

AGENDA ITEM:

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2012</b>
<b>REPORT NO.</b>	<b>CFO/132/12</b>
<b>REPORTING OFFICER:</b>	<b>DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>DEB APPLETON - DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PLANNING, EXTN:4402</b>
<b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>	
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW</b>

**THERE ARE NO APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the Operational Assessment review currently taking place and the peer challenge visit that will take place from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the information contained within the report

Executive Summary

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is undergoing an Operational Assessment (OpA) during 2012. This follows a successful OpA in May 2010

The OpA consists of the production of a self assessment that addresses the strengths and weaknesses of key areas of FRS operational service delivery and governance matters such as leadership, performance and capacity which is subject to a Peer Challenge visit.

The self assessment will be presented to Members on 25<sup>th</sup> October and the Peer Challenge will take place from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

The Peer Challenge will be provided free of charge as central government funding has been made available.

Introduction & Background

3. Members may recall that the Authority was the subject of an Operational Assessment in May 2010. At that time, although Operational Assessment was part

of the FRA approach to sector led improvement it also formed a part of the overall national audit regime (although it was not compulsory).

4. Since 2010 the approach to Operational Assessment (OpA) has been updated, revised and re-launched. The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and, Local Government Association (LGA) working with the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor (CFRA) have developed the original process to create one which has:

“a strong operational focus, comprises a self assessment and external peer challenge and is designed to allow a ‘whole system’ look at how a Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) leads, prioritises and delivers the interrelated functions of prevention, protection and response in a way which is rooted in:

- a deep understanding of community risk
- the allocation of resources in accordance with that risk
- the marshalling of partnership resources to assist in managing the risk
- a high regard for operational good practice and the health, safety and development of all Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) staff.

The OpA process is designed to:

- form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the FRA, and
- provide elected members on FRAs and Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

The OpA will:

- assist the FRA to identify its service’s strengths and areas to explore
- inform the FRAs strategic improvement plans
- deliver a robust process for assessing operational performance
- complement and not duplicate any national requirements for financial audit
- be used as a tool to assist FRAs in the identification and dissemination of notable practice
- be flexible in design, and simple in delivery. “

5. The Operational Assessment focuses on seven Key Assessment Areas (KAA):

**1. Community Risk Management** - How well is the authority identifying and prioritising the risks faced by the community?

**2. Prevention** - How well is the authority delivering its community safety strategy?

**3. Protection** - How well is the authority delivering its regulatory fire safety strategy?

**4. Response** - How well is the authority delivering its response activities?

**5. Health and Safety** - How well is the authority ensuring its responsibilities for health, safety and welfare are met?

**6. Training and Development** - How well is the authority ensuring its responsibilities for training, development and assessment of its staff are met?

**7. Call Management and Incident Support** - How well is the authority delivering its call management and incident support activities?

The Authority is also required to consider the three following overarching questions:

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

6. In addition to the questions above, each Authority can request that other areas of business are examined by the Peer Challenge Team.

#### The Operational Assessment process in Merseyside

7. A task and finish group comprising the Area Managers for Operational Response, Preparedness and Prevention and Protection and the Directors of People and Organisational Development and Strategic Planning is using the Operational Assessment Toolkit to coordinate the process of writing the self assessment, gathering evidence and arranging the Peer Challenge visit.

8. As a result of the work undertaken to prepare the self assessment, MFRA will ask the OpA Peer Challenge Team to consider the following overarching question:

***“Are the plans MFRA is making for the future, particularly in response to anticipated budget cuts, robust and appropriate and will they enable the Authority to continue to achieve its Mission of “Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters” .”***

In the context of this overarching request, the Authority will ask the peer review team to focus on the following areas:

**Operational Preparedness and Response:** Particularly focusing on the internal and external impact of potential station closures and the challenges associated with such closures. This will include consideration of the appropriate levels of consultation and staff and community impact and impact on operational planning and training.

**Support Services Review:** Particularly focusing on whether MFRA's approach is appropriate to meet the future needs of the organisation; are we transforming the Service in response to the cuts or simply cutting staff. i.e. Does the review consider the right areas and are we going about it in the right way?

**Prevention and Protection:** Will our plans for Prevention and Protection result in a workforce that is adapted to deliver what we are required to do and/or what our communities will need in the future?

And, In relation to all the above and MFRA's future capacity to deliver services to its communities:

**ICT systems:** Will MFRA's current ICT systems and/or future planned ICT development enable a reduced number of MFRA staff to work smarter through streamlining and integration to assist the remaining staff to deliver the best services they can? This will include evaluation of the best organisational structural and/or contractual approach to manage and support these systems.

9. The self assessment will be presented to Members for approval at the Community Safety and Protection Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October and the peer challenge visit will take place from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012. The visit will be similar to the one that took place in 2010 with a group of five or six peers interviewing staff, Members, and partners, holding focus groups and visiting fire stations and other MFRA locations, to challenge the findings of the self assessment. The Peer Challenge Team will be led by Jon Hall, Chief Fire Officer of Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service who will be accompanied by an LGA peer, at least two senior FRA officers and an elected member. The final one or two peers could be drawn from the FRA, the public, private or voluntary sectors and will be selected based on their experience in the areas MFRA wishes the Peer challenge team to focus on.
10. The Peer Challenge is not an inspection nor does it award any form of rating category or score. It is undertaken from the viewpoint of a critical friend. The peer challenge will help FRAs/ FRSs to meet the challenges facing a modern FRS. The Peer Challenge will end with a presentation to senior officers and Members and be completed with a final report outlining good practice and areas for improvement

#### Equality & Diversity Implications

11. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

#### Staff Implications

12. There are no staff implications arising from this report

#### Legal Implications

13. This assessment will ensure continuing scrutiny as required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England July 2012.

#### Financial Implications & Value for Money

14. The previous Operational Assessment cost the Authority in the region of £12,000. The current Peer Challenge is centrally funded and there will be no cost to the Authority.

#### Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

15. The Operational Assessment process will assist the Authority identify risks and weaknesses and the Peer Challenge will provide suggestions for dealing with those risks and weaknesses.

#### Contribution to **\*\*Our Mission – Safer Stronger Communities - Safe Effective Firefighters**

16. Self knowledge and peer assessment are useful methods of organisational improvement particularly during times of organisational challenge and change. The Operational Assessment will assist MFRA deal with the implications of the expected budget cuts.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Operational Assessment toolkit 2012