that they want to be engaged actively in the process of change. Strong communication and engagement from the Board and CMT would create greater certainty and address any potential anxieties which may exist around this.

Any non-executive board (such as that which NIFRS has) requires strong and visible corporate executive leadership. This will enable the Board to undertake its pivotal role (which it has started to do more effectively) of holding the executive function to account. This would be an area the team would encourage the Service to focus upon.

The current Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) would have benefited from a greater degree of stakeholder engagement in its drafting stage. As this is the Service's central 'anchor' and most important strategic document it is very important that its development is jointly led by the Board and CMT. Additionally, effective engagement with internal and external stakeholders through actively consulting with them in developing the plan is another critical element for ensuring the Service's future direction gains the traction it needs in order to succeed. The Service may wish to consider whether it might benefit from external facilitation, either by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) or through private consultancy, of some of this process. Feedback from such consultation would be a valuable element of the process of leading to the plan being finally approved by the NIFRS Board.

There are many aspects of Northern Ireland which are unique in terms of its history. Nonetheless NIFRS faces issues and challenges which are broadly similar to any other UK FRS. However it is fully acknowledged that NIFRS has very limited access to mutual aid therefore major incidents and spate conditions can only be predominantly resources from within. Therefore the experience of other colleagues within CFOA could add significant value to the future development of NIFRS whilst also providing the opportunity for the Service to share its practice and experience with other FRSs around the country. This would provide an opportunity for NIFRS to positively celebrate its successes on a national stage and move itself further away from previously negative media reports

In engaging with staff, the team would encourage NIFRS to consider how it might address some of the perceptions of differential treatment between the Whole Time and RDS establishment. Effective recruitment and maintenance of a motivated RDS establishment is important to NIFRS and warrants particular focus by the Service.

4.2 How well are outcomes for local citizens being achieved

Areas of strength

- Youth engagement such as LIFE scheme is demonstrating positive qualitative impacts on young people.
- Evidence that the emergency planning arrangements are delivering tangible benefit to local citizens (e.g. Belfast area multi-agency approach to flood reduction)
- Evidence of improved performance across a range of NIFRS performance measures- fire fatalities, RTC fatalities and hoax calls are all down.
- Customer satisfaction is high (99 percent of customer satisfaction surveys returned indicate NIFRS are meeting or exceeding expectations)

Areas to explore

- Consider your approach and resources to clearly identify and address community risk
- Be clearer on how you will measure and evaluate success so you can celebrate it publicly and internally
- Develop a suite of SMART objectives based on the IRMP.
- Consider how best to move from being data-rich to strongly intelligence-led; ensure the data you collect is relevant and contributes to meeting citizen need
- Consider broadening the Fire and Rescue offer to meet the wider citizen need (e.g. Transforming Your Care)
- Whilst understanding the local context (and challenges) around sharing data, this remains a priority to support future service delivery

The Service is very well respected and the support for NIFRS has remained solid for many years. There is a high degree of customer satisfaction and partners value the Service.

In particular, the Radar Centre is very positively viewed by partners who are also highly supportive of NIFRS. The Centre is also targeting the most vulnerable on a well-defined risk basis. The value of the Radar Centre is clear and the Service would do well to ensure it is promoted and evaluated effectively to ensure its longer term sustainability.

A draft Performance Management Framework has been created. Also the Gartan availability system has been a positive step in terms of remote awareness and has focused the Service's thinking and approach to mobilisation of crews. The Emergency planning group is working particularly well an example of which is how in Belfast the multi-agency group formed was effective in preventing worse impact of flooding on communities.

The IRMP in its current draft, whilst not yet entirely fit for purpose, provides a real opportunity for the Service. There appears an appetite at the present time to 'pause and refresh' the IRMP in order to get its development right. As mentioned previously, its early development does not appear to have involved all individuals (or teams) it might have done. Any review process would provide an opportunity for the FRS to

develop a truly robust and meaningful IRMP to which all of its established and emerging strategies and delivery aspirations are clearly aligned.

The Service performs well with fire fatalities, RTC fatalities and hoax calls all reducing. There is, however, a need for performance targets to be considered and there may be some value in testing whether the targets to which the Service is currently working to ought to be more challenging

Whilst the reasons for so doing are understandable, the Service appears to have spent recent years focusing on addressing recommendations from previous reviews. The team suggests that now is the time for looking to the future and moving forward with purpose.

NIFRS is a data-rich Service and has a significant amount of valuable information which could be better utilised in driving priorities. This could prove easier if datasets are better interpreted and their connectivity and overall impact were better analysed. There may be opportunities for the Service to examine the information it holds in the wider context of broader community outcomes which factor in the need of the 'whole person' (this is addressed in greater detail later in this report). The Service is better placed than most to contribute positively in this regard and may wish to explore further how it may achieve this in conjunction with other public sector bodies.

There is more to do in relation to establishing protocols with partners as to how data could be better shared for greater impact. This is not down to NIFRS alone and the effectiveness of its partnership working in terms of how it influences other organisations could provide opportunities which are currently not being fully utilised.

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

Areas of strength

- The passion and pride of NIFRS staff to deliver the best service possible is clearly evident and an integral part of service transformation
- IT arrangements with Business Service Organisation (BSO) are showing early signs of stability
- The Service has a draft planning and performance management framework, HR Strategy, policies and procedures in place
- Staff willingness to be engaged (and early) in changes
- Solid progress and measures in place against previous areas identified by internal audits and actions plans

Areas to explore

- The Service should consider how the IRMP process is supported by a comprehensive asset management strategy and a workforce development strategy
- Workforce development strategy should complement the service delivery design to enable effective and efficient delivery of protection, prevention and intervention resources
- Workforce development to also include service support around performance and project management, identified priorities, to enable capacity challenges to be addressed and projects delivered
- Through a comprehensive understanding of the resources to risk outcomes of the IRMP, the identification and utilisation of assets can be prioritised including implications on buildings, fleet and equipment
- Corporate Plan 2015-20 should be further supported by a review of the measurable outcomes associated with the draft performance framework. This would enable clear and auditable evidence against outcomes for local citizens, firefighter safety, organisational and operational assurance, management of health and safety, value for money and discharge legacy issues
- Service restructure and redesign will allow the issue of temporary and interim arrangements to be resolved
- Organisational restructure to take into account the new operating and governance landscape in NI including the move to 11 districts
- A Transformational Board approach to be considered to drive change based upon clear evidence and linked to outcomes
- PMF – future measurement could utilise the ‘5 Whys technique’

The Corporate Planning and Performance Management Framework is a positive foundation on which the Service can build into the future. It is key that this Corporate Plan and the targets within it are derived from the IRMP which is showing an improved approach to resourcing based on better identification of risk. As a result the five-year Corporate Plan contains measureable targets which should help deliver outcomes based on there being a clearer rationale for the allocation of resources. The Corporate Planning and Performance Management Framework should be

revisited to ensure it captures relevant information which will better inform the Corporate Risk Register to enable the senior team and the Board to prioritise resources.

The passion and pride of staff about the Service was clearly evident to the team in all its interactions with the workforce. There is a clear willingness to engage with the changes that need to be made to ensure the Service's position is strengthened for the future. It is clear they wish to be involved in the change process as they are aware of the challenges facing the Service and are passionate about supporting these being addressed successfully.

The Service is demonstrating its preparedness to use Business Service Organisation (BSO) to create capacity to review services and create change and new shared services model (e.g. Pensions and Procurement). Whilst this is in its early stages, there are early signs that this is improving this part of the Service's business. NIFRS has also taken learning from Police Service of Northern Ireland and UK FRSs to develop a Command and Control system. Overall the Service is beginning to demonstrate stronger leadership around the resolution of its ICT challenges.

The Service has appropriate HR policies and procedures in place and has developed a new HR Strategy. Development of these documents provides a foundation on which good practice can become further embedded within the Service.

In terms of the organisation utilising learning from elsewhere, the Shirley Towers report has been analysed, given an action plan and the legislative impact is being reflected in the approach NIFRS takes to its business.

There is, however, a feeling within the workforce that a whole Service restructure and redesign is a priority if the destabilising impact of temporary and interim arrangements are to be effectively addressed. There is an overwhelming view that too many temporary positions are in place across the organisation. This is holding the organisation back and resources and capacity are not being deployed as effectively as they might be as a result.

Progress on a longer term approach to staffing is important. There remains a need to rationalise the use of temporary promotions and interim staff. The balance between the laudable aspiration for giving staff personal development opportunities may need to be balanced against the impact of the organisational instability this creates. The appointment of a new Chief Executive/Chief Fire Officer would be an important first step for NIFRS.

Whilst some progress has been made, there remains more to do in ensuring IT arrangements fully support development and delivery of NIFRS core business. It will be important for swift progress to be made and involves staff in identification of solutions. It will also be very important for any changes to be effectively communicated to them.

The Service has taken some time to move forward from the legacy issues of previous critical reports, which has meant it has not been able to fully focus on the challenges that are to come. However, there are early signs that a more focused,

concerted and timely approach is being taken to dealing with the backlog of issues reflected within the action plans which were developed to address the various challenges highlighted by these reports.

It has never been more important for the Board and CMT to have a clear strategy and narrative relating to how it intends to deliver change going forward. Consideration needs to be given to realising resources from other parts of the Service to create the necessary capacity. This said the team is acutely aware that NIFRS is working within a different funding environment to that in which virtually every other Service in the country is operating. The year on year allocation of NIFRS funding received through DHSSPS is not always supportive of longer-term financial and general resource planning. The current system of business case development within year to identify and rationalise spending priorities and rationalisation provides value in terms of ongoing accountability. However it does not always appear to support the Service's aspiration to focus on how it wishes to address and deliver on medium to longer term strategy. This may have contributed to the Service being more risk-averse rather than positive in confidently managing risk.

Notwithstanding annual budget allocation from the sponsoring department, CMT and the Board should adopt a medium term financial plan as a matter of priority based upon the best professional planning assumptions available.

Whilst the principles of developing business cases provide sound foundations, NIFRS may wish to assure itself that (i) all staff are clear on what these are designed to achieve (ii) that the work required for developing these is proportionate to benefit, impact and scale and (iii) that the Service avoids the development of business cases becoming an end in itself rather than a conduit for effective delivery. Critical to this consideration is a clearly articulated vision through the emerging IRMP.

Now is the opportunity for this document to outline the outcomes NIFRS aims to achieve. It is also an opportunity to secure wider engagement in the development of the IRMP and for the structure required to deliver to be clearly identified in order that 'form follows function' effectively. Opportunities for 'Invest to save' options could also be articulated and put forward as part of this thinking in order to prompt consideration for a longer-term and different approach from the sponsoring government department.

There is already a significant degree of support for the 11 District structure to inform planning going forward. Structures ought to support the potential contribution the FRS can make towards wider community planning across Northern Ireland into the future. There are various external stakeholders to be brought into the consideration of these options. NIFRS is likely to benefit from clearly identifying who these are and how best to engage them as this seems to be the right time for effective partnership working to underpin the Service's plans for the future.

This process could also afford NIFRS the opportunity to build positively on its proven ability to capture information. This ability can be built upon in developing greater analysis and utilisation of data so that it becomes a strong evidence base thus transforming this resource into 'real' intelligence. It will be important for the Board and CMT to jointly assure themselves that they are asking the right questions around Performance information and managing this part of the Service's business effectively into the future. There is an opportunity to utilise 'Ask why 5 times' philosophy in relation to performance data as this can support a culture of clear rationalisation, greater efficiency and leaner processes.

Some areas of capacity are impacting on delivery and not always positively. For example there is a significant number of non-actioned Requisitions in stores which may indicate that project and programme management could be strengthened to support efficient delivery.

IT is not yet fit for purpose and there is not yet compelling evidence of a strategic approach to investment in this infrastructure. The risk this creates is a number of 'single points of failure' and reduced organisational resilience.

As a priority the team believes NIFRS would benefit from a robust 'Resource to Risk Review ' being carried out to identify where resources could perhaps be freed up in some parts of the organisation and utilised elsewhere in NIFRS to greater effect. Area and District structures are currently generic and not yet risk-based which can prevent Service-wide priorities from being delivered effectively.

KAAs

5.1 Community Risk Management

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the Service identifying and prioritising the risks faced by the community?'

Areas of strength

- Direction of travel of IRMP is positive compared to previous iterations
- Recognition within the organisation that the IRMP is a key driving document
- Use of Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) tool and census data is mature and providing a partial evidence base
- IRMP seen as a future way to really challenge the resources to risk allocation and therefore help to reprioritise all work areas in the service
- Recognition that existing response standards are dated so further work under way concerning potential replacements
- There is a growing cultural shift and recognition that protection and prevention should be the first control measures of risk with intervention being the final control measure

Areas to explore

- What would a Community Protection Agency protect the community from?
- IRMP should be further supported by data and evidence sets including future housing and economic growth, enterprise zones and transport
- Vulnerability factors should be enhanced through datasets from other partners such as health
- The use of other data sets will assist in fully understanding community risk and validate direction and evidence
- Effective use of the IRMP methodology will enable a comprehensive resource to risk review which may enable capacity to be reallocated
- IRMP should be a project owned by CMT encompassing views and direction from other stakeholders
- Comprehensive data and evidence will enable NIFRS to deliver against new response standards which will be robustly evidenced and robustly measured

NIFRS has a draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-20 which is more robust than previous iterations and strives to reflect the diverse nature of the community in order to identify and prioritises those most at risk in society.

Current use of the FSEC modelling, plus the 2011 census data, provides a mature approach to establishing an evidence base for future planning.

Going forward, the service should consider ways to establish Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and robust Data Sharing Protocols (DSP) with other stakeholders, such as NI Assembly Departments, the eleven super council areas, public sector organisations, health professionals, the private and voluntary sectors. This will enable the service to collect robust historical and forward looking empirical and

statistical data. This will in turn contribute to the creation of an evidence base from which to establish further iterations of the IRMP to help to drive organisational strategies.

The MOU's and DSPs should establish a risk profile for NIFRS through the provision of a sound, and regularly refreshed evidence base. Such an approach will allow access to information to further understand the planning and horizon scanning of partner agencies. This would cover such matters as demographics and vulnerability type as well as enabling NIFRS to contribute more widely to a number of key themes for Northern Ireland's citizens. This list whilst not exhaustive would include housing, enterprise and business planning areas, transport and urban regeneration zones, broader economic factors such as tourism, heritage and the environment.

By evaluating the evidence associated with the clear community risk profile, the key findings and subsequent mitigation solutions can be presented to the Fire Board for approval. These can then delivered more effectively by NIFRS through future Prevention and Protection strategies which clearly identify, target and prioritise resources to reduce community risk.

The Service could consider renaming the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which may help strengthen the cultural change in NIFRS to include wider societal risks. Such a move may encourage a more proactive approach by all stakeholders for involvement in a greater contribution to the wider public safety agenda. This could include future consideration to working with health colleagues around the public health agenda. There may be opportunities to work more closely with fellow emergency service colleagues concerning opportunities for emergency medical co-responding. NIFRS could seek greater service engagement with the 'Transforming Your Care' Strategy designed to supporting an ageing population to live independent, safe and secure lives in their own homes. The Service is well placed to contribute effectively to all of these areas.

Appropriate and strengthened arrangements should be put in place to ensure that effective engagement and consultation with stakeholders and robust communication strategies are implemented. This will allow the service to ensure that the findings from the risk analysis process (and the proposed Protection, Prevention and operational intervention control measures) can be put in place. There is an opportunity for risk control to be effectively discussed both internally and externally through effective stakeholder and community engagement.

The Service already has a very mature and robust approach to ensuring a comprehensive quality impact assessment is created. This existing process will complement the services future approach, the findings of the evidence-led review and subsequent allocation of resources to risk through the IRMP process.

As mentioned previously in this report, the Service should consider revisiting the existing IRMP process to ensure there is wider stakeholder engagement and clear ownership by the CMT and the Fire Board. This could play a positive role in the Service fully understanding the future potential opportunities for NIFRS. The greater impact is that through a comprehensive refresh of the IRMP process, opportunity to drive the future direction and citizen outcomes associated with Northern Ireland can be better achieved by the Service.

The refresh will allow debate, ownership, decision and direction concerning a comprehensive resource to risk analysis. Once the community risk profile is further

established and resources identified against the Protection, Prevention and operational intervention models, the Service will have the ability to strengthen its current approach to staffing. This process will place NIFRS in a stronger position to assure itself that it has the right people, in the right place with the right skills to deliver.

To further embed and sustain service transformation, the organisational development and personnel skills identified and associated with the outcomes derived from the future IRMP would benefit from being included in a Workforce Development Strategy (WDS). The WDS could cover such matters as the health, safety, training and development of the whole work force regardless of the conditions of service under which they are employed.

The Service could consider further supporting the IRMP outcomes and the WDS through a comprehensive and forward looking Asset Management Strategy (AMS). The AMS should be a vehicle which identifies the resources required to address the community risk profile and service delivery model. This strategy ought to focus on such matters as buildings location, type, age, fleet and equipment to promote public and fire-fighter safety. The AMS should include, and be supported by, IT software systems which can ensure contemporary recording of assets location and testing regime, avoid duplication and ensure accurate performance reporting.

The direction of travel concerning the IRMP, WDS and AMS will enable a conversation to commence with the Fire Board, NI Assembly Sponsoring Department and other stakeholders. As mentioned previously in this report the current backdrop of business case approval and 'in year' financial planning ought to be balanced against the possibility of a more medium to long term approach. This will ensure that risks can continue to be targeted in an efficient and effective manner thus promoting a more sustainable approach to public and fire fighter safety.

The Service may wish to consider further supporting and promoting the IRMP approach and outcomes through the extension of the current arrangements emerging through the draft performance management framework.

An extended and refreshed performance framework will ensure that NIFRS has a more robust process for measuring and evaluating effectiveness. This will also improve the likelihood of success in the Service's future approach to risk analysis. This will enable the organisation to have a strengthened and sound understanding of performance and a clearer approach to making improvements. This should make addressing areas of underperformance more effective due to a stronger auditing and risk review and analysis process. If this is undertaken on a clearly planned basis with the results of any audit and evaluation shared with relevant stakeholders, the opportunity for continuous future improvement could be significantly enhanced.

By continuing to analyse the risk map of Northern Ireland the Service will be able to determine the number, type, geographical location and level of resources (both during the day and night) required to respond effectively to all types of incidents. This would also allow for targeted protection and prevention activities within the Service's risk mitigation strategies. In turn this will enable the Board and CMT to jointly agree future emergency response standards concerning the speed and weight of both emergency appliances and operational personnel. Once this is done, putting in place the medium and long term planning assumptions which utilise NIFRS resources more effectively becomes more achievable.

As previously mentioned, NIFRS is very aware of the outcomes concerning the Review of Public Administration and the impact on Local Government through the creation of the eleven councils. In light of these outcomes and the reshaping of other public sector bodies in Northern Ireland, the Service could consider utilising the IRMP process as an opportunity to review and reshape the organisation. This comprehensive and evidence based review will ensure that the structures covering service delivery and supporting services are contemporary and fit for the future purpose of NIFRS. The Service would be better placed to deliver against the published Vision of 'Protecting Our Community' and achieving the Mission 'To deliver a fire and rescue service and work in partnership with others to ensure the safety and well-being of our community'.

Once the new operating structures are known, further organisational clarity, stability and the removal of interim appointments can be more easily achieved. This would lead to greater ease in delivering on the task of putting in place a suitable managerial structure with the agreement of NIFRS's various stakeholders. Once this is done, the managerial structure should be supported by an organisational chart and design which assigns responsibilities to an appropriate level and ensures that those responsibilities are clearly defined and regularly reviewed. This will ensure that objectives and targets can be agreed and set between empowered teams and individuals. This will in turn allow the organisation to better track its progress through a more robust performance management framework which links the activity of all staff and teams to the achievement of overall corporate objectives.

The Peer Team found excellent evidence of the involvement of NIFRS in activities which are creating real and measurable outcomes to the citizens of Northern Ireland which are mentioned elsewhere in this report. As part of the future Asset Management Strategy, the service should consider investing in appropriate IT solutions to measure the effectiveness of the Prevention, Protection and operational response arrangements in place. Through monitoring and continuously analysing to ensure that the selected options continue to achieve the reduction of risk within the community, NIFRS will be better placed to celebrate success (both internally and publicly) and deliver clear messages about the wider public value of the Service to Northern Ireland.

5.2 Prevention

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the authority delivering its community safety strategy?'

Areas of strength

- You are a highly respected partner
- Partners consider you a very approachable with a 'can do' attitude
- NIFRS a trusted brand, high public satisfaction and a powerful way to bridge community divide through such programmes as LIFE scheme
- Clear commitment from the CFO concerning the Prevention agenda
- Radar Centre is very impressive and will provide an excellent platform for delivering better outcomes for young people
- Emerging use of assistive technology
- Effective Fatal Fire Review procedure
- MoU and Investigative approach with PSNI ref FI (Notable Practice)

Areas to explore:

- Fatal Fire Review outcomes could be more widely shared with partners and stakeholders
- A resources to risk analysis approach would ensure targeted risk reduction activities rather than a blanket approach (issue is more acute in RDS areas)
- NIFRS should further strengthen internal and external arrangements on safeguarding issues and referral pathways
- Prevention activity to be more closely tied into the 11 areas which could attract a more sustainable approach to resourcing the LIFE scheme
- Future partnership offerings to be assessed and evaluated to ensure a qualitative assessment rather than quantitative
- Prevention and Protection approaches to be utilised as part of the response standards approach to ensure properties and life risk outside of ERS are enhanced
- Consider how you will approach the evaluation of outcomes achieved through RADAR
- The outcome of resources to risk review should enhance the levels of Home Fire Risk assessments in RDS areas
- Service to consider a much broader prevention and well being offer as part of the wider analysis of the strategic IRMP
- Through the potential restructure, a risk based prevention implementation in each district area closely linked in to the Community Planning Groups
- Moving from data-rich to intelligence-led providing firm evidence

- Service to consider a refreshed approach to the delivery of risk reduction activities through the training of other agencies and the voluntary sector
- The DHSSPS Transforming Your Care policy to be explored for additional opportunities

NIFRS is a widely respected brand which is held in high regard by partners. The Service is viewed as approachable and 'can do' because it demonstrates the ability to remove barriers which could impede other agencies and organisations. The use of assistive technology such as 'Portable Misting Systems' was highlighted by partners as an innovative approach. The success of this initiative is a good example of the benefits of working with partners on such matters and could be utilised further. These partners have indicated they would like to explore other opportunities to work jointly with NIFRS as this gives further reassurance when sourcing assistive technology in future. This illustrates the trust they have in the Service.

NIFRS have maintained neutrality and trust over many years and are ideally positioned to improve the life of citizens. This impact can be achieved not only through Fire Safety but through the Service's role in other areas such as health and wellbeing. The LIFE Scheme is highly regarded and has delivered positive outcomes for young people and communities. Schemes such as LIFE and RACE are key to delivering better outcomes for young people and improving their communities.

It is clear from internal and partner evidence that the Chief Fire Officer is strongly committed to driving Prevention forward. This commitment from the top of the organisation will be essential to ensuring that this core theme maintains the level of priority for NIFRS that it rightly has.

As mentioned previously the RADAR Centre is an excellent facility. It will provide a tremendous opportunity to educate young people and help keep them safe from harm. The partnership ethos of the RADAR Centre could provide an ideal platform to develop greater collaboration and integration with a wide range of partners. In order to ensure the true value of RADAR is understood and communicated widely, existing evaluation and performance metrics should be utilised more widely to make best use of the analysed information and help shape future thinking and developments. This will allow the Service and partners to demonstrate the positive difference achieved through their work at the centre. There is much other FRs in the UK could learn from this initiative and the Team would recognise this as notable practice.

The Fatal Fire Review process provides a robust method of analysing the outcomes of the fire investigation process following fatal fire incidents. There is demonstrable evidence of where the fatal fire review has resulted in interventions or initiatives aimed at avoiding recurrences in similar incidents in the future.

The MoU between PSNI and NIFRS on matters relating to Fire Investigation is an area of notable practice. The MoU contains clearly assigned and agreed roles and responsibilities for both agencies in the planning, training and on-scene incident management of fire investigation. This approach demonstrates a clear shared commitment to reducing fire related crime, promoting fire prevention and making communities safer.

There are a number of strategies for the prevention work carried out by NIFRS and partners. The Service may wish to consider how it consolidates its various strategies in order to develop a more risk-based resourcing programme along with a qualitative approach to performance setting and management. This would help the Service in

demonstrating clearly the positive outcomes it is delivering to all citizens. The publication of a revised Integrated Risk Management 2015-2020 provides an ideal opportunity to consolidate prevention strategies and clearly define the overall NIFRS Prevention offer.

As referenced previously in this report, the Service already holds a significant bank of data. The next objective would be for NIFRS to make the transition from being 'data rich' to 'intelligence led'. This would allow for resources to be more clearly matched to risk so that, in turn, services are prioritised to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The value of this approach would be enhanced by the emerging robust performance management system. SMART performance objectives that are reflected from strategic plans through to service and individual performance plans would allow everyone in the organisation to understand more clearly how their individual actions contribute to achieving the aim of a safer Northern Ireland.

NIFRS has set annual targets for new partnerships. There may be benefit in refining this approach so that it is based less on quantitative assessment of inputs and outputs. Instead a more qualitative consideration could be given to how any partnership working is helping to achieve wider outcomes for citizens. Partners are keen to explore opportunities to broaden the partnership offers and deliver even better outcomes through collaboration with NIFRS. The team would encourage the Service to explore such opportunities further.

There is an opportunity to further develop the fatal fire review and encourage greater involvement of partners in both the review process and the delivery of review recommendations. Consideration could be given to developing an outcome focused action plan that is shared by the stakeholder organisations.

The objective of the 2015-2020 Integrated Risk Management Plan is to have the **Right Resources** in the **Right Place** at the **Right Time**. When developing future strategies and plans NIFRS should consider testing the plans against this objective to ensure it meets the IRMP criteria. The Service retains large amounts of operational and community risk data but there does not appear to be a clear strategy on how best to use this valuable information. There is limited evidence of risk data being used to drive the various work programmes or to inform the resourcing requirements across the Service. A more intelligence-led approach to matching resources to risk would prove beneficial in delivering better outcomes for Northern Ireland's most vulnerable citizens. Officers within the Community Development teams demonstrated a good understanding of this issue and would be willing advocates of a more risk based approach to resource allocation.

Better use of data to identify the most vulnerable would also greatly assist RDS teams who have condensed time to allocate more of this to targeted Prevention activity which in turn could yield greater benefit to all citizens.

The service has safeguarding arrangements in place, with responsible officers and training for all staff identified. This is strength for NIFRS and shows a clear commitment to safeguarding responsibilities. However, when safeguarding arrangements were tested with some staff groups, the level of understanding was inconsistent due mainly to not all staff having received training. A more coordinated approach to developing skill across the Service as a whole would yield benefit in this area including the need for existing procedures to be reinforced via further communication.

NIFRS may also wish to implement a more robust safeguarding training programme which ensures that all staff are confident in identifying safeguarding issues and what action they need to take when issues are identified.

As mentioned previously, there is an opportunity for NIFRS to consider its organisational structure and seek to identify the benefits co-terminus boundaries with the 11 'super districts' may offer. This could deliver a number of benefits for partnership working whilst providing enhanced opportunities for attracting funding and other resources for NIFRS initiatives. This consistency would make it easier for NIFRS to build more effective relationships with partners including the Community Planning Groups. This may in turn provide the opportunity for sharing key data sets and developing plans through which shared aspirations can be achieved. Economies of scale in terms of servicing meetings and partnerships could be realised whilst some of the complexities within the existing area and district structures could be removed.

There is a clear commitment to working with partners and there is evidence of positive outcomes being delivered through the existing partnerships. The Prevention and Protection Strategy 2014-2019 has partnership working as a key area of focus. In order to develop constructive and sustainable partnerships, taking a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to partnership development will be critical as previously mentioned. The Service's stated commitment to appointing a partnership coordinator who could constantly review the effectiveness of partnership working will be key to success in the NIFRS partnership aspirations. There may be opportunities to involve local communities in developing the strategic approach of the Service in developing and nurturing effective partnership working.

There is an understanding that due to the physical location of NIFRS Response assets it is not always possible to meet the agreed emergency response standards. The Service holds the data identifying the areas where the standard cannot be met. Further data sets could be utilised to identify the most vulnerable citizens and businesses in these areas in order to develop a targeted plan to mitigate risk through Prevention and Protection work. Further to this the Service could demonstrate more effectively how it is taking positive action in areas that are outside of the response standard.

The Prevention and Protection Strategy 2014-2019 includes a stated aim to review the Home Fire Safety Check procedure to ensure it is more risk-focused and better supplements response arrangements. This is a key piece of work which, if delivered, should ensure that the most vulnerable citizens are prioritised and their individual needs assessed.

The new IRMP 2015-2020 provides an opportunity to utilise the Safer Community Concept to broaden the role of the Service. The existing work programme predominantly focuses on fire risk in the home. Further consideration could be given to how NIFRS can enhance this role to provide a broader home care offer. This could include areas such as slips trips and falls, fuel poverty, hoarding, social isolation among other considerations. As mentioned previously in this report, this would allow NIFRS to explore how it makes a greater contribution to the 'Transforming Your Care' model for integrated health and social care.

This work could be even more greatly enhanced by developing a clearer role for volunteers and third sector organisations. The Service is committed to employing a volunteer co-ordinator and increasing the volunteer workforce and the team sees this as a positive move as volunteers will be a valuable asset for future prevention work.

However a clear volunteer strategy and work plan will be essential in order to sustain their attraction and retention whilst effectively demonstrating evidence of the value added. The Service already has strong links with some third sector organisations who are delivering positive outcomes. The service could consider how its work with the third sector could be further developed and how volunteer organisations could be trained and branded to deliver against NIFRS plans.

5.3 Protection

This KAA focuses on the question ‘How well is the authority delivering its regulatory fire safety strategy?’

Areas of Strength

- Targeted inspection programme based upon risk
- Performance Management and Quality Assurance of district audits is effective
- Very positive working relationship with Building Control and Licensing
- Structured training programme for inspecting officers
- High awareness and demonstrable evidence of SC61 (A) process
- Evidence of audit programme being developed to address specific seasonal risk

Areas to explore:

- Service to consider more formal arrangements around engineered solutions
- Temporary/interim positions create staff development difficulties in this area
- A longer term staff succession plan recognising the specific technical needs of the protection area to be an integral part of the thinking around the Workforce Development Strategy

The protection area provides NIFRS with some strong evidence and a platform to deliver even better outcomes for businesses and citizens.

There is a mature approach to discharging statutory protection responsibilities with a clearly articulated commitment to:

1. helping and encouraging those it regulates to fully understand and fulfil their legal responsibilities more easily and
2. responding proportionately to non-compliance to avoid imposing unnecessary costs while taking firm action against those who fail to comply with the law.

In order to further enhance the Service’s role in this area, it may wish to consider further how it can work with businesses and other stakeholders to support economic growth across the country.

The Fire Safety Enforcement policy clearly communicates how NIFRS will approach their business fire safety role and what can be expected in their approach to these activities. There is a clear risk-based inspection programme in place which identifies four different routes by which priority premises can be identified. Robust arrangements exist to ensure evidence based targeting, whilst building in the opportunity for local determination in the districts. The 17 FSEC building categories are used to ensure the NIFRS audit approach is in line with national best practice.

Introduction of the Quality Assurance policy has ensured consistency across Area Commands while promoting local autonomy in aspects of the risk-based inspection programme - this reflects the diverse nature of the risk in the built environment across Northern Ireland. Quality assurance random sampling is clearly evidenced and provides the service with confidence that business fire safety responsibilities are being effectively discharged and that a learning environment is in existence across Protection activities.

Although the peer team did not have the opportunity to talk to protection partners there is documented evidence of productive working relationships with Building Control and Licensing colleagues. MoUs exist across these statutory bodies which serve to ensure consistency or approach when engaging the business community. The Fire Safety Liaison Panel is a valuable forum for driving fire safety improvement and also organises the highly regarded Northern Ireland Fire Safety Conference.

Fire Safety training begins at trainee course level and then develops for officers taking a career path in Community Development. It is well structured leading to the attainment of a Diploma in Fire Safety after three years. This approach clearly identifies expectation of fire safety officers and provides the service with assurance of competent accredited practitioners in this specialist area.

Training is delivered both internally and externally through the Fire Service College depending on need which ensures value for money principles are achieved.

The SC61 (A) Premises Information Update is a well-embedded process that provides assurance that fire safety concerns or operational intelligence matters are dealt with at the appropriate level by officers with the appropriate competencies. The process is understood by staff throughout the organisation and is a valuable tool for improving both firefighter and public safety.

Protection is an area where activity based on foreseeable risk is clearly demonstrated. This was evident at the time of the peer challenge where the Irish Open golf tournament was taking place at Royal County Down and a programme of inspection based on sleeping risk had been undertaken to ensure public safety at a time of increased visitor footfall in the area.

NIFRS does not have a dedicated Fire Engineer or formal arrangements for ensuring the availability of qualified fire engineering solutions expertise when required. The service has previously been able to secure this expertise through informal channels. Moving forward however (and in the interest of having robust and resilient arrangements in place) the Service may wish to consider how it might identify more formal arrangements to best meet organisational requirements.

This is an area of the Service's business which is particularly impacted on by the high number of temporary and interim posts mentioned previously in this report. This Service-wide challenge is tangibly impeding business delivery in specialist areas such as business fire safety. This is an area of delivery which demands particularly structured individual development requirements which cannot be achieved within the current temporary post arrangements. Post holders are changing role at a point when it could be argued they are just finding their feet in what is a very technical area of delivery. This constitutes a significant risk to the achievement of Protection objectives and the service should consider how to address this issue as a matter of priority.

A longer term staff succession plan recognising the specific technical needs of the Protection area ought to be a key and integral part of the thinking around the Workforce Development Strategy referenced earlier in this report.

5.4 Response

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the Service delivering its response activities?'

Areas of Strength

- Recognition that NIFRS is delivering against a unique risk profile
- NIFRS is extremely well respected by emergency management partners resulting in 'a coalition of the willing'
- SOP team tied in well to the national process and a very impressive approach to managing OPS SOPS into NIFRS via a whole team approach
- Critical Risk information approach via the SC61(A) is leading to quick information refresh for crews thus enhancing firefighter safety.
- MoU and Operational approach with PSNI ref body recovery and joint BA work around chemical suicides.

Areas to explore

- RDS competence-firefighters riding OIC without any formal command input
- Asset management tracking arrangements need to be strengthened to ensure effective inventory of operational fleet
- Service to continue to review all their top tier COMAH sites as a priority to ensure info is up to date and responding crews have access to the appropriate training and equipment
- Operational debriefs are in place however close out actions need to be tracked and supported through to closure
- Service to ensure consistency concerning the gathering and reporting of risk information
- Resources to risk review should identify the ability to re-allocate resources
- Preparedness- community risk register exists but no evidence of visibility or a review for 2-3 years
- Preparedness – BCM EX programme to be reviewed from the current level of 32 annual exercises

NIFRS operates in an environment that is unique within the UK in terms of its history. Nonetheless, against this backdrop, NIFRS has always been and remains a highly respected and credible partner. This contributes positively to its ability to support and contribute effectively to the delivery of multi-agency lifesaving initiatives for those at risk.

Firefighters and officers at all levels are passionate about protecting citizens through effective response which is delivered alongside their counterparts in the Police and Ambulance Services. The dedication and pride in the operational capability of the Service is tangible and consistent across the organisation.

Whilst not mandated by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, NIFRS are working hard to ensure that interoperability is prominent in its direction of travel. JESIP and CCG (NI) Sub Groups are at an embryonic stage. However, the MoU with the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) regarding body recovery and breathing apparatus procedures related to chemical suicides is a strong indication of the commitment to

cross-agency working. Firefighter safety benefits from good standards of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and appliances and this represents an area in which operational firefighters and officers have a good level of confidence. The process for formulating and managing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) and the utilisation of Form SC61(A) for Risk Critical Information is also contributing positively to the safety of the operational workforce.

Notwithstanding the overt pride in operational response NIFRS would benefit from focussing on ensuring that it is well-placed to address some areas which could pose clear and present risk. Whilst there is recognition of the need for all firefighters mobilised to operational incidents to be competent in role, NIFRS should assure itself that those riding in charge of fire appliances are equipped with the command skills relevant to the level required. The need for this assurance is most apparent amongst firefighters contracted to the Retained Duty System (RDS). The compelling need to mobilise a fire appliance runs the risk of overshadowing the imperative of ensuring competent command of the appliance crews. NIFRS have worked hard to ensure that RDS contractual arrangements meet the needs of the citizens they serve. That said the Service may wish to examine the process by which individual contracts are agreed, in order that NIFRS can ensure 'buy in' and understanding around this need.

NIFRS should consider reaffirming the need for 'loop closure' which also extends to the Operational Debrief process. This would provide an additional level of assurance for the Service that issues raised as a result of operational incidents are managed through to a conclusion that will prevent or reduce the likelihood of the issue occurring again in future.

The commitment to firefighter safety via the collection of risk information relating to premises is clear. However, the team would encourage NIFRS to focus on removing the subjective nature of risk assessment, evident in some cases the team examined, as this can lead to inaccurate risk ratings. This area of focus also pertains to Top Tier COMAH sites which in line with NIFRS's strategy of re-inspection (instigated in January 2015) should continue to be reviewed as a priority to ensure that relevant information, training and equipment is available to those responding to such sites.

A review of resources to meet identified risk (resources to risk) within Northern Ireland would enable the effective allocation of personnel and equipment tailored to the actual risks being faced by the community, business, environment and firefighters. Ensuring the risk based operational deployment of competent personnel should be matched by focussing on asset management and, in particular, the tracking and testing of equipment. NIFRS may wish to consider reviewing the 'triggers' for officer mobilisation in relation to 'weight of attack' assigned to particular incidents.

Areas of strength relating to preparedness could be further underpinned by a visible multi-agency risk register. This 'live' document would benefit the identification of risks posed to the community and help to support Business Continuity plans and an achievable exercise programme.

5.5 Health and Safety

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the Service ensuring its responsibilities for health, safety and welfare are met?'

Areas of Strength

- High level policy and strong corporate commitment to health and safety
- SC61 (A) process
- SOP policy and construction process demonstrating a whole team approach
- Periodic Quality Safety Audit (QSA) reviews are undertaken.

Areas to explore

- Service to consider reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Ops Policy and Safety Forum
- Draft Performance Management framework to be reviewed to include further Health and Safety outcomes (e.g. active monitoring) to enable greater CMT reporting, oversight, trend analysis and ownership
- Service to review measures required for closer working between Training and Development, Health and Safety and Response concerning issues relating to operational debriefs to ensure close out loop
- Service to ensure areas identified within QSA audit report are closed
- Consider how you examine general staff well-being and firefighter fitness to improve sickness rates and fitness testing outcomes
- Ensure that the Operational Test of Competence (OTOC) is a pre-requisite of Firefighters riding as OIC
- Due to declining experience levels, operational crews to maintain competencies underpinned by HSG 65 and the Safe Person Concept
- Corporate Risk Register to be reviewed, refreshed and simplified to enable high priority CMT ownership of actions required to mitigate risk
- Consistency of the leadership function of Health and Safety (15 heads in 15 years)

The corporate commitment to the Health and Safety of NIFRS employees is made clear within policy documents that indicate that there is CMT level leadership of this critical undertaking. Policies are underpinned by the principles found within HS (G) 65 which cascades through a range of Health and Safety Management System (HSMS) policies. These include Health and Safety Aide Memoirs, Health and Safety Risk Assessments and Occupational Health and Safety Welfare Bulletins.

Periodic Quality Safety Audits (QSA's) are undertaken, the most recent being completed in January 2015. This followed a Health and Safety Peer Review using the RoSPA QSA process in 2010. The Operations Policy and Safety Forum (OPSF) is chaired by the Director of Community Protection, again highlighting CMT level commitment.

Firefighter safety benefits from good standards of PPE and appliances which, as mentioned previously, is an area in which operational firefighters and officers have a good level of confidence. The process for formulating and managing Standard

Operating Procedures (SOP's) and the utilisation of Form: SC61 (A) for Risk Critical Information is also contributing positively to the safety of the operational workforce.

The Performance Management Framework, whilst currently in draft, could be utilised to place greater emphasis on health and safety performance and outcomes. Improved reporting and oversight at CMT level would enable a Service-wide understanding of trends and comparison between Command Areas. Implementing measurable improvements will give the Service a better opportunity to continuously improve on their health and safety performance which currently show an increase in accidents across a number of indicators.

Consideration of the Health and Safety team working closer with all departments, in particular Training and Development and Response, could lead to better communication of outcomes and necessary improvements throughout the organisation. The QSA conducted in 2015 did not show great progress when compared to the QSA conducted in 2007, which would suggest that evidence and data could be more consistently acted upon than is currently the case. Due to a number of short term temporary appointments, clear ownership of the Health and Safety function and team is an area the organisation finds to be a challenge. There could be benefits to NIFRS considering the longer term appointment of a qualified Health and Safety Manager which could be a non-uniformed appointment.

Early implementation of Operational Active Monitoring should be considered as well as how this feeds into the Service's Operational Debrief process. The need for the Debrief process to travel from the operational issue being raised, through to outcomes that will prevent or reduce the likelihood of the issue occurring again (loop closure) should be focussed upon, recorded and reviewed.

The team would encourage NIFRS to ensure that those riding in charge of fire appliances are equipped with the command skills relevant to that level. As mentioned previously the need for this assurance is most apparent amongst firefighters employed on the RDS. The team would reiterate the importance of the Service assuring itself that the compelling need to mobilise a fire appliance does not overshadow the necessity of ensuring that the commander of the appliance crew is sufficiently competent. In order to improve the well-being and fitness of operational staff, NIFRS would be encouraged by the team to consider reaffirming the need to achieve the Service fitness standard as a prerequisite to riding a fire appliance. Consideration of the fitness test being conducted by centrally located fitness advisors/PTIs would serve to remove any difficulties of familiarity between tester and tested which could undermine the robustness of this process.

In common with other Fire and Rescue Services, the reduction in fire calls is detracting from the levels of operational experience amongst firefighters and officers. There would be benefit in NIFRS examining more closely how this decline in experience can be mitigated by the implementation of a Training and Development (T&D) competence framework which includes a risk-based Training Needs Analysis (TNA), a competency based Training and Development system along with Personal Development Records (PDR) for all operational staff.

5.6 Training and development

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the Service ensuring its responsibilities for training, development and assessment of its staff are met?'

Areas of Strength

- Employee engagement around the need for training is very positive
- Structured training programme for Technical Fire Safety Inspectors is in place.
- Service is actively examining the potential for a new training management system as part of the HSG 65 systematic approach to managing employee risk.
- 7 Day safety critical training approach for all staff is positive
- Service working toward the implementation of a new training structure as part of their broader restructure considerations as CMT recognise this area requires improvement
- Proposed Training and OD structure will enable better central delivery of training
- Control training is robust and self-managed built around their own Training needs analysis

Areas to explore

- Future training approach should be part of a broader Workforce Development Strategy including:
 1. Development for all staffing groups so they all feel equally valued (e.g. allocated budget for Support Staff)
 2. Longer-term succession planning approach
 3. QA and validation of risk critical training
 4. Risk-based Training Needs Analysis associated with IRMP
 5. To further strengthen the organisational approach to the Safe Person Concept
 6. Development plans for new people in role or prior to role take-up – getting ahead of the curve
 7. Delegation of authority , accountability and empowerment of managers
- Ensure the procurement of a new training management system (to ensure compliance with HSG 65 systematic approach to managing employee risk) remains a service high priority.
- Assure yourselves that the 7 Day safety critical training for all staff is consistently applied and quality assured
- NIFRS to review training delivery models to ensure efficiency and effectiveness through determining what training should best be delivered centrally or delivered locally through the 11 Districts as part of the broader restructuring considerations to maintain consistency in application and competence.
- Give urgent consideration to the need for adequate training facilities especially in relation to risk critical training and prioritise BA and incident command.

- Due to declining experience levels, operational crews to maintain competencies underpinned by HSG 65 and the Safe Person Concept

The value of a healthy Training and Development culture is understood and strived for within NIFRS. Staff at all levels recognise the critical need for development of individuals and teams and how this will benefit the community.

Structured training programmes are apparent in a number of functions, in particular; Technical Fire Safety and Fire Control who benefit from a sound risk based training regime that is performance managed and recorded. The Service's policy of delivering seven days of safety critical training to all operational personnel is positive and serves to underpin the high level commitment to firefighter safety.

In recognising that the risk based approach to training requires improvement, the Service is examining the potential for a new Training Management System. As a forerunner to this, a new draft Training and Organisational Development structure has been produced. This has the potential to greatly enhance the central delivery of training and development to all members of staff whether in operational or support roles.

Taking a holistic approach to workforce development and succession planning would enable NIFRS to scan across the entire organisation in order to more effectively identify training and development needs for all staff both operational and those serving in a support capacity. Coordinated from a high profile central resource, the Service should give further consideration to how it might utilise a strong risk-based Training Needs Analysis. This would help the Service in being able to more accurately identify what actual training and development individuals need in order to fulfil their role competently and safely. Clearly some development requirements will vary from role to role and from area to area. Nonetheless it is important that this is underpinned by the core functions and values of the Service in terms of ensuring competence and preparedness.

Once accurate training and development needs are identified and programmed for delivery, NIFRS could further examine suitable ways of continuously promoting and supporting the development of individuals and teams throughout their careers. This ought to include the individual ownership of Personal Development Records (PDR's) by all staff, recorded assessment and validation of training, development plans for individuals' pre and post substantive appointment to a role and a clear understanding of accountability as it pertains to those in managerial and non-managerial positions.

Notwithstanding the negative affect of numerous short term temporary appointments throughout the organisation, the team would encourage the Service to further consider how effectively it ensures that continuity of individual development is maintained, validated and recorded.

Service managers have recognised the need to procure a Training and Management System that supports the Training and Development principles previously covered. Giving priority to assurance that critical training has been consistently delivered to (and understood by) those performing safety critical functions should be swiftly taken into account. Seven Day Critical Training, Breathing Apparatus (hot fire) and Incident Command should be particular areas of focus. Given the limited time for firefighters working the Retained Duty System, NIFRS should examine how to ensure that these firefighters maintain their competencies for the risks they face.

The Service has recognised the need to continuously deliver realistic training against a backdrop of diminishing fire calls and as a consequence, diminishing operational

experience. In order to achieve this, NIFRS should continue to explore opportunities for the provision of high quality training facilities which can directly support the delivery of realistic training scenarios for all operational personnel. Authentic training provision for Breathing Apparatus and Incident Command should be considered as a priority.

5.7 Call Management and Incident Support

This KAA focuses on the question 'How well is the authority delivering its call management and incident support activities?'

Areas of Strength

- Control training is robust and self-managed built around their own Training needs analysis
- Control involved with exchange visits between Ops leading to good awareness of sectors
- Staff positive approach around shortages
- Gartan system being effectively used and monitored
- Regional Control project well developed through sharing with Scottish FRS
- Staffing shortages being addressed

Areas to explore

- Watch Managers in control to be upskilled to enable 24/7 updates of critical risk information via the SC61 (A) process.

The Control Room within Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service benefits from having motivated staff members many of whom have significant years of experience which ensures the effective management of emergency calls and the mobilisation of resources. As a result of this experience base the training regime within the Control Room was found to be resilient and robust, with a comprehensive training needs analysis approach in place which is self-managed to a very high standard.

The room has suffered from a shortage of staff numbers which has had an impact on the ability to continue with the exchange visits between the Control Room staff members and operational personnel which had led to a mutually beneficial awareness of the various functions of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. It was very encouraging to find clear evidence of a very positive staff approach concerning the current staff shortages issue to ensure that there are appropriate numbers on duty to both manage incidents and ensure appropriate welfare/break arrangements. The review team were also made aware of the managerial decision to instigate recruitment against the establishment levels within Control which should ensure that staffing shortages are addressed with new Control Room Operators in position towards the end of 2015.

The Control Room is benefitting from the investment into the Gartan system which is effectively being used and monitored providing real-time information concerning fire engine availability.

The existing Command and Control Systems are fit for purpose but coming towards the end of their technical shelf life. It is pleasing to see the replacement regional control project is well developed through sharing with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service the potential for a future joint procurement exercise which will hopefully

deliver an enhanced level of value for money and provide appropriate fall back arrangements with an outside fire authority.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service benefits from a comprehensive SC61(A) process which allows for the rapid updating of critical risk information. However, the service should consider supporting the current single point of contact within the Control Room which processes the information by up-skilling the Control Watch Managers. This will enhance Firefighter and public safety by enabling risk critical information to be uploaded onto the system 24 hours a day rather than relying on the attendance of one individual position.

6. NIFRS Areas of Focus – Headline messages

Organisational structures

1. There is clear recognition at all levels from within the Service that the current structural arrangements and organisational design are no longer fit for purpose. The CMT, in conjunction with the Fire Board, needs to reaffirm their commitment to the existing vision and mission within the Corporate Plan in order to fully identify the future function of NIFRS to then enable a clear way forward in terms of the form under which the future Service should operate
2. Any future restructure of NIFRS should take cognisance of the wider restructure of Local Government and also other structures of public bodies and delivery arms particularly those associated with the Department of Justice and the Department of Health. The organisational structure going forward should enable the Service to continue to advance its current status as a trusted delivery partner of choice of other agencies, delivering a wider agenda leading to a safer Northern Ireland.
3. The service should ensure any future structure has flexibility through the allocation of resources to risk which is based upon an intelligence and evidence led approach.
4. NIFRS should become clear in its thinking around a model to promote service delivery and from that approach should flow arrangements around business support.

Accountability at all levels including service delivery models

1. In view of the outcomes of the Local Government Review, the Service should give serious consideration to a service delivery model which creates fire risk areas each of which could be overseen by a Community Risk Manager responsible to manage risk in that area. As part of the service delivery structure, the 11 fire risk areas should be supported by overreaching service wide functions to include protection, prevention and risk reduction, operational policy and critical risk information, and training delivery resources. Community Risk Managers could provide a risk report on an area and the local manager have a level of autonomy and authority to deploy resources in response (prevention, protection and intervention) to that address that risk.
2. The Service delivery functions could be supported by overarching business support areas such as health and safety, finance, human resources, workforce development (including training policy), community risk information and data and performance management.
3. The service delivery structure should promote the safe person concept around fire fighter safety to manage corporate risk more effectively. The structure should also be supported by an evidence and intelligence led approach to the promotion of community reduction activities which will enable desired outcomes.
4. The Service's current Performance Management Framework should be reviewed to promote accountability at all levels through outcomes and performance management indicators. These high level indicators can be utilised to inform the Corporate Risk Register and help prioritise resources. This will enable CMT to manage performance and identify how resources can be allocated against

emerging risks and also allow the service to celebrate success both publicly and through its own staff

5. Once the service has identified the future structure and delivery model a mapping exercise can quickly be completed which will enable positions to be substantiated and therefore remove the current interim and temporary arrangements.

Training facilities

1. Explore opportunities for the provision of high quality training facilities which can directly support the delivery of realistic training scenarios for all operational personnel. Authentic training provision for breathing apparatus and incident command should be considered as a priority.
2. Workforce development should be underpinned by a strong risk-based training needs analysis. This will enable the service to tackle community risk head-on.
3. The continuous development of individuals and teams should be supported by a commitment to the completion and maintenance of personal development records. This principle should apply to operational and support staff alike.
4. Implementation of operational active monitoring should be developed and feed into the Service's operational debrief process, therefore supporting coaching and mentoring of incident commanders. Outcomes of debriefs should be actioned, recorded and reviewed.

RDS issues

1. Fire appliances mobilised to incidents crewed by firefighters contracted to the RDS must be commanded by competent supervisory officers holding the relevant command skills and qualifications.
2. Examination of how to ensure that firefighters contracted to the RDS maintain their competencies for the risks they may face, should be undertaken to ensure that their available time is utilised for training.
3. Ensuring the consistent delivery of critical training to RDS staff would be significantly enhanced by a centrally driven and delivered training programme.
4. The identification of how the service will match resources to risk should consider the added value that staff contracted to the RDS system can provide to prevention work in retained station areas.

Financial planning and procurement

1. The organisation needs to take a smarter approach to the development of Business Cases. A process needs to be developed that identifies which business cases are needed, allocates appropriate resources to deliver them and ensures that they are submitted well in advance of the financial year for which the funds are required.
2. Notwithstanding annual budget allocation from the sponsoring department, CMT and the Board should adopt a medium term financial plan as a matter of priority based upon the best professional planning assumptions available

Estates issues

1. In order to ensure a move towards resources allocated to risk, there needs to be developed an asset management strategy aligned to the delivery of a revised and updated Integrated Risk Management Plan which should also allow for a major asset review.

Performance management

1. Whilst there is some evidence of performance monitoring, a shift towards strong performance management will be needed to ensure NIFRS is able to deliver the service it wishes to.
2. A clear purpose and priorities should be articulated, set out within a revised and updated IRMP linked to all strategic plans. Without this being in place, the management of performance across the organisation and the improvement planning required will not be delivered. This could lead to missed opportunities to improve performance and a reduction in the quality of outcomes to citizens.

Strategic ICT infrastructure.

1. It is recognised that the arrangements with the Business Services Organisation is a positive step in addressing an underdeveloped ICT system. However, a modern fire and rescue service requires stable and up to date ICT platforms in order to deliver its objectives. Therefore this is an area of critical priority.

7. Conclusion and contact information

Key success ingredients

- Take ownership of your own future
- Meeting your future challenges requires service transformation
- Unleash your talent
- Have the right people doing the right jobs in the right places
- Be risk aware not risk averse
- NIFRS is a proud organisation well-placed to continue delivering better outcomes for citizens. The team would encourage the Service to create the space for the Board and CMT to identify and clearly articulate the future for NIFRS in terms of culture, behaviours and outcomes for citizens.
- Service transformation must be based on a clearer understanding of risk and robust evidence.
- Going forward effective engagement of all the Service's internal and external stakeholders must be integral to all NIFRS does.
- Staff recognise the need for change. They want a clearly defined and communicated vision for this.
- The future shape of NIFRS should be built upon 'form' following 'function'.

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

Ernest Opuni – Peer Challenge Manager

(Local Government Association)

E-mail – ernest.opuni@local.gov.uk

Mobile - 07920061193

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

www.local.gov.uk