



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Community Safety Committee

PEER REVIEW OF THE OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF SERVICE DELIVERY

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 16 January 2009

Purpose of Report:

To update the Community Safety Committee of the Chief Fire Officer's decision to undertake a peer review for the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery.

CONTACT OFFICER

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) was introduced in 2006 with the intention of responding to criticism that Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA, 2005) had missed some key elements in the service delivery arena. Following its introduction, Nottinghamshire underwent its first assessment in 2006 and has recently had its progress measured during September 2008.
- 1.2 The key lines of enquiry (KLOE) used in the OASD are currently being reviewed, with an expected publication date for consultation towards the end of November. One of the main reasons for reviewing the KLOE in this case has been to respond to criticism that there are some areas of duplication with other parts of the external review process used by the Audit Commission.
- 1.3 In other future developments it is expected that the Audit Commission will now look for fire and rescue services to demonstrate that they are self aware and will be encouraging methods such as peer review and self assessment. Obviously the Audit Commission will look for the robustness and quality of any process and this will undoubtedly be part of future debates regarding external assessment.
- 1.4 Up to now peer reviews have been undertaken by some fire and rescue services using external providers or facilitated arrangements with other Services. In the initial stages of CPA peer reviews were offered with funding support and Nottinghamshire took advantage of this in an arrangement with SOLACE.
- 1.5 The Chief Fire Officer has approved that a peer review is undertaken in January 2009 using Excellence in Business as the external provider.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Predominately peer reviews are undertaken on the run up to a formal external assessment. As a consequence a flurry of activity takes place usually including the production of a self assessment just before the Audit Commission visits. The idea is that any Service that goes through this process of raising its awareness will then undertake improvement work where necessary.
- 2.2 At each iteration of external assessment it has become the norm to say that the assessment bar is being raised and this iteration is no exception. Nottinghamshire achieved a good score last time for OASD and therefore there is a risk of slippage even if the Service keeps the same standard of delivery. Along with this the changes made to strengthen the approach in this area are in their infancy and would therefore clearly benefit from an external review.

- 2.3 Ideally self awareness should be an integral part of the business process for any organisation and not be as a consequence of external scrutiny. The Service will use Excellence in Business to assist in the first stage peer review.
- 2.4 Excellence in Business were one of the three providers accredited by the Audit Commission to provide peer challenge at the outset of CPA 2005 and have continued to undertake work with a range of different fire and rescue services. More recently this has included work on behalf of the South East Improvement Partnership and they have reviewed Suffolk and Cornwall fire and rescue services.
- 2.5 In the attached proposal (Appendix B) Excellence in Business have provided the following on request:
- Background and requirements;
 - Their approach to peer challenge;
 - Experience in peer reviews;
 - The model used and timelines;
 - A breakdown of the fees;
 - Conclusion.
- 2.6 Although the KLOE for OASD will be referred to, the review will take a rounded approach whilst assessing the Service's position. As a result it is expected that the Service will benefit by:
- A measure of the strategic fit for forthcoming business plans;
 - A way of demonstrating that the Service is self aware and willing to undertake external scrutiny (current KLOE);
 - An external assessment report detailing the strengths and areas for development;
 - A product of open challenge for self awareness to inform future thinking on how to maintain such awareness;
 - Confirmation progress and success to date.
- 2.7 At its meeting of 5 December 2008, the Performance Monitoring Committee endorsed the Chief Fire Officer's decision that a peer review of the Service will take place in January 2009 by Excellence in Business. It was further agreed that the outcomes of the review and any actions arising from it be submitted to the Performance Monitoring Committee to ensure ongoing performance improvement.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 A full breakdown of cost is provided for the Committee's information in the attached proposal. Taking into consideration the expenses for the team, £12,500 - £13,500 would therefore be a reasonable estimate for the full amount.

- 3.2 The Service might be able to secure funding support for this work from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP). Even though the financial implications can be covered by the Service an application to the RIEP will demonstrate the Service's commitment to improvement with regional partners.
- 3.3 There is no requirement in this case to tender for the work, but the fact that a similar approach has been undertaken in the South East provides a basis for a decision to follow the same method.
- 3.4 For the cost described in 3.1 above, a budget is available for Operational Assurance.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

A peer review of operational assessment of service delivery will contribute to how the Service develops its operational staff to comply with its operational procedures. It may also help to inform deployment of personnel and role descriptions within the organisation.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An initial equality impact has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix A.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications under the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) or the subsequent Crime and Disorder Regulations (Statutory Instrument 1831/2007).

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

If any future external assessment identifies a lack of self-awareness the organisation will be criticised. It is currently being proposed that if quality arrangements are in place for self-awareness and assessment this should lead to more of an arms length review by the Audit Commission in the future. Poor performance in future external assessments can trigger formal improvement support, including full Service inspection and referral to the Secretary of State for direct intervention.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<i>Section</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Date of Assessment</i>	<i>New or Existing</i>
Resilience	Martin Smart	November 2008	New
Name of Report Peer Review Proposal (Operational Assessment of Service Delivery)			
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the report.	To seek endorsement by the Performance Monitoring Committee of the Chief Fire Officer's decision to undertake a peer review for the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery		
2. Who is intended to benefit from this report and what are the outcomes?	If the Service decides to undertake a peer review it will be able to use the information for future plans. It will also be able to demonstrate its self awareness credentials during future external audits.		
3. Who are the main stakeholders in relation to the report?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members • Senior Management Team • PaCT and other internal stakeholders depending on the communication of the results. • 		
4. Who implements and who is responsible for the report?	ACFO Andrew Beale		

5. Please identify the differential impact in the terms of the six strands below. Please tick yes if you have identified any differential impacts. Please state evidence of negative or positive impacts below.

<i>STRAND</i>	Y	N	<i>NEGATIVE IMPACT</i>	<i>POSITIVE IMPACT</i>
Race		x		
Gender		x		
Disability		x		
Religion or Belief		x		
Sexuality		x		
Age		x		

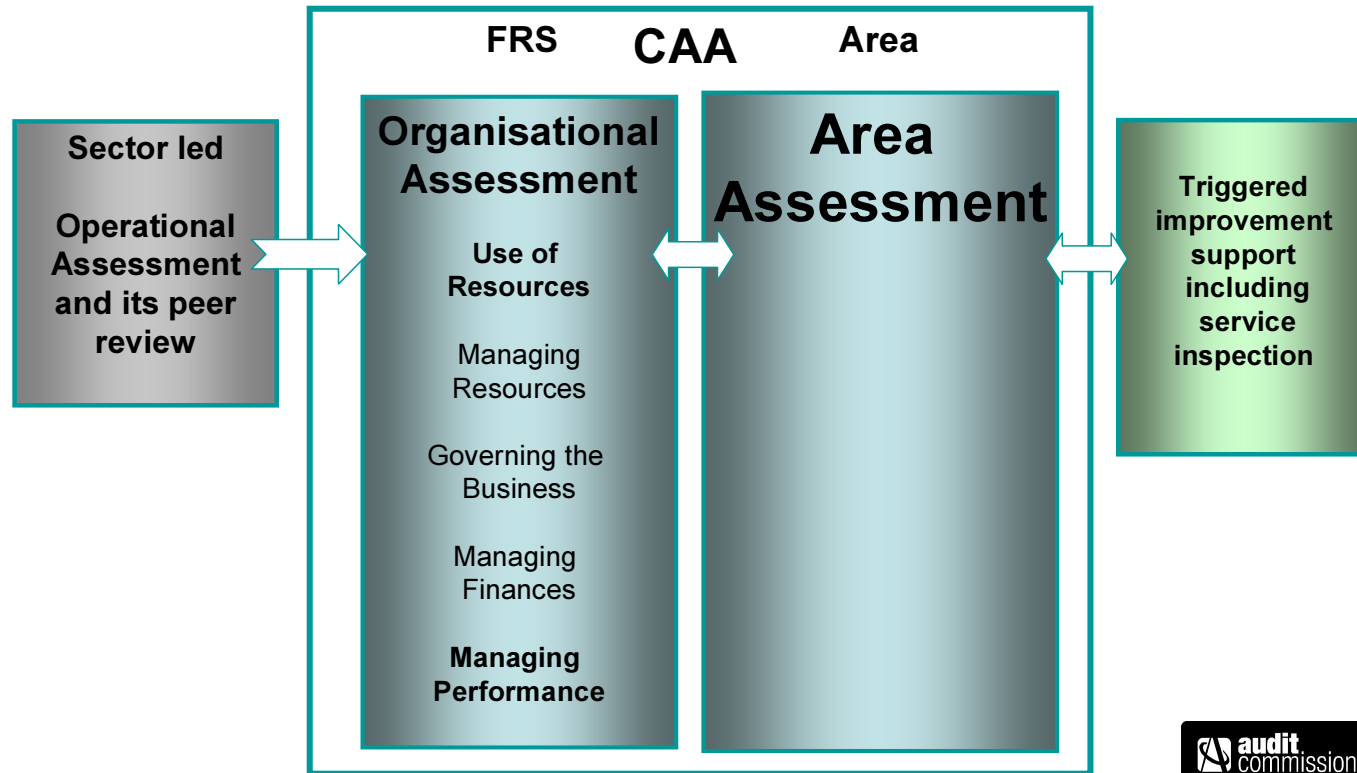
6. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group?	Y	N	7. Should the policy/service proceed to a full impact assessment?	Y	N
					x

I am satisfied that this policy has been successfully impact assessed. I understand the impact assessment of this policy is a statutory obligation and that, as owners of this policy, we take responsibility for the completion and quality of this process.

Signed (completing person)...Andrew Beale

Date ... November 2008

Model for Fire Assessment





24th October 2008

M Smart Esq
Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service
Headquarters
Bestwood Lodge
Arnold
Nottingham
NG5 8PD

Dear Martin

PEER REVIEW PROPOSAL

Thank you for asking Excellence in Business to outline how we could assist Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue in conducting a review against the OASD Framework. Excellence in Business has a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Fire Authorities across the Country, the Audit Commission and CLG and we are delighted at the opportunity to work together with yourself to develop capacity and improve performance of your service.

Over the last 10 years Excellence in Business has been at the forefront of using internal and external challenge to drive improvement as well as help prepare for inspection, assessment and scrutiny across both the public and private sectors. We have developed a robust approach built upon the need to ensure that any review activity is properly integrated into normal operations and not simply seen as a necessary hoop to jump through in the lead up to any form of inspection.

Whilst not unique we would ask you to consider the issue of integration and the fact that we strive to align our Peer Review support with our clients' own business and improvement planning activity in order that the outcome of such activity is used to drive these processes. The resultant outcome is greater ownership, improved communication, real added value and the opportunity to demonstrate how the process itself has led to improved self-awareness and demonstrate real capacity to improve.

BACKGROUND AND YOUR REQUIREMENTS

There is a continuing trend across the sector to conduct more focused comprehensive qualitative and cultural assessments as part of the ongoing capacity building agenda. This represents a clear response to the perceived weaknesses of traditional 'preparation for inspection' model where the sponsor, paymaster or policy maker set the agenda and where the published key lines of enquiry provided the basis of challenge. This at times led to no more than a list of 'haves and have not's' as opposed to a more qualitative based judgment which drives future improvement. This approach has led to more adversarial than partnership based assessments.

Increasingly, both central and local government are utilising a more inclusive approach to assessing Corporate Capacity, Quality of Service and Value for money. As a result, the key challenges for the future are to:

- Clearly demonstrate how you and your partners/sub-contractors will seek to address what matters most to local people – demonstrate your understanding of community impact;
- Prepare your managers and people for the type of issues, questions and processes which potential 'scrutineers' will want to pursue as part of the assessment/inspection process;
- Use the opportunity to significantly reduce the amount of preparation required for the likes of future 'reality checks' and other external scrutiny of the authority.

In addition to the respective key lines of enquiry it will be important to challenge:

- The alignment of your vision and priorities with those of your key stakeholders;
- The effectiveness of leadership across the organisations and influence on regional/local operations;
- The focus on management development and capacity building of people and teams;
- The ability to demonstrate:
 - A clear commitment to the needs of the service users/public;
 - You have the capacity to improve;
 - The understanding of the public's broader needs;
 - The understanding of the wider public sector environment and partnerships that exist;
- The ability to introduce improved continuous improvement arrangements at a local level. In particular, the framework/systems which enables you to identify and share good practice across the region;

It is clear that as the process of inspection, scrutiny and challenge evolves into the new CAA arena there will be a need to ensure Authorities continue to be able to demonstrate clear self-awareness and that they have real capacity to improve further.

Many organisations in the last 10 years have used some form of peer challenge as part of their preparation for inspection. To be truly successful however there is a need for Peer Review to:

- Be properly integrated into the 'normal planning and improvement cycle' to ensure that the outcome drives future improvement;
- Develop reports and self-assessment documentation which can be used to communicate what works well where and why across the organisation to staff and stakeholders driving improved understanding and confidence in the Authorities approaches;
- Inform future business and service planning at all levels; and,
- Enable us to prepare for future challenge and demonstrate capacity to improve.

In our experience over the last 10 years too many of our clients have been driven by the external drivers and have failed to realise the benefits of the activity and gain true value beyond a satisfactory rating or judgement being made!

On this basis it will be important that future Peer Review activity is planned, managed and delivered in a structured and systematic way to ensure full integration into normal operations. We believe it will be critical to:

- Ensure the Review team are well prepared, briefed and supported through the process to ensure they are able to add as much value as possible to the recipient of the Peer review;
- Maintain a regular dialogue throughout the process to ensure that the emerging issues are identified 'in process' and that all appropriate evidence is subject to challenge;
- Report on the findings accurately and be prepared to contribute to the improvement part of the process leading to recommendations on how the issues identified could be addressed;
- Develop robust findings that clearly identify 'what works well where and why' in order that good practice is recognised and to inform future process benchmarking; and,
- Remain focused on the needs and expectations of the people that deliver and receive your respective services in order that the process and related outcomes enable positive change and improvement in relation to the things you do for your people and the services that you provide.

With these points in mind, I have outlined below how Excellence in Business could work with you and your team.

OUR APPROACH TO PEER CHALLENGE

The success of this type of support is dependent on a number of key factors. These include:

- Strong senior management commitment to both the concept of Peer Review and to each distinct Challenge exercise;
- Effective contract management (at a framework level) with a clear sponsor and individual accountability relative to each aspect of our support;

- The opportunity to regularly monitor and review progress and take the necessary action to assure the ongoing success of our support.

We recognise the importance of a development/capacity building initiative like this being able to demonstrate its real impact on organisational performance. On this basis, we would aim to work with your project manager at the start of the contract to identify an appropriate set of performance indicators that can be used to assess progress and to measure the overall impact of our Peer Review Support.

Our approach is designed to encourage Authorities to identify and challenge their strengths and areas for improvement and the opportunities and barriers to delivering improvements. Peer Challenge in this context is about trying to raise awareness and understanding, offering the insight, encouragement and support necessary to develop true capacity to improve. The aim is for Authorities to use this external challenge to produce a stronger, more forward looking self-assessment that they can own which truly drives business and service planning at all levels of the organisation.

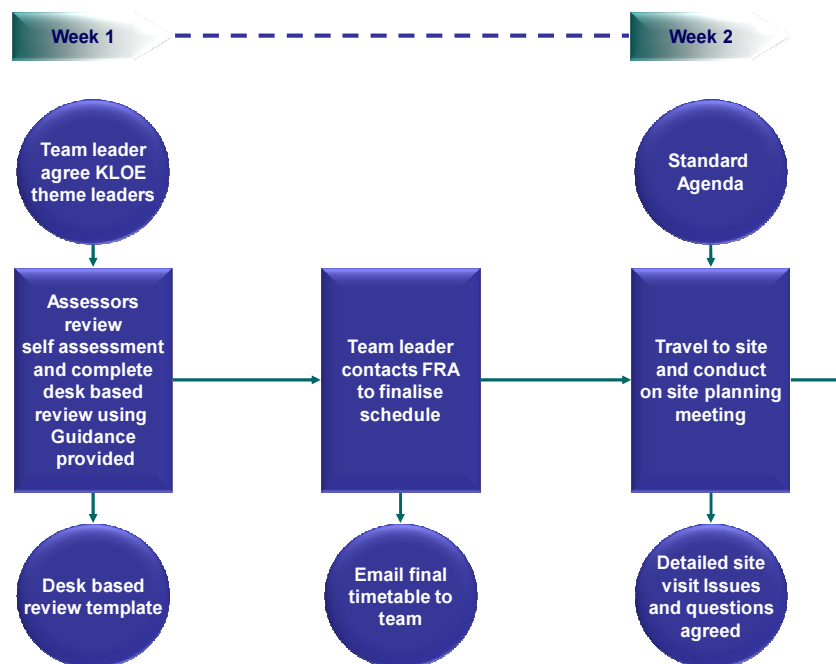
PEER REVIEWS UNDERTAKEN

Over the last 10 years we have undertaken a wide range of Peer Reviews and trained all Peer Review Team Members who have participated in a review. We were instrumental in the development of the Peer Review Model adopted by the Audit Commission for CPA and we are the only private sector organisation accredited by them (alongside two other organisations) to provide these services in the public sector. We have successfully completed in excess of 125 reviews across a full range of disciplines and proud that our methodology originally developed with the West Midlands Region has been successfully adopted by other providers and practitioners. An example of this is the recent adoption of our Corporate People Management Peer Review Framework by the IDeA which we agreed to allow them to deliver in partnership with us since October 2006.

During the first round of CPA we provided support to 15 FRAs 12 of which achieved a 'Good' rating and 2 achieved 'Excellent' status. This success led to our continued support to the Service through both the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery, Use of Resources and Direction of Travel Assessments.

EIB PEER REVIEW MODEL AND TIMELINE

Whilst the actual approach taken varies according to the type, size, nature and complexity of each organisation and the type of review required I have outlined below the typical stages we follow, our approach to each stage and associated timescales.



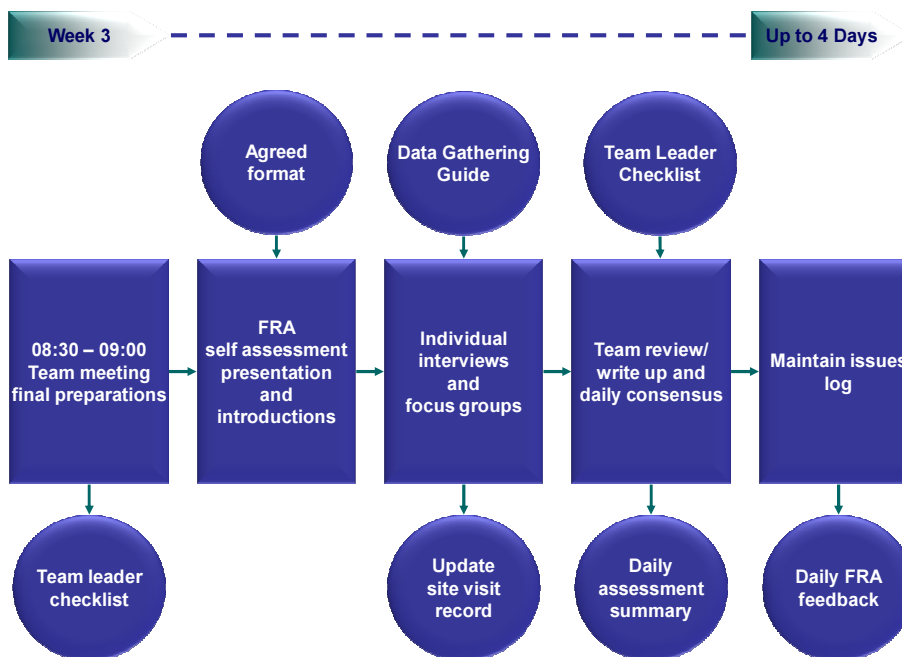
Assessment Planning – Conducted 3 weeks prior to the assessment:

The ‘assessment’ team would be led by one of our Peer Review Managers/senior assessors, each of whom have conducted a minimum of 10 similar assessments over the last 3 years.

The first stage of the process is usually based on individual planning meetings for each assessment – 1 day per assessment. During this session, facilitated by our Review Manager, we would pair assessors to take a lead on identified themes/Key lines of enquiry areas during their respective assessment and assist each team in:

- Developing the issues to explore at each site, centre or location;
- Identifying the key people that they would want to interview;
- Listing the main documents and evidence that they would want to be made available during the site-visit;
- Establishing a set of objectives for each assessment;

To ensure that the assessment is well planned and managed within, we would recommend you appoint co-ordinator who could take the draft list of interviewees, evidence etc and ensure that all the logistical arrangements are sorted at a local level. In addition, if possible, we would want the co-ordinators to give a short 10 min presentation on the Organisation during the planning meeting to set the context and assist the peer team in ensuring that their plans are bespoke to the needs of Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue.



Site Visit – 3 days:

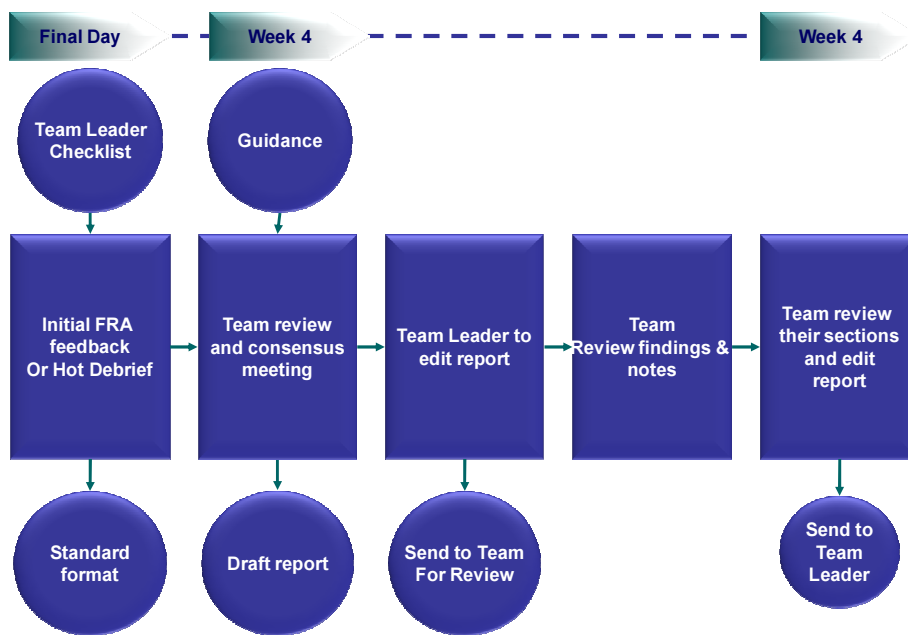
Having planned the assessment, we would facilitate the onsite review of the Authority over a three day period using the 'current' OASD Key Lines of Enquiry.

The assessment would involve:

- Individual interviews with selected officers, staff, partners and stakeholders;
- Holding a number of focus groups of staff, managers, partners and stakeholders from across the organisation;
- Collecting necessary evidence and documentation to inform the team’s assessment against the key lines of enquiry.

During the assessment our Review Manager will not only have their own portfolio of interviews, but also sit in with each of the paired assessors to ensure consistency and provide feedback to support the development of future capacity and skills within the ‘assessor bank’.

We would also provide each assessor with an assessor aide memoire containing a ‘site-visit’ assessment record, interview template and guidance, the key lines of enquiry and any other tools that will assist the process (examples provided). At the end of the assessment the Team Leader will provide an initial ‘Hot Debrief’ outlining the key emerging themes and observations from the site visit activity to your FRA’s senior team.

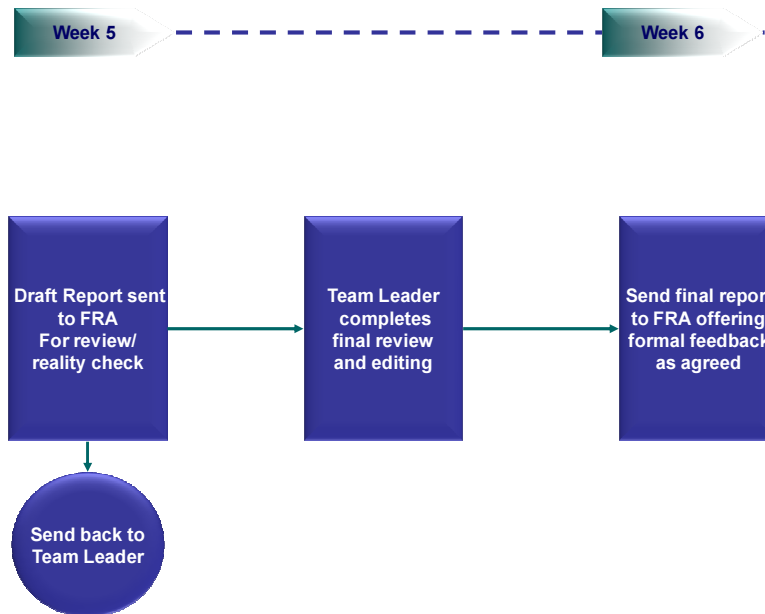


Consensus Meeting – To be completed within 1 week of the assessment:

We will facilitate individual consensus meetings with the Authority. At this meeting the team will:

- Review all of their findings and ensure consensus on each of the Assessment themes/key lines of enquiry;
- Ensure that recurring themes and general observations are recorded and added to the report;
- Identify and resolve any areas of concern or lack of clarity;
- Develop the final report detailing; findings, conclusions and recommendations on how to strengthen each Authority’s self-assessment submission;
- Ensure that the full and objective report accurately reflects the findings of the Site Visit.

The final report would include a summary of the process, key themes and a summary of the key strengths and areas for improvement identified under agreed common reporting criteria.



Reporting & Feedback – To be completed within 1 week of the consensus meeting:

Each of the pairings would take a lead for their themes and develop the respective sections of the draft report before the consensus meeting.

Upon completion of the review, we would prepare and present the report and findings to the senior management team and agree:

- The main improvement priorities and how these can be aligned with the Authority’s own planning schedule;
- The key actions necessary to improve the self-assessment submission and how to take these forward;
- How to prepare for the forthcoming external assessment/challenge they are to be subjected to.

CONSULTANCY TEAM & FEES

Martin, I outlined in broad terms the approach described above when we met earlier this week and I can confirm the project will be led by myself to be completed by the end of December this year. I anticipate the following number of days:

- Planning and set-up meeting – ½ Day;
- Pre-assessment team briefing and planning – 1 Day;
- FRA Briefing and planning (included in the above planning day);
- Site visit preparation reading source documentation and initial evidence review IRMP, Improvement Plans, key service orders etc. – 1 Day;
- Site Visit – 4 Days to include day 4 review and hot debrief – 4 Days;

- Team consensus meeting – 1 Day;
- Reporting – 3 days;
- Formal Feedback to the SMT and FRA – 1 Day;
- Improvement planning meeting – ½ Day.

This represents 12 days of time. My current daily fee rate is £995 per day excluding VAT and expenses. However, based on our previous relationship and our commitment to Fire & Rescue Service improvement I am able to provide this support at a discounted fee rate of £895 per day excluding VAT and expenses which are recharged at cost.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we are delighted to work with Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue to deliver this programme, and look forward to the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues over the next few months. If you would like to discuss my proposals in more detail please feel free to call me as appropriate.

I look forward to hearing from you, kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Chris Geyton
Partner