



**CFOA**  
Chief Fire Officers  
Association



# **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge Report**

**March 2013**

## **Report Contents**

|           |                         |          |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------|
| <b>1.</b> | Executive summary       | <b>2</b> |
| <b>2.</b> | Introduction            | <b>4</b> |
| <b>3.</b> | The peer challenge team | <b>5</b> |

## **Areas of Focus**

|            |                                    |           |
|------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>4.</b>  | Leadership and Corporate Capacity  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>5.</b>  | Community Risk Management          | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>6.</b>  | Prevention & Protection            | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>7.</b>  | Response                           | <b>11</b> |
| <b>8.</b>  | Health & Safety                    | <b>12</b> |
| <b>9.</b>  | Training & Development             | <b>13</b> |
| <b>10.</b> | Call Management                    | <b>14</b> |
| <b>11.</b> | Strategic Risk                     | <b>15</b> |
| <b>12.</b> | Conclusion and contact information | <b>15</b> |

## **1. Executive Summary**

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service provide a high quality service to local citizens and businesses and maintains a focus on safe communities and safe people.

Overall, in the areas the peer team examined, performance was found to be good. It is clear that the Service has made a particular focus and investment in ensuring that the organisation is fit for purpose underpinned by a clear vision which is understood and supported by staff.

There is strong political leadership and vision from the Humberside Fire Authority. Members are fully aware of the Service's key priorities and service issues and are self-assured in discussing these, they have great faith and trust in the information that officers give them.

The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) maintains a confident and visible presence throughout the Service. His leadership is based upon strong relationships with staff and stakeholders. He is regarded as approachable and fair having the best interests of the Service at heart.

The Medium Term Financial Plan and savings achieved to date provide an effective platform for planning to meet the future financial challenges. The Service has considered radical service delivery options including an enterprising approach to income generation through its recently formed Community Interest Company, HFRS Solutions, which is focused on growing and safeguarding future service provisions.

There is no doubt that, for the foreseeable future, increasing downward pressures on budgets will require cohesive strategic support from elected members. Currently the Service is well resourced. In light of the likely future financial reductions, the Fire Authority, working closely with their CFO, will need to ensure the complex decisions that lie ahead recognise the changes to the Service's capacity and its impact on delivery of its current activities. In order to make informed decisions the Service would benefit from fully evaluating its activities to ensure a sustainable approach to delivering services in the future.

There is an opportunity for the Service to further develop its approach to transformational change. A particular emphasis on regular, timely and inclusive communication would greatly assist transformational change. The Service could also consider how it recognises individual and collective achievements and not only sustains but builds staff engagement during a period of increasing uncertainty.

In driving the transformational change the corporate team must be unified, consistent and exhibit a sustained pull in the same direction to maintain momentum and in doing so the deployment of change champions as catalysts to aid this process will undoubtedly ensure that all staff understand the direction the Service is travelling and in doing so embrace change.

A good understanding of risk management across the Service exists. The Risk Register and risk management framework are both thorough and well established and the way the Service researches and manages risk is both appropriate and proportionate. The Service may benefit from further consideration on how to demonstrate the understanding of mitigating actions on the corporate risks. For example, the cause and effect links between actions, outcomes and risks.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is creative and innovative. There are numerous examples of notable practice. Hazard House is an excellent example of a social enterprise partnership between the Service, Humberside Police and North Lincolnshire Homes. Hazards included in training are a range of local issues including hospital admissions, Adult and Children's Safeguarding, health and fuel poverty. The use of CCTV on fire appliances to aid learning and debriefs works well. The Organisational Intelligence Unit's role has been transformed, changing a culture and perception of being 'just a statistics provider' to a fully integrated and rigorous community risk data analysis function including the production and analysis of 'problem profiles' that takes a deep dive examination behind pure statistical data to establish casual factors. A new approach to the Fire Authority's governance role has been the introduction of the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee that has strengthened the assurance processes and strategic decision making support to the Authority.

The Service's engagement with the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Local Resilience Forum to help communities have greater self resilience in case of flooding is enabled through the 'Prepare' strategy - a facet of the Integrated Risk Management Plan. 'Vision 2020' takes a longer term perspective of how communities are developing and the necessary changes in how services will need to be delivered with special emphasis on demand reduction through prevention and protection before the need for response.

Overall Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is well-run and organised. It is founded on competent and enthusiastic staff and the Service enjoys a productive relationship with its elected members. It is self aware and its own assessment on its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities is sound. Moving forward these relationships will need to be strengthened against a backdrop of uncertainty to ensure that all partnerships, internal and external, are fully realised and enable the Service to progress in an effective and positive manner.

## 2. Introduction

This report captures the outcomes and presents the key findings from the Local Government Associations (LGAs) Fire Peer Challenge at Humberside Fire and Rescue Service in March 2013. Fire peer challenge is part of the new approach to sector led improvement. It is a key component of the LGAs 'Taking the Lead' offer ([www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)).

The Fire Peer Challenge took place from the 5-8 March 2013 and consisted of a range of on-site activities including interviews, focus groups and visits to four Fire and Rescue stations. In total the team met and spoke to over 140 members of HFRS staff and partners.

The peer team met with a broad cross-section of elected members, operational and non-operational staff and partner agencies. During the time in Humberside the peer team were very well looked after and everyone the team met was fully engaged with the process, open and honest.

The peer team also undertook background reading provided to them in advance, including Humberside's summary Operational Assessment (OpA) Self-Assessment and key supporting documentation. The peer challenge provides the opportunity to have a greater focus on key areas identified, to assist with their change programme, in discussion with the Service. The overall scope of the peer challenge was:

*Issues rated as Red Risks on our Strategic Risk and Opportunity Register will be the primary overarching focus for the review with particular focus on planning and implementation assumptions and arrangements for our Operational and Corporate Services Efficiency Programme. This should include the intrinsic enabling elements of Political and Corporate Leadership.*

*The review should also incorporate a lighter touch health check of other key service delivery areas.*

The evidence and feedback gathered was assimilated into the seven OpA themes and the additional areas of Leadership and Corporate Capacity and Strategic Risk which were identified by HFRS as further areas of focus. A discussion of the findings was delivered to the Chair of the FRA and the Services' senior officers in a feedback presentation held on Friday 8 March 2013.

This report provides detailed information on the key focus areas agreed with the Service, based around the seven key themes of the operational assessment toolkit areas:

- Community Risk Management
- Training & Development
- Health & Safety
- Response
- Protection

- Prevention
- Call management and incident support

The purpose of the peer challenge was to complement the Authority's Operational Assurance self-assessment by providing external challenge to help support improvement and to reflect how the Service is performing across the areas of focus.

Fire peer challenges are managed and delivered by the sector for the sector. 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.

### **3. The peer challenge team included:**

- Nigel Williams, Chief Fire Officer, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (lead peer)
- Councillor Sian Timoney, Luton Borough Council
- Dean Stevens, Director of Prevent and Protect, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Simon Allsop, Director of Finance and Treasurer, Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Barbara Owen, Brigade Manager People and Development, Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Jonna Stevens, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

## 4. Leadership & Corporate Capacity

### Strengths

- **Strong leadership and ambition at both political and officer level**
- **Clear and realistic long term vision**
- **Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee constitutes an innovative approach that has potential to strengthen the assurance to the Authority**
- **Commitment to success and a positive values culture**

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service provide a high quality service to local citizens and businesses and maintain a focus on safe communities and safe firefighter. It is generally seen as a good place to work and it is pragmatic with clear direction, business focussed, innovative and ambitious for the future.

There is strong and visible leadership from both the Chair and the CFO and the recently developed governance structure has been designed to integrate the Service across functions to drive change, eliminate silo working and provide assurance.

Member engagement is high and members are fully aware of the requirement for making further savings in the future and are prepared to discuss and consider wide ranging and difficult proposals. There has been a significant investment of time and effort from the senior management team and the Fire Authority to work together in building up Officer and Member knowledge. For Members this has especially focused on operational efficiency options to maximise the opportunity for informed decision making in relation to the capacity and capability of operational service delivery in light of the reduction in future funding.

There is also evidence that the Service is continuing to follow an investment in service development strategy in the future despite reducing budgets. For example, there is a corporate commitment to ensure that IT becomes an effective enabler by investment to replace the wide area network.

The constitution of the politically independent Governance, Audit and Scrutiny (GAS) committee is innovative and GAS members appear well informed and raise appropriate and challenging questions which support the function of scrutiny of HFRS. The planned, and timely, review of the effectiveness of GAS will determine whether the structure is adding sufficient value to the governance arrangements as it stands or whether there would be some value in widening their remit.

The Service, supported by the Authority, is at the vanguard of considering radical service delivery options such as commissioning and delivering services through the Community Interest Company (CIC) HFR Solutions. The contract to supply emergency service cover for Tata Steel is a good example of where the Service has moved quickly on an opportunity to secure a mutually advantageous position.

The Service has a mature outlook on the future and is self-aware and open to discuss issues of further improvement where needed. There are good relationships with the Representative Bodies who understand the challenges ahead.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Continue to manage the on-going risks around financial plans for future budget reductions**
- **Effective use of Area Managers**
- **Short term opportunities should be complementary to the long term vision**
- **In driving the transformational change the corporate team must be cohesive and consistent**

Moving forward the support between the CFO and elected members will require a constant focus to ensure that the more difficult decisions that will have to be made as a result of continuing downward pressures on budgets require more radical organisational change and transformation. It is therefore encouraging that members generally expressed a good understanding of the current and future financial situation and the impact this may have on some of the current commitments around for example response times.

There is evidences that some elected members attend quarterly Community Protection Unit performance meetings, however there are opportunities for officers and members as community representatives to engage more fully at this level. It should be recognised the vital role they can play in adding value to the intelligence led work locally carried out and as Service champions for prevention and protection.

The Service may wish to consider more fully evaluating its activities to ensure a sustainable approach to delivering services in the future and there is an opportunity to further consider business process re-engineering and maximising the opportunity to develop leaner systems prior to implementation of restructures and new systems. Furthermore functions could benefit from preparing themselves for the challenges going forward by developing a balanced portfolio of performance measures in particular for support functions.

Area Managers seek a greater involvement in shaping the strategic direction and consider themselves to be able to contribute to improving the effectiveness of the Service. Some consideration could be given to whether or not this resource is being maximised in respect of developing, owning, communicating and championing change.

A clear focus on the change management programme supported by a transformational plan to draw together the various streams of work to enable effective monitoring by the Chief Officer led Change Board is absolutely critical going forward. Furthermore to assist in this period of change the



Service may wish to consider prioritising soft skills such as communication to assist transformational change. In order to keep staff engaged some consideration on how to effectively communicate important messages from the leadership team, recognise achievements and sustain staff engagement during a period of increasing uncertainty would be extremely beneficial. The deployment of change agents may be one way to achieve this and to maintain the momentum and pace of change whilst ensuring an effective mechanism of communication between the Change Board and staff.

CMT visits to CPUs and stations are seen as valuable to staff and could further be seen as an opportunity to deliver a balanced message, capturing the positive work of the Service as well as discussing the challenges being faced more locally.

There was a perception by some of the staff interviewed that a uniformed and non-uniformed divide may be growing within the Service which is causing concern about fairness and equality of opportunity. The Service is aware of this and the CFO has made it a priority to understand and resolve these issues and ensure that moving forward this is neither the case nor the perception.

## **5. Community Risk Management**

### **Strengths**

- **Organisational Intelligence Unit**
- **Partnerships are delivering positive outcomes**

HFRS has a multi layered approach to data and information through using a number of integrated data analysis products, for example, MOSAIC, Geographic Information System (GIS) and Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) and Phoenix. The Organisational Intelligence Unit (OIU) has a clear understanding of how to use this information effectively. The OIU has moved from being a transactional resource that supplies statistics to a transformational force that has a full understanding of its links to making communities safer. The Unit is valued as an important and growing area of the service which has been recognised and supported by additional capacity.

Management and Resource Intelligence Optimiser (MARIO) is being well used and the value and opportunities to apply it in future decision making is being embraced by the wider Service.

HFRS is an active member of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and uses the community risk register to proactively reduce community risk. A strong example of this is in regard to flooding and the development of “Prepare” as an overt addition to the traditional Fire and Rescue Service strapline of Prevent, Protect and Respond in relation to community resilience. Furthermore, with “Recover” naturally following any such incidents in helping the community to return to normality within a reasonable timescale: thus Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Respond and Recover.

Community partners recognise HFRS as a strong, effective and decisive partner and are highly complimentary of action showed in addressing community risks for example flooding and there has been a significant increase in capacity (500 trained flood response volunteer staff after the floods of 2007 which is notable). HFRS also recognises the need and value of being involved with partners in issues that go beyond fire, for example, adult safeguarding and community safety partnerships. The recently developed Community Safety and Inclusion Strategy is a good example and provides a detailed focus on targeting resources to identify and support those who are vulnerable to risk.

This mature approach to partnership is a real strength and will ensure that the community continues to receive the maximum benefit from their Fire and Rescue Service in a wider sense in delivering safer communities.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Capacity of the Organisational Intelligence Unit**
- **Data protection**

Although there has been a significant investment in capacity in the OIU the Service may wish to consider whether this is sufficient. The demand from other parts of the organisation as systems are developed and analysis becomes more detailed is likely to increase and the potential impact of this on the OIU and other parts of the Service will need to be assessed and appropriate options developed as necessary. Some investment in training other parts of the Service and at CPU level in how to effectively interrogate the data provided in a meaningful way may provide a way to reduce demand on the unit which otherwise could become overwhelmed by its own success.

The Information Sharing Protocol with the Humberside Police is now signed and in place which is a positive step forward. Data sharing arrangements remains an area for further development and compliance with data protection requirements a concern. The increase in capacity of IT and the planned upgrade of the wide area network may support this important area.

## **6. Prevent & Protect**

### **Strengths**

- **Enthusiastic committed and passionate staff**
- **Effective partnership working**
- **Good use of risk data analysis**
- **Re-integration of technical fire safety and operational staff skills**
- **Clear recognition of the value of Protection at CMT level**

The Service has made excellent use of its performance and risk data analysis when, for example, developing the previous IRMP and there is a successful

programme of domestic sprinkler installation based on risk profiling and information from partners to target specific vulnerable people. Greater use of risk data analysis could greatly enhance the support to other departmental business planning processes, particularly those related to prevention activities.

There are excellent partnership links at CPU level with local strategic partnerships, Adults & Children's Safeguarding and the emerging Health & Wellbeing Boards to ensure that partnership priorities are identified, prioritised and actioned. The Community Safety Managers at CPU level and centrally provide a strong direction and recognise the value of local and national relationships and know what they are doing fits in with the Service strategy. Community Safety Advocates also have strong partnership links and have, in two way exchanges, provided and received training from partners such as the Police, NHS and the Alzheimer's Society to forge a joined up response to prevention and deal with concerns about vulnerable people in a timely manner that is most likely to have a safe outcome for individuals.

HFRS has made positive steps towards investing in modern technology and there is a good use of information technology and social media, for example, use of Twitter and Facebook for Community Fire Safety messages. A new website will be launched shortly which will enable postcode entry to find local station news. This approach is aimed at making the Service more 'locally' accessible and allowing it to communicate with a wider section of the community than previously.

There has been a clearly communicated recognition of the value of Protection at CMT level. This is leading to greater confidence in protection teams which is resulting in clearer plans for the future at strategic and tactical levels.

A clear and intelligent risk based inspection programme which is well understood and based on type and number of premises and inspection timescales exists as does a well-developed system of measures and performance management to evaluate the effectiveness of protection work. There appears to be good links between the OIU and the central/CPU teams which enables this to be achieved.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Maintaining a focus on Prevention & Protection**
- **Increasing the visibility of enforcement activity**

Currently there is a perception amongst some staff that response is the Service priority and although some effort has been made to raise the profile of Prevention and Protection this could be further built upon. The Service may wish to examine why this perception exists and consider how to better reinforce the balanced approach between each pillar of service delivery.

There is some concern around the apparent strategic level commitment to a number of on-going projects and initiatives in relation to funding and

resources for example Prince's Trust and 'Changing Behaviours Saving Lives'. Clear communication, and where necessary reassurance, from CMT about the future of these projects would provide staff with a level of reassurance that their work was valued and would also send a message to the rest of the organisation about the importance of this work.

The Service may have some further work to do in ensuring the consistency of assurance and performance of the recently developed central and local protection management systems. For example, whilst there are clear plans for the full range of Protection activities it will be important to build an internal review and evaluation into this process once plans have been fully implemented and embedded within the Service.

There is a perception by some staff that the Service may not actively be pursuing enforcement through to prosecution. Examples were given that show this has been taking place. An increase in emphasis on the visibility of this work could be beneficial in raising the profile of Protection, both internally and externally.

## **7. Response**

### **Strengths**

- **High performance against prevailing response standards**
- **Commitment and investment in a skilled, competent and safe workforce**
- **Notable increase in capacity to prepare for and manage flooding**

There is a clear organisational focus on the importance of delivering a high performing, capable and competent operational response service. This focus translates into well-developed delivery plans which are applied consistently throughout the organisation.

HFRS benefits from an effective operational assurance team and tactical advisor and debriefing policies are embedded and delivering outcomes. It is an integrated approach and provides an overarching picture of how operational response is being delivered at strategic, tactical and task levels. This links to individual and organisational learning and development.

The Service has learnt from previous operational challenges in particular the floodings of 2007 and has been able to apply that learning in dealing with more recent incidences of flooding.

### **Area to explore**

- **Future challenges of funding**

The emergency response standards, predominantly around an 8 minute response in 90% of occasions, are amongst the most stringent across English Fire and Rescue Services. With continued pressures on budgets there is latitude to examine, compare and contrast local response standards with

those across other Fire and Rescue Services. Focus on a measured and balanced integrated risk management strategy may enable a range of appropriate emergency response deployment options set against increasingly scarce resources that continues to meet the aspirations of safer staff and communities within available resources.

## **8. Health & Safety**

### **Strengths**

- **A strong health and safety culture**
- **Clear commitment in learning from activities and events**

Staff across the organisation are competent, enthusiastic, and passionate about health and safety and have widely bought into the vision that health and safety is an organisational responsibility owned at every level. This was reinforced throughout the visit and the team were impressed with the calibre and enthusiasm of the people they met and consider the culture of safety and safe systems to be well embedded.

There has been recognition of a need to work differently in Health & Safety. Away from signposting and directing staff to a critical friend approach offering advice and support. There are now practical arrangements in place to support this. The move back to headquarters last year and the restructure with a new Area and Group Manager is seen as a positive.

The quarterly monitoring report prepared for GAS indicating notable incidents ensures an additional level of performance scrutiny which will help the Authority to hold the Service to account for Health & Safety performance.

HFRS has got a reciprocal arrangement with South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to investigate major accidents demonstrating a clear commitment to external scrutiny.

### **Area to explore**

- **Further benefits to be gained from 'well being'**

Whilst there is a strong culture and link between health and safety, this is less developed in terms of wellbeing, which is a relatively new concept. Further benefits could be gained by closer links with HR with regards to occupational health, sickness absence, psychological safety, sickness levels and fitness, to improve management information, trend data and processes regarding the "health of the organisation".

## 9. Training & Development

### Strengths

- **National leadership in operational incident command and learning and development**
- **Commitment to member development through briefing sessions**
- **Investment in Retained Firefighter training**

The Service has a strategic focus on developing and maintaining a safe and competent workforce.

HFRS is taking the lead on the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) training subgroup which has enabled Learning & Development to link into the Emergency Planning College and it is anticipated this will lead to increased awareness of partners and blue light/category 1 responses.

There is a strong commitment to member development. Eleven thematic sessions were held last year and resources are made available to schedule them as and when required. As a result the Authority members are knowledgeable and well informed to make key, strategic decisions about the Service.

Work has begun on creating station risk profiles and linking operational training to them. This approach is likely to enable a more efficient use of training time by reducing the need for some training, for example, technical rescue training and enable time to be spent on core training. This approach has been welcomed by the operational training department. It is too early to evaluate the outcome of this approach but close monitoring will be vital to ensure that crews and individuals remain competent in the areas where training is being reduced.

The allocation of an additional £250,000 training budget by CPUs will enable a further one hour training per week to be paid for Retained Duty System (RDS) training. This shows a commitment to RDS staff and training and development throughout the workforce and empowers CPUs to make decisions based on local needs.

Incident analysis is becoming increasingly important in order to ensure that the training budget is spent efficiently. Using an intelligence-led approach to predict how many incidents are likely to occur and what the cost of training to respond to these incidents is shows a realistic, risk based and mature approach to allocating resources.

The use of trained auditors to provide Operational Assurance on issues identified from debriefs and the use of thematic audits is of high quality. The methodology in which these are fed into the strategic risk register and monitored and managed by the Performance and Risk Board is robust. The Service could consider how it can be more proactive in terms of applying national learning at the appropriate level for example lessons learnt from

Shirley Towers rather than the information being disseminated at the top and fed down rather than, at times, a more reactive approach.

#### **Area to explore**

- **Need to fully commit to the appraisal system through supported introduction, training and ongoing support**

A new appraisal system has been launched. This requires the Service to underpin this initiative by close support of a new appraisal process training programme with a key focus on what the appraisal process means, how it is intended to support performance and the focus on values and behaviours. A phased introduction accompanied with a strengthening of relationships at line manager level and regular informal one to ones will be a useful investment in time to ensure collective organisational buy-in and success of the system.

### **10. Call Management**

#### **Strengths**

- **Fire control staff are re-engaged and highly motivated and driven**
- **Clear investment in continuing to develop robust and effective mobilising systems and resilience**
- **Drive to adopt and link new technologies**
- **Closer integration of Control, ICT and Comms teams**

HFRS is well served by its call management, incident support systems and staff. Systems are good and communication is resilient and linked to internal audit.

The recent investment in refurbishing the control room has led to the control team feeling more motivated and re-energised and in general there is a positive outlook on the East Coast Collaboration project.

The strategy for closer integration of fire control, ICT and Operational Communications teams and their associated governance through the Performance Risk Management Board are particularly strong, supported by a robust and detailed delivery programme. Staff have been engaged in the development of the project and the new control room design which has helped reintegrate the team with the Service.

#### **Area to explore**

- **Capacity to successfully deliver the East Coast and Hertfordshire Fire Control project**

The Service may wish to consider whether they have the right amount of resource invested to successfully deliver the East Coast and Hertfordshire Fire Control Project.

There is an opportunity for HFRS to look at pathways to help increase the integration of fire control into the rest of the Service, for example, through joint

training as this is likely to have a beneficial impact on other parts of the Service. The challenge will be to deliver and sustain the ambitious plans.

More extensive use of performance measures and ways of assessing performance and the extent to which Control is fit for purpose could give additional assurance; this has already been recognised by senior management and is being developed.

## **11. Strategic Risk Register**

### **Strengths**

- **Risk Register and risk management framework are well established**
- **Generally a good understanding of risk management across the Service**

There is generally a good understanding of risk management across the Service. The Risk Register and Risk management framework are well established at all levels, Authority, Directorate, Board, CPU and the way HFRS researches and manages the risk is appropriate and proportionate.

The process in which risk is registered through a cycle of identification, monitoring and mitigation enables the senior management team to have confidence in making potentially difficult decisions about the future at a time where an increase in risk may need to be considered to deliver services in a sustainable manner going into the future.

### **Areas to explore**

- **Ensuring risk process and updates are dynamic**
- **The impact of mitigating actions on the corporate risks could be clearer**

The Service has identified that there a problem with accessing the Risk Register within CPU's due to download speed of the network, the planned Wide Area Network upgrade will overcome this problem..

Further clarity on the impact of mitigating actions on the corporate risk register could be clearer. This will help demonstrate the understanding of the cause and effect links between actions, outcomes and risks.



## **Conclusion and contact information**

Throughout the peer challenge the team met with enthusiastic and committed Officers. It is clear that with Humberside Fire & Rescue Service is moving into a new phase focused around how services will be delivered in the future and there is enthusiasm and commitment to drive the Service forward. The Service has a clear strategy for change with a Change Board led by the Chief Fire Officer. It is vital that for the success of this change programme it is embraced, communicated and supported throughout the organisation.

The peer team believe that by harnessing this enthusiasm and commitment Humberside can embrace these plans for the future, managing the risks and challenges along the way.

For more information regarding the Fire Peer Challenge please contact:

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