REPORT TO:	**MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY**
DATE:	**TUESDAY 4TH DECEMBER 2012**
REPORT NO.	**CFO/162/12**
REPORTING OFFICER:	**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**
CONTACT OFFICER:	**AM MOTTRAM DIRECTOR OPERATIONAL RESPONSE**
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	**GM MCNEIL**
SUBJECT:	**INTRODUCTION OF AN OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE TEAM**

THERE ARE NO APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 That the Authority notes the permanent establishment of the Operational Assurance Team following a successful trial period and that the Authority note the associated structural changes to the Operational Response function.

2. **Recommendation**

2.1 That the Authority notes the formation of an Operational Assurance Team within the Health & Safety function of Operational Response.

2.2 That the Authority notes the establishment of the current temporary Group Manager B post as the Health & Safety Manager through the conversion of the Green Book Health and Safety manager position.

2.3 That the Authority notes the establishment of the two current temporary Station Manager A posts through the conversion of two WMB posts.

3 **Introduction & Background**

3.1 In October 2010 following an audit of 8 UK Fire & Rescue Services the HSE published its consolidated report which included the following recommendations

"We recommend that FRS should concentrate their management scrutiny and oversight on topics that most matter for fire-fighter safety"

Specific / targeted operational monitoring should be undertaken to constantly monitor the performance of crews and the relevance of operational practices

3.2   This was reinforced in 2012 through the publication of the draft Health Safety and Welfare Framework. "Active monitoring" is highlighted throughout the document and in particular

'Fire and rescue services should have in place appropriate arrangements for monitoring and measuring health, safety and welfare performance against pre-determined plans and standards, including learning from incidents and using this information to improve operational performance. '

'Specific/ targeted operational monitoring should be undertaken to constantly monitor the performance of crews and the relevance of operational practices'

3.3   The importance of active monitoring was also highlighted as part of the Operational Assurance Audit (OPARA) / Operational Assessment (OPA) Peer review of MFRS Service in 2010 which commented "that the OPARA process should be further developed to be carried out by a dedicated team rather than by a manager attending an incident in another role".

3.4   Around 70% of Fire and Rescue Services across the UK have dedicated incident audit teams/personnel. As a result the Operational Response Directorate visited a number of FRS's to identify and establish notable practice. Benchmarking visits were made to Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and South Wales and discussions held with West Midlands, West Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear FRS. This activity allowed MFRS to identify notable practice, learn the key lessons of others and develop policies and procedures which are best suited to Merseyside.

3.5   The decision to trial the Operational Assurance Active Monitoring Team was agreed in March 2012. The current composition of the team is two Station Manager A non-flexi level posts, managed by a Group Manager B (temp H&S Manager). These core Officers are supported out of hours by 3 HQ based functional Group Managers. This approach ensures that a significant sample of response activity is being actively monitored on a routine basis.

3.6   The monitoring role it is important to note, is separate to the command structure. This separation allows the Operational Assurance Officer the freedom to actively monitor all aspects of the Services response to an incident, without the confines/restrictions of either the incident command role or other roles within the Incident Command System. This not only allows for a complete "picture" to be gained but ensures objectivity, in that an officer's observations are not influenced by his/her personal involvement in the command structure of the incident.

3.7   The team's methodology for monitoring both incidents and training events is based upon the requirement to actively monitor as detailed in the CFRAU Health Safety & Welfare Framework Document: which states:

"Operational Assurance at incidents deals with the effectiveness of Fire and Rescue Service arrangements for implementation of guidance contained in generic risk assessments and standard operating procedures, incident command, operational training and the maintenance of competence. By 'actively' monitoring operational performance Fire and Rescue Service can maintain and improve their ability to manage risks in the operational environment by learning from experience through the use of audits, monitoring and performance reviews.

Auditing and performance review are the final steps in the health, safety and welfare management control cycle. They are an important component of the 'feedback loop' which enables the Fire and Rescue Service to reinforce, maintain and develop its ability to reduce risks and ensure the continued effectiveness of the health, safety and welfare management system"

3.8 To this end a detailed set of monitoring criteria has been drafted and can be found within the draft Service Instruction which has been designed to ensure compliance with National guidance as well as local MFRS procedures.

3.9 Outcomes of monitoring activity are expressed in terms of significance; should an incident occur where the Monitoring Officer believes that there is the potential for organisational impact, either 'Major' or "Minor" then the appropriate actions, as detailed in the draft SI are taken accordingly. Similarly areas of notable practice can also be identified and then be disseminated across the organisation.

3.10 The implementation of the Operational Assurance Team has quickly become a key part of our Service and an invaluable tool. It is evident that when active monitoring of an incident has taken place it has given assurance to the Authority that both existing and newly implemented policies and procedures are fit for purpose. It has also identified where organisational improvement is required and has been the catalyst for improvement.

3.11 As a result of Operational Assurance the following actions have already been taken to improve operational Response;

- The staffing arrangements at Kirkdale have been altered to improve effectiveness enabling development of the Complimentary Crewing arrangements.
- Instigated the development of and verification of improved systems of work at large scale Breathing Apparatus incidents.
- Operational Assurance Team have identified and implemented improvement in regard to communication in particular the quality of radio messages and terminology used.
- Best practice has been identified and shared through Operational assurance case studies including Water Rescue and Rescue from Height.
- The team is actively monitoring compliance with H&S regulations such as for PPE with particular reference to the recording of testing regimes and the resultant improvement of fire-fighter safety

3.12 It is recommended that the Operational Assurance Team is now permanently established as a core part of the H&S function

4 **Required changes to structure and roles**

4.1 To Implement the Operational Assurance Team there is a requirement to change the H&S structure and some of the roles within it.

4.2 **H&S Manager Post** - In December 2011 it was decided not to immediately recruit another H&S safety Green Book Manager. This decision was taken as the Service had received a draft H&S guidance document, which had a renewed

focus from HSE into the management of Health and Safety in FRS's with a particular focus upon fire-fighter safety and the management of risk in the operational environment. This renewed focus from HSE had been clearly brought about through a number of high profile and tragic incidents involving fire-fighter fatalities.

4.3   It was considered appropriate given the focus on fire ground safety that it was prudent to utilise an operational Senior Officer at Group Manager level to temporarily lead / manage the Health and Safety department during this national change in focus. The rationale for this was that the operational experience and understanding required to adapt to the emerging guidance would be best achieved by a senior grey book manager, due to their inherent understanding of operational risk and their active participation and experience in command and decision making at operational incidents.

4.4   The successful identification and implementation of the Operational Assurance Team has been driven by and has been the responsibility of the temporary operational Health and Safety Manager. The success of the Operational Assurance Team has only been achievable through this role being Operational in nature. The provision of a Grey Book officer who is conditioned to the flexi duty system has meant that the Service H&S Manager can now attend operational incidents, have unrestricted access to the incident ground, is available to do so for all incidents and is importantly flexible in approach to work outside of normal green book working hours.

4.5   The benefits associated with the Health and Safety Manager being an operational officer has not only served to provide the necessary skills and experience to manage the Operational Assurance Team. This position has also proved invaluable when making the links between the findings of monitoring activity and the areas of the organisation best suited to bringing about improvements and reductions in risk to operational personnel.

4.6   Operational Assurance Team Roles - During the trial period two Watch Manager B posts in the Operational Response directorate were temporarily increased to Station Manager "A" non-flexi. This was undertaken in order to align the roles with the added responsibilities of the new positions and is in line with the benchmarking of similar roles being undertaken in other FRS's

4.7   The additional two SM A's are non-Flexi Officers and therefore do not accrue the additional 20% flexi duty cost to their salary and as such there is a minimal increase in cost between WMB and SMA. These new positions have required the implementation of an agile base working pattern, which was constructed and put forward by the officers themselves. The pattern is based upon an average 42 hour week over an eight week period but offers the greatest possible availability for monitoring duties.

4.8   It is also necessary that in order to implement the Operational Assurance Team the two existing WMB posts are permanently changed to SMA non flexi.

5.   Equality & Diversity Implications

5.1   There are no Equality & Diversity implications relating to this report

6   Staff Implications

6.1   The two temporary SMA posts currently in place were created by removal of two Watch Manager posts from within the Operational Performance Team; therefore the permanent creation of the SMA roles will result in the permanent deletion of the WM B posts.

6.2   Creation of the Permanent Group Manager post as Health & Safety Manager will result in the permanent deletion of the existing Green Book Health & Safety Manager post.

7   Legal Implications

7.1   Active Monitoring by the Operational Assurance Team will make a significant contribution towards compliance with Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) and subordinate legislation.

8   Financial Implications & Value for Money

8.1   The conversion of a Grade 14 Green Book post to the Group Manager Grey Book post within the Health & Safety Department will result in an increase in salary costs of £25,966

8.2   The conversion of 2 Watch Manager (B) posts Operational Performance Team to 2 Station Manager (A non-Flexi) within the Health & Safety Department will result in an increase in salary costs of (£3,243 per role x2) £6,486

8.3   The net cost can be contained within current overall budgets for uniformed staffing by offsetting deletions of posts within the Resource and Resilience Team.

9   Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

9.1   The Operational Assurance Team will achieve an enhanced level of objective risk critical scrutiny applied to our operational preparedness and response capabilities.

9.2   An increase in compliance with safe systems of work will lead to a reduction of workplace injury and a decrease in days lost.

10 <u>**Contribution to Achieving Our Mission:**</u>

"Safer, Stronger Communities, Safe, Effective Firefighters"

10.1 The primary objective of the Operational Assurance Team is to embed the safe person principles as described in the Health, Safety and Welfare Framework. And HS(g)65. Achievement of this objective contributes directly towards our mission of safe, effective Firefighters.

11 <u>**BACKGROUND PAPERS**</u>

CFRA Health, Safety and Welfare Framework
HS(g) 65
INDG275, reprinted 08/08