

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY	
date	14 JANUARY 2005	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT – RESULTS OF PEER CHALLENGE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present to Members the outcomes of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Peer Challenge.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Fire & Rescue Services National Framework 2004-2005 lays down the principles for Performance Management for Fire & Rescue Services nationally. Core to this process is the replacement of the inspection regime of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate to a process of CPA undertaken by the Audit Commission.

2.2 Members will be aware that CPA has been in place for Local and District Councils since 2001. The process for Fire & Rescue Services will be similar with Services being given a performance rating.

3. REPORT

3.1 Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service underwent a pilot Comprehensive Performance Assessment in Spring 2004. This was part of a two phased process undertaken by the Audit Commission to determine the process for Fire CPA's National roll out in 2005.

3.2 Although the pilot CPA was extremely beneficial, the development of the CPA framework was such that early lessons learnt were subject to a change by the Audit Commission.

3.3 Following a second round of pilot assessments in Autumn 2004 (Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service were reviewed during Spring 2004), the Audit Commission finalised the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's) that they would be using for the Fire CPA process.

3.4 To help Fire & Rescue Services prepare for CPA, the Audit Commission made finances available for the opportunity of a Peer Review. Three organisations were made available by the Audit Commission to undertake this process. These were:-

- West Midlands LGA
- Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA)
- Solace Enterprises

3.5 Although Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service had been part of the CPA pilot phase, the Strategic Management Team felt that there were additional benefits to be gained from a peer review. Not least was the aspect that fire CPA had evolved. Following an assessment of the providers Solace Enterprises were engaged to carry out the process.

3.6 The objectives of the Peer Challenge were to:-

- Provide the Authority with a dry run for the "real" CPA.
- Gain a sense of the Authority's culture in relation to self-awareness and the desire to improve service quality and performance.
- Clarify any unclear aspects of the self-assessment and identify evidence that may not have been cited in the Authority's document.
- Confirm the validity and accuracy of the Authority's self-assessment document.

3.7 The Peer Review Team were on-site early in November 2004 and their Peer Challenge Report, attached for Members' information (Appendix A), was presented on 23 December 2004. Outcomes of the review for action will be considered and introduced into the CPA process.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the Peer Challenge was £6,250.00. The total amount was covered by a grant from the Audit Commission for this purpose.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct personnel implications arising from this report.

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Comprehensive Performance Assessment is the measure of performance and achievement that is to be used to assess Fire & Rescue Authorities. Failure to obtain an acceptable CPA result could result in:-

- An improvement team being allocated to the Authority.
- The restriction of any freedoms and flexibilities available to better performing Fire & Rescue Authorities.
- Intervention by the Secretary of State in the running of the Fire & Rescue Authority.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

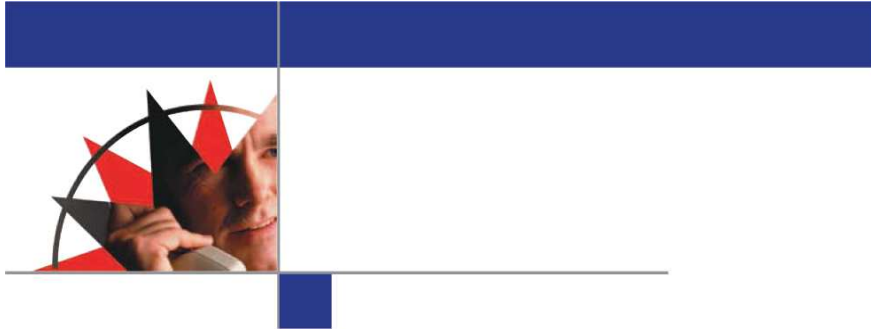
8.1 That Members note the contents of the Peer Challenge Report dated December 2004.

8.2 That Members continue to support all of the Fire & Rescue Authority initiatives associated with the CPA process due 25 February 2005.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

None.

Paul Woods
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER



Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority

Peer Challenge Report

December 2004

Introduction

1. This report sets the results of your recent Peer Challenge. Your team members were John Tench (Peer Facilitator), Peter Smith (Leader, Wigan MBC) and Michael Price (Treasurer, Humberside Fire Authority). We would like to thank everyone who helped our review.
2. Our review focused on the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) published by the Audit Commission for its forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) of fire authorities. Our objectives were to:
 - provide the Authority with **'a dry run'** for the Audit Commission's own assessment
 - gain a sense of the Authority's culture in relation to **self awareness** and the desire to improve service quality and performance
 - clarify any **unclear aspects** of the self-assessment and identify evidence that may not have been cited in the authority's document
 - confirm the **validity and accuracy** of the Authority's self-assessment document.

Overview and summary recommendations

3. Our headlines are that:
 - You have clearly benefited from being an CPA pilot site, but you still need to 'raise your game' to prepare for the proper CPA inspection;
 - in particular, members and senior officers now need to get more involved in challenging and owning the self-assessment document;
 - you have considerable strengths, particularly in respect of your 'whats'; that is, your external vision, balanced strategy and ideas;
4. But given the scale of the agenda you face, your capacity is thinly stretched at present. You need to focus on your real priorities, develop and build your top team and involve and support your middle managers.



5. We also recommend that you increase your focus on your people still further. You need to keep communicating the bigger picture and openly tackle the current culture of mistrust with the staff themselves.
6. We understand that using such a phrase as 'culture of mistrust' is strong stuff in a report such as this. Nevertheless, on the basis of our discussions with members, officers and staff, we believe that such a culture exists at present. Many staff have over-personalised the change agenda, blaming local managers – and the chief fire officer in particular - for wider changes in society and central government policies. On the other hand, local managers now need to be more confident about engaging staff in decision making and managing change.
7. For example, the draft IRMP 2 proposes a review of rescue tenders. Having spoken to people at all levels, it is our view that there is no hidden agenda here. This is precisely the sort of challenge that both the public and central government would expect of any public service, not just fire services. But the draft IRMP 2 does not put the review in context. It does not explain the rationale for the review, or outline the process and principles by which the review will be conducted (including staff involvement and transparency). There is a communication gap here and the negative staff reaction is entirely understandable.
8. The authority's staff have tremendous potential that can be realised to deliver the new agenda. But all staff need to be able to see the bigger picture, and local managers need to engage them confidently.

A Dry Run for the Audit Commission Assessment

9. The authority was a pilot for the Audit Commission's early attempts to develop the CPA methodology for the fire service. A confidential report was received late last year. We used your earlier self-assessment document, and the Audit Commission's report, as the basis for our visit.
10. But the Audit Commission's final version of the CPA KLOEs has changed considerably since that early pilot visit. Your self-assessment will need to be revised considerably in time for the CPA inspection proper, with more involvement and challenge from members and senior officers.
11. Our experience on site was largely positive. Our advance requirements were handled efficiently and we were treated well on arrival. Our requests for further information, interviews and coffee were always dealt with courteously and quickly. But our office arrangements – including a



move on the last day - were not of the standard that the Audit Commission would expect.

12. We also found that not everyone took the opportunity to get the authority's key messages across to us. Many people seemed happy just to react to our questions rather than make your own points. More preparation is needed at all levels before the Audit Commission's visit.

Self awareness

13. We were surprised that you had decided not to update the self assessment in advance of our visit. This made it difficult for us to assess, and then help you improve, your levels of self awareness. We do, however, recognise that much of our initial feedback presentation was unsurprising to you. This shows encouraging levels of self awareness, although perhaps more confidence is needed in addressing our concerns about how you bring your people with you.
14. In addition, the self-assessment you send to the Audit Commission must be the authority's own document. You now need to increase member and senior officer involvement in the remaining time available, and plan for member 'sign off'.

Unclear aspects of the self assessment

15. There were inevitably some gaps in the information made available to us, most of which were already known to you. Once collated, this information will need signposting and cross-referencing to enable the CPA inspectors to find it quickly and easily. This is particularly true of your data concerning your 'achievements', where we had to work particularly hard to collate and review the available evidence.
16. In addition, we found that your overview and narrative are not yet sufficiently developed, whether in the self-assessment document, your opening meeting or in the various one-to-one interviews. It is important that you tell your story. In particular, you need to clarify the 'internal aspects of your vision' for the way the organisation will look and feel in future, and how that will be experienced positively by your staff.

Our contribution to your improvement plan

17. We have appended our detailed findings for each KLOE. The peer challenge process is not intended to provide consultancy support to help you to draft your self assessment. But we can offer our contribution to your wider improvement plan.

18. Between now and the CPA inspection early in 2005, we recommend that you:

- Ensure CPA preparations meet Audit Commission expectations in terms of developing your self assessment, presenting information and preparing your people;
- Prepare a simple summary of what's happening, why it's happening, and how it's being managed;
- Integrate your priorities and budgets through this forthcoming budget round, and develop a 'critical path' of key changes.

19. During the next financial year, we recommend that you:

- Manage the organisation's response to change through a mix of listening, tone and challenge;
- Increase the visibility of local managers, involving them in decision making and supporting them to develop their skills;
- Rationalise and integrate your different planning processes for corporate, service, finance and risk plans.

20. Over the longer term, we recommend that you:

- Secure greater management stability, although we recognise this will be difficult and may require further innovation;
- Realise the potential of your staff, since they have considerable skills and commitment to contribute to the new agenda;



- Openly tackle the culture of mistrust with the staff themselves, and engage the challenges that face you as 'One Organisation'.



Appendix: Our Feedback On Individual KLOEs (Page 1 of 2)

Key line of enquiry	Strength	Areas for development?
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear external vision at the top of the organisation • Widespread commitment to core purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Narrative' not sufficiently clear (need to keep explaining what/why/how) • The internal vision is not clear or widely shared • Agendas require closer alignment to your overall priorities
Balanced strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced strategy • Innovative authority • Starting to shift resources into CFS activities • Commitment to external diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to streamline your priorities still further • Resources will then need greater alignment to your priorities
Governance/management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better governance than pilot CPA suggested • Recently revised Members handbook • IDB developing its approach and confidence • Structure aligned to political boundaries • Seriously engaging with local partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of member scrutiny and challenge • Development & embedding of policies • Discontinuity of senior management • Knock-on effect on line management readiness • 'Top team' teambuilding not underway yet
Capacity (Money)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledged to be a well financed authority • Starting to link finance to this year's IRMP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of corporate, finance & risk planning • 'Top team' needs greater role in managing finances • Budgetary devolvement

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- needs review
 - Capping!
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Appendix: Our Feedback On Individual KLOEs (Page 2 of 2)

Key line of enquiry	Strength	Areas for development?
Capacity (People)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good people in key support roles, particularly HR • Commitment to diversity agenda • Training (in some areas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and trust • Not supporting local managers & other key people • Corporate capacity (policy, programmes, advice)
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of Home Safety checks • Contribution to national Fire PM project • Risk management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Traffic lights' system may have been reduced too much • Unclear evidence of 'golden thread' • Insufficient challenge of performance by PMG
Achievement of objectives Achievement of improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress on most risk control priorities for 2002-03 • 9% reduction in primary fires last year • 20% fall in accidental dwelling fires in 5 years • 36% reduction in malicious calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14% rise in all fires (due to deliberate secondary fires) • Sickness absence levels • Mixed results from Best Value Reviews
Future improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National & regional engagement • Proposed review of rescue tenders (& other IRMP 2 initiatives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communications and staff engagement • Member communications & involvement



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- People want the service to succeed
 - Coherence & integration of all plans
 - Need to plan and manage the pace of change systematically
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