



Fire and Rescue Services: Going the extra mile

A report by Fitting-in
for the LG Group

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Foreword



We live in extremely challenging times. However, despite the intricate financial and organisational ties binding local government to central government, fire and

rescue services have already delivered significant financial efficiencies.

But now we need to go further. We need to squeeze the maximum value out of every pound of public money we spend and direct funding to areas where they will have the most impact.

Some fire and rescue authorities have already demonstrated that they are imaginative and bold in finding new ways to deliver services, increasingly using the private sector, for example. They are open about spending and performance and it is this accountability which helps create an informed public.

Significant reform is vital if fire and rescue services are to continue to not only be efficient, but to deliver more for less.

Although the local government finance settlement presents challenges for us all, the back-loading of the reductions helps some authorities plan accordingly. However, it is not the same country-wide. Those authorities which are part of county councils endure front-loaded cuts, and the metropolitan

authorities have been hit particularly hard.

As the Chairman of the Local Government Group's Fire Services Management Committee, I am delighted to present a range of case studies from across the country which, I believe, amply demonstrate that the sector is making progress and wants to be in charge of its own destiny, and ready to innovate to make the required savings. It is clear that we are already taking forward many of the suggestions from the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP in an energetic and positive way. In collating these, we have been inundated with a whole range of examples – too many to print here – and I am grateful for the willingness of colleagues to tell us about them.

I do hope you can use this information to both applaud and challenge your own organisation and the way it does business.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Coleman'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Brian Coleman AM FRSA
Chairman, Fire Services
Management Committee

Introduction

Although fire and rescue services (FRSs) have already achieved significant success in delivering efficiencies in recent years, the spending cuts that FRSs face over the next four years mean that further reductions in spending need to be delivered. In communicating the cuts to FRSs the Fire Minister identified a number of areas in which he believes further savings can be found:

- flexible staffing arrangements
- improved sickness management
- pay restraint and recruitment freezes
- shared services/back office functions
- improved procurement
- sharing Chief Fire Officers and other senior staff
- voluntary amalgamations.

This research identifies what 23 FRSs are doing in these areas and indicates that once again the FRS is meeting the challenge and going the extra mile.

Objective of report

In producing this report, the Local Government Group (LG Group) aims to assist and inform fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) to deliver the spending reductions required by disseminating good practice of how efficiencies have been achieved and examples of plans and ideas emerging from FRAs in response to challenges faced by

the sector. We hope that the examples and lessons in the report will assist councillors in taking forward future plans for service delivery.

The scale of the cuts

Although budget detail may be different for each FRA they have been given a very transparent directive from Government.

“Over the four year period, the reduction to formula grant, which makes up roughly 50 per cent of the overall spend for fire and rescue authorities, will be 25 per cent. Reductions for fire and rescue authorities are weighted to the second half of the spending review period, so that fire and rescue authorities have time to prepare.”

(DCLG 2010b)

LG Group's role

The LG Group's role is to help, support and improve local government. In respect of the fire and rescue service we aim to lead the national debate on the issues facing FRAs and the people they represent. We develop forward-looking policy positions to decisively influence government policy and legislation. In order to make a reality of the Government's commitment to greater localism we work with national partners to make a compelling case for more devolution of powers and funding and we highlight the value of local leadership to use scarce resources efficiently and effectively. Throughout this work we highlight real examples of best practice from the sector.

Whilst cuts in revenue may appear disproportionate for some FRAs, those facing the heaviest burden may, if they already have a culture of developing innovative ways of managing service delivery, have the vision to implement the necessary cuts and retain fire cover that is proportionate to the risk and budget.

Vision: changing expectations

Localism is not about traditional approaches. By putting more power in the hands of communities, the Government hopes to empower citizens to drive through change to a point where they are challenging FRAs. The fire and rescue service may believe that because of its popularity with the public, working with the community will be easy for them. However, the public have shown that they are resistant to change in the fire and rescue service (Audit Commission, 2008). An important stage in cost reduction for the FRS will be to change this expectation and this research suggests that in many ways, the

FRS has a long way to go in this direction.

The research

All but one of the 23 FRSs in this report contacted us. What we cannot report on are those plans that are still on the drawing board and remain sensitive. Area Manager Mark Ainge from Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service explains:

“We are exploring ways of collaborative working and working differently for the future. We recognise that the next four years will be very challenging and we need to proactively identify significant opportunities to improve the way we deliver our service, and we need to explore even more cost-effective ways than previously imagined. This will take real leadership and courage. This is the time for creativity and innovation and not just a reliance on doing the same things the old way with fewer people.”

Meeting challenges – the Audit Office approach

With the dissolution of the Audit Commission, the National Audit Office's (NAO) advice has been considered. Their view is that there are three stages to consider when undertaking cost reduction (NAO, 2010).

Focus of the report

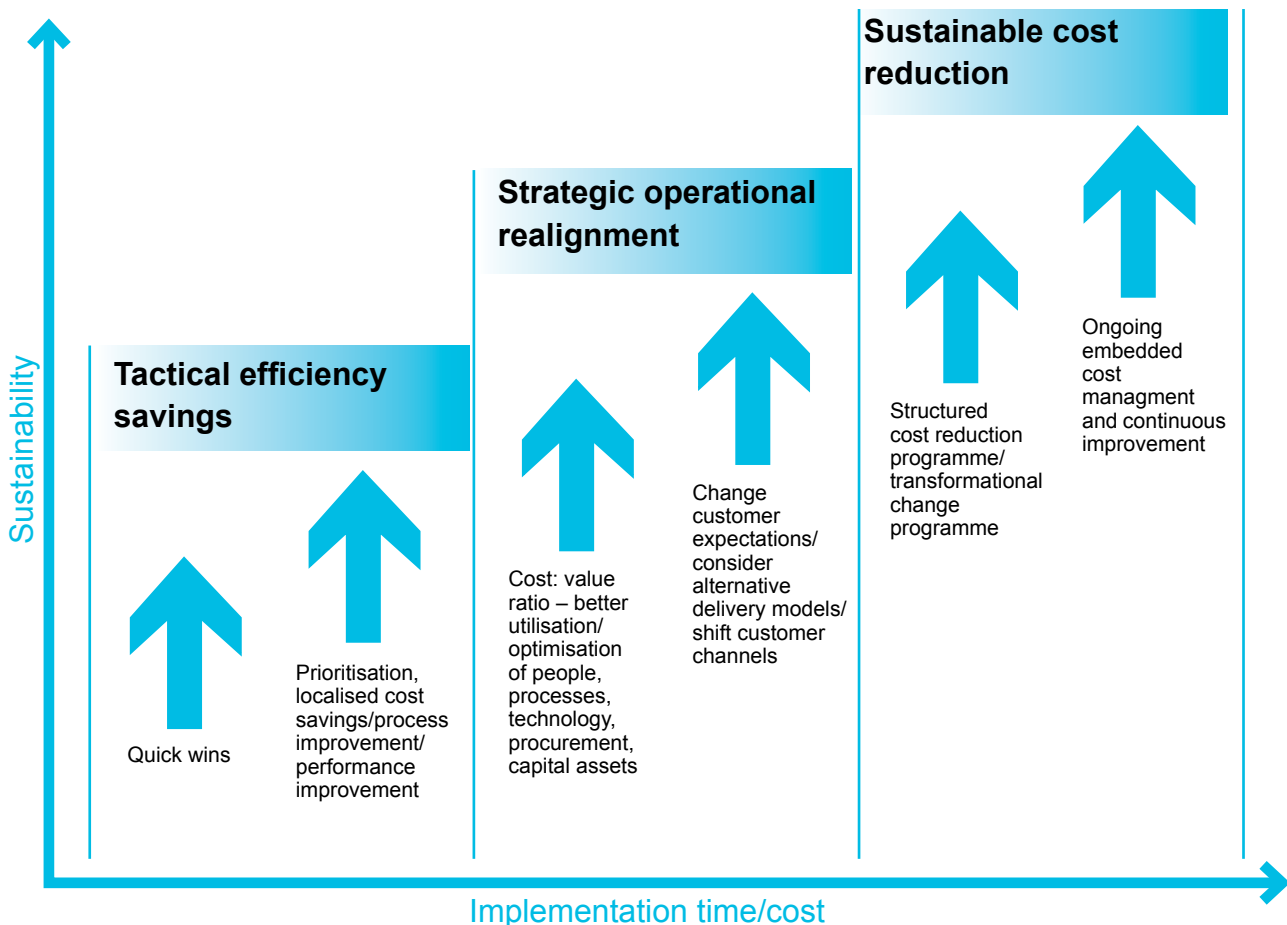
Whilst there are clear advantages in achieving quick wins, given the enormity of budget cuts it is the strategic and sustainable reductions (columns two and three below) that this report focuses on.

The accountant's view

It is important to note that there is a view in both the National Audit Office and LG Group, that top-slicing budgets may appear to bring quick wins, but there is a need for judgement when short term 'gains' produce little in the way of savings and yet can upset people.

Strong leadership, and a strategy for the future alongside a clear understanding of unit costs are required (NAO 2010). Chief Fire Officer Darren Gunter from Dorset Fire and Rescue Service has developed a 'ready reckoner' so that department heads recognise cost by service area. Some services have told us that they do not have this detailed understanding.

Figure 1
Stages of cost reduction



Source: National Audit Office



Risk

There are, as the NAO suggest, risks attached to change. For the FRS, risk assessment largely hinges around saving life. This approach is not solely about fire cover. Data should equally target resources on reducing risk. Councillor Dave Topping from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service crystallises the argument: “A number of people in Cheshire are alive today not just as a result of the bravery of firefighters but equally due to the safety advice and smoke alarms provided by a range of staff and volunteers.”

Amongst our case studies there are examples from Lancashire, Surrey and Greater Manchester that concentrate on this important area. Councillors will not need reminding that prevention not only saves lives, it also has the potential to provide sustainable cost reductions because as risk recedes this releases operational resources.

Applying the NAO criteria to the FRS

The diagram opposite represents Fitting-in’s interpretation of how the seven areas of savings that the FRS are attempting to achieve could fit within the NAO framework for cost reduction. We have also developed a more sophisticated chart and a word document that makes our argument in greater detail. These are available at www.fitting-in.com/scr.docx

To set the scene for this report our first case study is included in the introduction. This provides an example of how a fire and rescue service, which has for some time been involved in changing the mindset of their public and workforce, has reduced incidents, realigned their delivery and achieved sustainable savings.

Case study Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service are currently dealing with the reality of a cut of £9 million from a £73 million budget having already faced significant financial challenges in saving £111 million. Success, they argue, is driven by their strong performance culture that has in the last decade halved fire deaths and reduced full-time firefighters from over 1500 to 880.

Improvements in sickness levels

In 1994/95 Merseyside FRS had the worst sickness rate in the Fire and Rescue Service, comprising of 18.98 shifts lost per full-time firefighter. Merseyside FRS began to offer a range of services to reduce sickness. This new approach incorporated a comprehensive range of services for employees underpinned by occupational health wellbeing policies, strategies and guidance. The service offers all employees (and their family living at the same address) a 24/7 assistance programme.

By 2007/08 sickness rates were reduced to 7.44 days per full-time person and further reduced to 4.65 days the following year. This reduction in absence levels allowed reductions in the firefighter establishment that provides sustainable savings of over £2 million per year.

Shared services

Merseyside FRS share a procurement service and a director with Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service. They are just completing the biggest ever fire and rescue service procurement for the £42 million Northwest Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project for 16 new fire stations in Cumbria, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Figure 2

Adapted from NAO 2010



Flexible staffing arrangements – Low Level Activity and Response (LLAR)

MFRS developed LLAR stations to deal with over-capacity without closing stations. Their five LLAR stations are a third cheaper to run than standard full-time stations (£640,000 compared to £1 million per year). This saves £2.4 million; the duty system is voluntary and appears popular with those who choose to work it (Audit Commission 2008).

Budgets

It must be well known in Government and amongst all councillors that in the fire and rescue service front-line services consume most of the budget, as Figure 3 demonstrates, in Merseyside FRS only 17 per cent is spent on support services.

Future savings

This case study evidences how Merseyside FRS has already ‘moved forward’. This research also indicates that there are many authorities, who like Merseyside FRS have already made considerable savings. For example Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services budget for backroom staff has been reduced to below 10 per cent and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service are proposing to save £6 million in this area.

It becomes clear therefore that major budget cuts (of a scale never seen before) are likely to translate into changes in front-line services. A report from the Government’s recent Fire Futures exercise takes the view that:

“When all the frills have been removed, every spare ounce of fat burned off, and every possible efficiency saving identified and implemented, there will remain only real cuts to the core service and a real increase in casualties and property loss.”

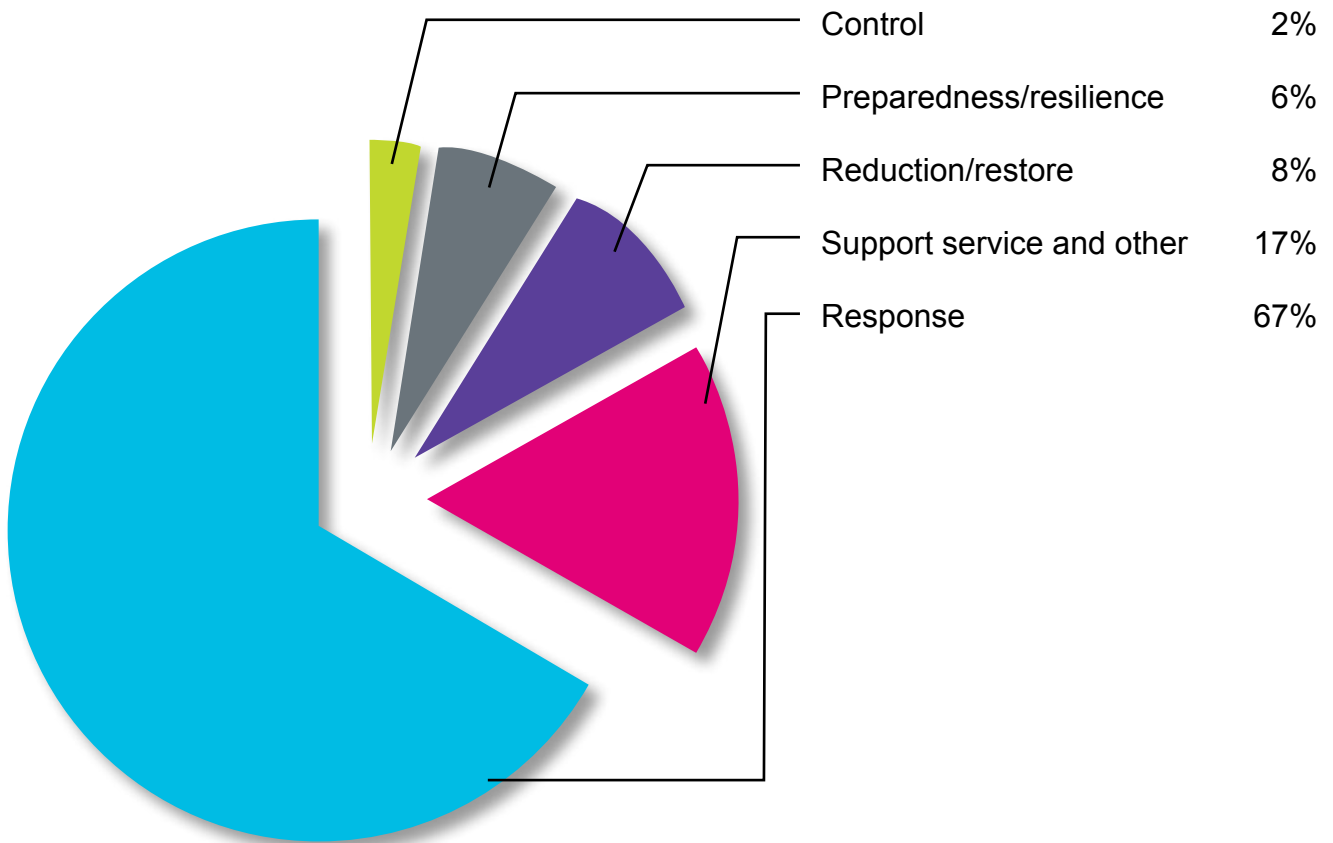
(DCLG 2010a)

Despite this depressing view taken from Fire Futures, the case studies that follow present a vision that something can be done which reconciles the risk with the budget.

How this stark choice is realised is important. Does losing firefighter jobs necessarily mean that risk increases? Are there still innovative and data-led changes available to provide more with less? One answer may

Figure 3

Analysis by service area in Merseyside FRS



be Greater Manchester FRS's development of a risk model to determine prevention and emergency cover. Another may be Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's case study that suggests how developing the LLAR concept saves them £400,000 with no impact on front line service delivery. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service have saved in excess of £6 million by cancelling a PFI bid for a training centre and relocating to a military base. It may even be that FRSs vision could make localism work for them and Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Services's case study is a case in point as it argues for a standalone joint fire and ambulance precepting body.

And so the list could go on, but for now the report examines further case studies where economic rational and data-led innovation may just challenge Fire Futures vision.

1. Flexible staffing arrangements

Case study Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service: Moving Forward

Introduction

As part of management restructuring that reduces the establishment by 17 full-time equivalent posts (Green & Grey Books) within Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, area managers have voluntarily opted to alter their work pattern. Group and station managers are currently considering a similar system. Within three years the new structure will deliver year-on-year savings in excess of £700,000 with potential for further significant cost reduction.

Moving Forward

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Adrian Crook, describes the Moving Forward restructuring programme as an implementation of “modern working conditions that will make the service more efficient, flexible, better equipped for the future and meet economic pressures.” The pre-existing working patterns for middle managers currently entitle them to a number of rota days during the traditional working week. This often means that managers were unavailable to their staff, colleagues, external agencies and the public during what most organisations would describe as normal business hours.

The new arrangement

Area managers are now contracted to work a five-day week, one of which involves 24 hour cover and one weekend of 24 hour cover in five (moving to one in four shortly). Flexible working arrangements apply which enable managers to adjust their day to suit both business and personnel commitments and annual leave can now start on any day of the week. Pay remains the same at area manager [B] rate including the flexible duty allowance and there is a supplement of 10 per cent (non-pensionable) for providing operational cover at Gold command level.

Further discussions

Station managers and group managers are also involved in discussion as part of a similar offer except that they will be on call for 24 hour cover twice a week and one in four weekends. Whilst there will be no change in pay, the possibilities of future performance-related pay and conditions related to the associated increased productivity have yet to be considered.

Savings

To date, savings have been made in establishment reductions of 17 posts including two area managers, two group managers and six station managers. It is hoped that natural wastage will account for these reductions. Voluntary redundancy and voluntary early retirement policies (for all employees) have been put in place for those who wish to take advantage of them.

Conclusion

The Moving Forward project attempts to make managers more available in line with requirement of a modern organisation. These arrangements aim to improve managerial efficiency and effectiveness whilst at the same time contributing to service economies.

Case study Surrey Fire and Rescue Service: realigning the shift system in Surrey Public Safety Plan

Introduction

Part of the draft public safety plan (Surrey 2011-20) sets out options to strategically realign the workforce to ensure that more appliances are available at peak times and to provide capacity to deliver an operational assurance programme. After start-up costs, the proposal would become part of the 7.7 per cent saving that Surrey Fire and Rescue Service will achieve over four years.

Proposal

Data from 2004 to 2009 suggests that on average the service receives 25 emergency calls between 0700 and 1900 and 15 calls between 1900 and 0700. The severity of incidents in Surrey is fairly consistent across the 24 hour period.

Availability

Surrey is part of the commuter belt and getting retained duty service (RDS) firefighters on days is difficult. They said:

“Currently we could have 22 whole-time duty service (WDS) appliances and 13 RDS on days, but we struggle to get five RDS. At night we have 20 WDS and most

of the 15 RDS are available. This means we have more cover at night when we are less likely to receive calls and fewer appliances during the day when we receive most calls. This does not make good sense nor provide value for money”.

Changes to staffing arrangements

The proposal is that firefighters continue to come to work in a block of four shifts but in the future three of these will be day shifts and only one night duty. The greater availability on day duties means that 20 staff will be available for scheduled training. These firefighters will also provide an ‘operational assurance group’ that can be put on the run at 30 minutes’ notice or in the event of sustained drought or bad weather, and on Derby Day.

The proposal means that 23 whole-time pumps will be available on days with an additional four pumps available as ‘operational assurance’ (staffed by personnel who are on courses or delivering community fire safety). At night 21 pumps will be available, composed of 15 WDS and 6 RDS.

Conclusion

The concept of providing resilience pumps staffed by personnel on training courses is innovative.

Case study

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service: Strategic Projects Team hammering down unit costs

Introduction

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service provides a case study of how the development of a 'Strategic Projects Team' to focus on key areas of potential savings has identified potential savings of over £1 million.

Planning ahead

Derbyshire's FRA members, Strategic Leadership Team, group managers, heads of department and the Fire Brigades Union met in May (2010) to investigate potential areas for savings. These were then put before a cross-section of the workforce and 15 areas were identified for Area Managers to investigate.

Strategic Projects Team

The team reports directly to the CFO and consists of a group manager, two station managers and the FBU Brigade Secretary who assists in creating a transparent approach to strategic direction and decision-making. One project they looked at was water rescue.

The Water Rescue Strategy Review:

The team analysed a range of data to identify which stations could be considered for water rescue. Scenario planning led to the suggestion that rather than reduce the number of water rescue resources, more personnel should be mobilised to dynamic water rescue incidents to improve firefighter safety.

Group manager Alex Johnson who leads the team says:

"If approved it will save 28 posts across the establishment without reducing our response and saves nearly £1 million."

The FRA paper gives three options for a water rescue capability; each option provides an opportunity to reduce the operational establishment by 28 posts.

Conclusion

The establishment of a Strategic Projects Team to objectively look at proposals with a view to cutting costs has worked for Derbyshire FRS. This team is developing the skills to review original systems of work from a 'detached' perspective, and recommend alternative approaches following research and modelling. The FBU involvement on the team provides transparency.

Other areas for savings have been identified that include a reduction of one firefighter on ariel ladder pumps, conversion of dormitories into office space, a more cost-effective car users scheme and reducing station managers by seven through sharing them between stations.

Case study

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service: Day Crewing Plus project (DCP)

Introduction

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's Risk Management Planning arrangements have led to a saving of £400,000 a year without affecting emergency cover. Having identified six stations where DCP is appropriate, two stations have already converted and the other four stations will convert over the next two years.

Staff savings with no impact on front-line delivery

Traditionally one pump appliances in Lancashire have required 28 personnel. By moving to DCP, this number has been reduced to 14. Personnel volunteering for this scheme are expected to provide 12 positive hours on the day shift.

Although there was an initial capital layout to construct the accommodation this was recouped within the first year and now there are "substantial revenue savings of around £400,000 per year and from a public perspective has no impact on front-line service delivery." There are also further savings identified through having fewer staff to train, administer and equip.

Conclusion

This arrangement has resulted in a sustainable cost reduction and provides evidence to support a view that when the volume of calls is right, rather than shutting stations to achieve budget cuts, there are other options to deliver the service which maintains emergency cover (that staff will volunteer for). Councillors facing station closures may well want to speak to Lancashire FRS (and of course Merseyside FRS) to see if this model could work for them.



Case study

Kent Fire and Rescue Service: Retained Duty System (RDS) will become part-time firefighters

Introduction

The proposal from Kent Fire and Rescue Service is to move their retained duty system (RDS) firefighters to employment contracts more akin to the traditional part-time worker model. This proposal is a response to their fears about RDS firefighter safety and to allow them to guarantee appliance availability.

Concerns

Kent FRS's primary concern with the RDS is around the health and safety of staff, and the proposed change should ensure that training is on the same scale as whole-time staff. There is also concern that at very short notice, a RDS member of staff can make themselves unavailable and take the appliance off the run. This unpredictability is an issue.

The proposal for part-time contracts will allow Kent FRS's to determine the appliances they have on the run by specifying the hours that people are required to work so as to match their resources to risk. This will include part-timers working with WDS firefighters.

Conclusion

This proposal to change from RDS to part-time working is Kent FRS's response to a risk evaluation exercise to identify what resources are required, when and where (IRMP 2008/11). If agreed, the new approach will go live on 1 June 2011 to "provide for a far more integrated and flexible service" as contracted part-time staff support their WDS colleagues. Concerns over firefighter safety should also be mitigated. Councillors will no doubt watch this proposal with interest

alongside other alternative approaches that already exist in a number of other fire and rescue services.

A comprehensive report on the RDS is available from the LG Group (2010).

Case study

Essex Fire and Rescue Service: redeploying resources leads to reduction in firefighters

Introduction

Essex Fire and Rescue Service's case study indicates how a proposed new establishment model and a data-led approach can result in changes to emergency cover and a reduction of 40 firefighter posts.

More strategic establishment

Using a new model for identifying their establishment, Essex FRS are introducing a phased reduction in riders to 12 personnel a shift. The new system should maintain crewing levels at five on the first pump and four on the second releasing 16 WDS posts.

Essex FRS have also identified a number of other changes:

- additional positive hours to carry out fire station routines, training and improve community safety
- bespoke personal shift pattern adjusted (with notice) to cover absence, ensuring standard or minimum crewing
- self rostering, therefore flexible rota days allow for family-friendly working conditions such as child care and work/life balance
- autonomous station management
- minimum overtime payments for bank holidays.

Responding to increased risk

In response to a significant development of the Uttlesford area, one of the two RDS pumps at Great Dunmow will during the next two years move to WDS. This will provide the additional resources to deliver the appropriate fire prevention, fire protection, response and operational assurance. The crewing system has yet to be agreed but it is almost certainly going to employ a new system which will not require normal firefighter numbers for a single appliance station. At the same time the number of RDS posts will be reviewed.

Details will be forthcoming during 2011 to phase out day crewing and replace this with a form of low-level activity response releasing eight WDS posts.

From 1 April 2011 work will commence on redeploying WDS personnel at Canvey as it changes from one full-time pump and one RDS pump, to two RDS pumps.

Conclusion

The financial savings from this redeployment are yet to be fully quantified. The 40 WDS posts to be taken from the establishment represent a sustainable cost reduction. The opportunity to provide more community fire safety should further help reduce incidents.

Case study Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service: Initial Intervention Vehicle and Cobra Unit

Introduction

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service are in the course of piloting the use of two rapid response vehicles. The first is aimed at improving safety and enhancing availability at RDS stations and over the three month trial period, this pilot improved RDS availability at one station from nine per cent to 60 per cent. The second initiative provides Cobra firefighting equipment for use in rural areas.

Rationale

Northamptonshire FRS, faced with similar problems as Kent FRS in regard to RDS availability, has initiated a review of duty systems to release a full-time firefighter to supplement the crews at two RDS stations. The review not only provided the staff to pilot the initiative, but also developed the concept of an initial intervention vehicle.

Initial Intervention Vehicle

This vehicle serves as transport for the WDS firefighter to supplement RDS crews and also provides a quick response to the high number of road traffic collisions in RDS areas. The full-time firefighter has enhanced casualty trauma care training and equipment, provided by the East Midlands Ambulance Service, to facilitate greater support to casualties and enhance scene safety, lighting, vehicle stability, glass management and a cutting capability.

Pilot

The introduction of this vehicle has improved availability at the RDS station and provided early intervention at road traffic collisions.

Cobra Intervention Vehicle

In 2010, Northamptonshire FRS introduced a Cobra Intervention Vehicle for use when fire cover is reduced due to lack of RDS availability or other operational activity. This vehicle has the ability to fight compartment fires from outside the building without the need to deploy staff into the high-risk area. Casualty survival rates have potentially been improved and fire contained until a fully-equipped appliance arrives.

Conclusion

Both these vehicles represent innovative approaches to providing fire cover. The rapid intervention vehicle can provide the fourth member to allow a retained crew to ride when there are only three riders. At other times it can attend road traffic collisions, deliver early trauma care and turn back unwanted appliances. The Cobra unit provides a means of transporting specialist equipment to rural fires that can and has extinguished fires without the crew entering the building.

Consulting the workforce

Overview

Assistant CFO Nick Mure from Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service equally recognises the importance of good relationships with the workforce:

“I consider our relationship with the union to be very good 7–8 (out of 10). But that’s because the Brigade Committee and Secretary and corporate team have built up a good relationship.”

It must be the hope of every CFO that they can work together with their workforce in implementing the cuts. The dynamic of change is often interpreted as an acceptance of change as people get caught up in the momentum.

“Working in new ways often leads to suggestions for further improvement as people become familiar with a new approach but this requires sustained impetus from the leadership in actively demonstrating commitment to ongoing improvement.”

(NAO 2010)

Whilst we do not have a brief to critique or challenge any of the data we have collected, it may be right just to note that many of the changes (both proposed and already implemented) have met with significant challenge. Sometimes this comes from the unions but local Members of Parliament and councillors can also be part of this.

What follows from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service indicates how they developed a good relationship with the workforce to work with them.

Case study

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service: consulting the workforce

Introduction

Shropshire FRS's public value review has identified potential savings of around £2.8 million. Uniquely this consultation involved agreeing a written protocol with the unions.

Public value process

The public value review process is a system of conversation (as opposed to consultation) with the workforce to generate ideas and seek consensus. In Shropshire FRS this meant engaging with all groups of staff, including nearly every watch (WDS and RDS) to ask how they would save money. This generated around 300 ideas. These ideas were grouped under 25 headings to use in the second round of visits by a principal manager and at least one fire authority member. Deputy CFO John Redmond said:

"People could see that we were committed to it and that we had to be committed to it."

Working with the unions

Shropshire FRS drew up protocol with the unions during the public value process. This did not mean that the unions supported management but that management were more aware of their position and were pragmatic about areas of difference. Having an understanding with the unions also improved workforce engagement. CFO Paul Raymond argues:

"I was determined from the start to have a collegiate approach but even if we all did not agree, we were all fully aware of the consequences, politically and financially of taking the easy options."

Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSCs)

Shropshire FRS is predominantly an RDS-based service and HFSC are carried out by RDS and WDS staff working on firefighter's flat-rate pay. This is expensive and the expense doubled because of the FBU requirement for two firefighters to carry out HFSCs.

Amendments to the policy of HFSCs allowed the RDS to continue to deliver in their areas. However changes in the approach, and the use of other staff, reduced costs but not the impact to the communities. Deputy CFO John Redmond said:

"We found it quite refreshing, because people were actually saying 'you don't need us to do it like this', or 'this is not the best way'".

Conclusion

This example has identified how Shropshire FRS has worked with their staff in identifying areas of saving. The agreement with the unions as part of the process helped improve engagement. It may well have helped in the outcome too.

In South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service CFO Mark Smitherman recognised that there would be benefits if he engaged with the workforce. He started that process when he went public on the cuts:

"If the cut is 25 per cent, as is being suggested, that will have significant implications for our frontline service. I have to stand up for my staff and the public and say that this could compromise our ability to deliver vital emergency services."

CFO Smitherman also commissioned a snapshot cultural audit that focused on how to improve engagement between the workforce and the CFO (Baigent, O'Connor et al. 2010).

Members' participation in the station visits sent messages to firefighters, first, about the seriousness of the situation and second, the FRA's commitment to listen to the people they employ.

Case study

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service: new risk model

Introduction

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service find that the concept of localism fits neatly with their corporate plan to organise their service according to local need. Working with legislation that since 2004 allows them to develop local fire cover standards, Greater Manchester FRS have developed a data-led way of modelling risk. As a result they can now adjust (scientifically match) whatever resources they have (after budget cuts) to provide the best results.

The risk model

The research necessary to develop this model has been in development for over two years and is externally validated. The model is available from Greater Manchester FRS but in essence when applied to an area, it identifies the risk; estimates risk levels; compares the options and decides on targets and response standards. Assistant CFO Nick Mure argues:

"[What the data] shows is that risk can be objectively assessed and we can determine how best to use all of our resources to reduce those risks, taking account of value-for-money considerations."

Risk modelling is currently being mapped out for delivery across the boroughs. Emergency response will be planned according to need and will be supported by targeted interventions to drive down risk. This may lead to a number of other changes.

- Deployment of resources in a more flexible way through viable rostering/crewing options to utilise time at work and maximise productivity.
- A 24/7 'core duty' roster based upon new 'clusters' of stations for crewing purposes.
- A second tier of backup resources, utilising new approaches to local management, new rostering systems and recall to duty.
- Deploy a variety of fire appliances/specialist vehicles based on risk.
- Incident command/managerial arrangements are being reviewed.
- The potential for greater specialisation of crews/firefighters is being considered.

Conclusion

By developing a risk model, Greater Manchester FRS have a toolkit that will allow them to concentrate their resources to save lives by prevention and intervention. Significantly the model should be adjustable according to the budget and councillors may wish to speak with Greater Manchester FRS about this.

2. Improved sickness management

Overview

Sickness management may be one of the areas where the fire and rescue service has already improved its performance to the point where there is little left to be gained. Area Manager Mark Ainge from Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service suggests:

“In Northamptonshire, fire and rescue attendance management focuses on supporting the individual to ensure that they feel valued and included. As a result short-term absences have reduced and the long-term absences are known and are being managed by the involvement of occupational health and the line manager in line with our service policy on attendance management.”

Like Northamptonshire FRS, most services we spoke to explained that they were trying to create an environment where sickness management was about a concern for the worker rather than a ‘police’ interview. Mayo (1949) discovered that this approach worked and so have CFOs.

Case study

London Fire Brigade: reductions in sickness absence

London Fire Brigade (LFB) has made significant reductions in sickness absence. Sickness was reduced from an average of 10.88 shifts to 6.97 shifts per person for operational staff between 2004 and 2009, representing efficiency savings of over £6.3 million a year. The number of long-term sickness absence cases also halved from an average of over 200 in 2004 to 109 in 2008. The time taken to resolve long-term sickness cases also reduced by 40 per cent from an average of 173 days to 104 days. These reductions were realised through initiatives such as the introduction of dedicated caseworkers, the introduction of a toolkit for managers to manage long-term sick cases, a review of the end-to-end sickness management process, and the launch of an LFB Healthy Initiative. The programme covers issues such as personal resilience, healthy lifestyle, and managing personal stress, and has resulted in a significant decrease in the occurrence of stress-related absence.

They also undertook a detailed review of the occupational health services contracted for staff and best practice, and extended the range of services (eg physiotherapy, MRI scans, cognitive behaviour therapy,

ECG) and introduced a mobile health unit to support staff wellbeing. Further progress included the introduction of revised drugs and alcohol policies focusing on rehabilitation and prevention, along with testing regimes, and the introduction of an updated no smoking policy that offers support to staff who want to quit smoking.



Case study

Essex Fire and Rescue Service: Absence Management

Introduction

Essex Fire and Rescue Service's research has highlighted the differences in tackling absences between the fire and rescue services and other public and private sectors, as the bar chart opposite indicates.

Comparisons with other sectors

In Essex FRS, a new radical approach to absence management since 2008 involving a HR Business Partner model has reduced employee absence and costs by almost 60 per cent and involves a 'unique' covenant with the workforce.

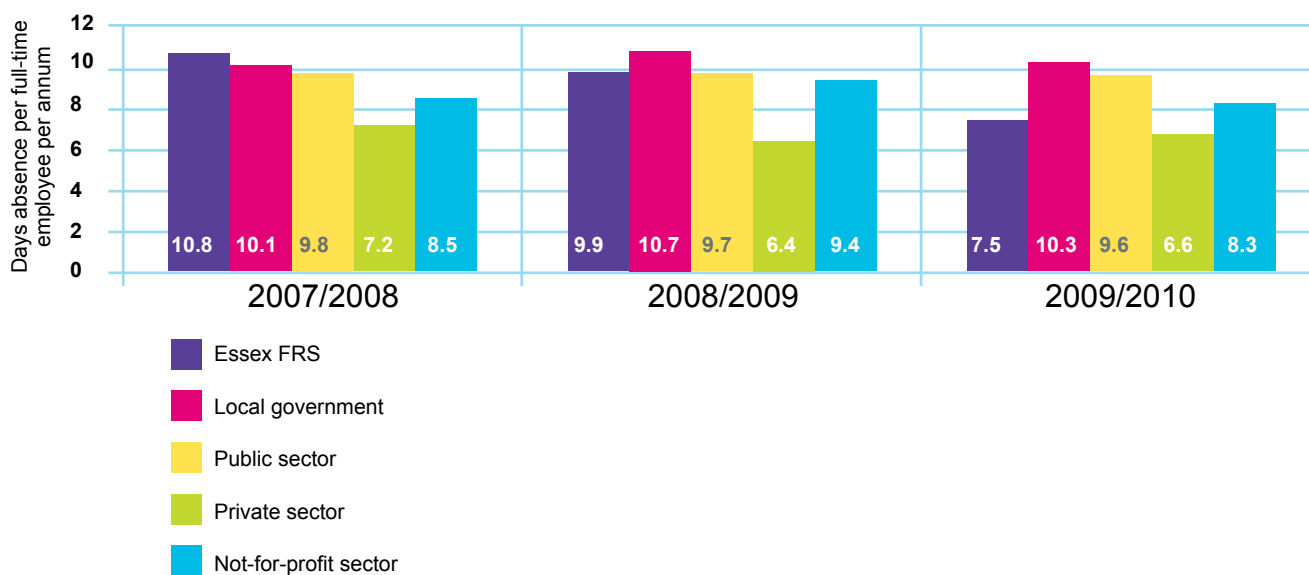
CFO of Essex FRS, David Johnson said:

"When I took over five and a half years ago we had the worst sickness leave in the country, running at just around 14.5 shifts. We said to our workforce if you want to keep your shift system we have to be the best in the country. So a combination of working with our employees, training our management to more effectively deal with the issues and better data management to identify the problems, we have our sickness running under seven shifts, down from 14.5."

A new approach

The HR Business Partner model combines HR and occupational health as support for the line manager who, in a significant cultural shift, takes responsibility for people management. Line managers now proactively support employees to facilitate their return to work as soon as possible by understanding the root cause of absenteeism and where possible remedying it.

Figure 4
Essex FRS absence benchmarking



Focusing resources more effectively

HR Business Partner teams are now undertaking a complete overhaul of the organisation’s absence management policies, guidance and systems, training managers to be more effective and implementing more cost effective initiatives for managing longer-term permanent medical capability cases in developing wellbeing services.

Savings

In financial terms the reduction in employee absence equates to a financial saving of around £1.5 million over the three year period. In addition, ill-health retirements have decreased from 10 per annum in 2007 to two in 2009/2010. The financial saving equates to a further £1.7 million over the period.

Conclusion

Essex FRS’s work has led to considerable savings in human terms and financially. By passing responsibility to line managers, interventions to help people who are sick have taken place earlier.

The emphasis in sickness policy on helping the individual appears to provide results. In a similar vein the Audit Commission (2008) link falling absence amongst low-level activity and response personnel with high morale.

3. Pay restraint and recruitment freezes

Introduction

A consequence of the Government's pay policy and the self-imposed recruitment freeze within the public sector has provided a framework of restraint for FRSs. As such, it may be that there are consequences of this happening. Is there a political will to follow through the potential consequences? Large-scale reductions in operational staff are unknown territory for the fire and rescue service and in this chapter there is an attempt to explore some of the issues this raises.

The LG Group recognises the need for pay restraint in the current climate and supports greater transparency in pay for senior public sector managers, including the FRS. Local Government (LG) Employers have recently produced a 'guide to reducing workforce costs' for local authorities and are in the process of producing a comparable document targeted specifically at FRAs.

Staff costs

Staff costs for the front line service will increasingly dominate the cuts debate in the FRS as they may soon become the only way to achieve the cuts. After the attempt to achieve lean staffing arrangements by reducing personnel on pumps or using small intervention vehicles are taken into account, there are three potential options all of which

are likely to become part of FRSs new business operating model.

- You stop doing something.
- You take out a management layer.
- You accept a reduction in quality.

LG Employers provide some advice on how this could be done.

- Establish a vision of what you want to achieve.
- Plan how you are going to get there.
- Set up a comprehensive and well thought through change programme.
- Find the right people with the right skills to both lead and drive change.

(LG Employers, 2010)

Pay freeze

Pay freezes may be superficially attractive. In the short term they can lead to cost reductions providing they are real. Pay freezes will produce real cost savings particularly in the FRS where there is limited incremental progression for Grey Book staff. Green Book staff in the FRS are more likely to be on an incremental scale but represent a small part of the workforce. Nonetheless there still may be savings from freezing increments. In both cases there is a need to be mindful of contractual obligations. Pay

freezes are more likely to be attractive to the workforce when they sense they are also saving jobs.

Recruitment freeze

As the FRS enters a period of planned staff reductions, (a situation that will undoubtedly increase in years three and four) a recruitment freeze is all but inevitable. Whilst most services indicate that they are planning to rely on natural wastage, have they considered that 'retirements' may not be so evenly spread? This can lead to shortages in far-flung stations or on alternative duty systems to the 2-2-4. In the short-term, this can lead to an increase in costs if overtime is necessary and if people are required to transfer, there may be the potential for industrial unrest and individual unhappiness.

In considering a recruitment freeze managers will wish to be mindful of the implications for attracting new talent to the organisation at all levels.

Political will

During these turbulent times, strong political leadership and direction are crucial to organisational success. Councillors will need to make difficult decisions on service provision, staffing levels, pay and terms and conditions of employment, mindful of the need to make significant savings whilst maintaining workforce performance and morale. For example, when a senior manager retires, will organisations consider a restructure? There are also questions being raised about senior managers' salaries across the public sector.

Staff reduction

If you are reducing staff then the amount of savings will depend on where they are placed in the organisational structure. Key points to consider are how many jobs, and at what level, for example, a relatively high reduction of management jobs may save less money than a relatively small reduction in firefighter posts.

Freezes in recruitment are also likely to frustrate attempts to provide a more diverse workforce. Organisations should conduct equality impact assessments to assist in considering the equality implications of such a proposal.

Income to support pension schemes will also be affected as the amount paid in pension contributions decrease as fewer staff contribute to the pension scheme - this puts a greater financial burden on the employer.

Redundancies

The biggest question concerns compulsory redundancies. Will FRSs make the decision to go ahead and what will the ramifications be on the whole service if local strikes or a national strike follows? Contingency plans should be designed to deal with local problems and be mindful of the effect of national action.

To actually consider the costs in financial terms, redundancies may be costed by taking a dispassionate cost benefit risk analysis. However, the potential loss of fire cover is far more than a financial decision.

4. Shared services/ back office functions

Case study Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Services: sharing control

Introduction

This case study illustrates how two FRSs are collaborating on the delivery of a fire control. The project provides resilience and significant cost savings.

Proposed staffing arrangements

The proposal for a shared fire control in Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service will see an increase of two fire control staff per watch to accommodate the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service activity. TUPE regulations will apply to the transfer of staff, and support the opportunity for Suffolk FRS staff to work in the new shared fire control.

Costs

There are significant revenue savings that will be realised in the shared fire control function. Costs to establish the shared arrangement are primarily being borne by Suffolk FRS and future investment will be shared between the two services.

Additional benefits

Additional benefits to both FRSs are that the joint control provides for:

- greater efficiency through revenue savings and, in the future, shared capital investment
- greater resilience
- joint development of improved IT systems
- catalyst for future partnership working and shared functions.

Conclusion

Suffolk FRS's speed of response after the failure of the national fire control arrangements shows how positive thinking can produce quick results.

In a similar vein we have been informed of a number of other examples. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service provides a large animal rescue service for West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service indicate that they are now handling calls for the Isle of Wight. In turn, West Midlands FRS provides fire investigation services to neighbouring fire and rescue services. Essex FRS workshops are piloting the repair of dustcarts for Braintree District Council and already service some police vehicles.

Case study

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service: Emergency Services Community Support Officers

Introduction

The sharing of a community support officer with the police not only offers a potential financial saving it also provides an increased opportunity to get the safety message across.

Innovative partnership

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service has become part of an innovative partnership with Lancashire Constabulary and the North West Lancashire Ambulance NHS Trust by introducing Emergency Services Community Support Officers (ESCSO's). Six ESCSO's were appointed in 2003 and based in rural areas of the county to provide and deliver:

- a resource capable of responding to community safety requirements in remote rural communities in three specific northern, eastern and southern areas of Lancashire
- a visible reassurance in the community for the police and support to police officers
- or the ambulance service – first aid/first responder
- for the Lancashire FRS the ESCSO's provide an increased capacity to address risk reduction activity in rural remote areas of Lancashire through the delivery of two key services: home fire safety checks and Childsafe Education
- ESCSO's allocate 40 per cent of their time to Lancashire FRS, and 60 per cent to the police.

The creation of this post represented the first such multi-agency partnership and role to be found anywhere in the country.

Economic logistics

- the jointly funded by Lancashire FRS and police service
- Lancashire FRS contribute to 40 per cent of the salary for each of the 6 ESCSO's with Lancashire Constabulary contributing 60 per cent and being responsible for their employment.

Conclusion

This concept has considerable potential, particularly with regard to reducing risk (which in turn will save lives and reduce the demand on front line services. Whilst there are examples nationally of the police and fire and rescue service jointly approaching community safety in the home, this is often done by one representative from each organisation. Councillors whose service employs non-operational community safety advisers may wish to talk to Lancashire FRS.

During the research an example came up about the thought-provoking concept of a para-professional who undertakes community safety duties and is also a RDS firefighter. This person could be sent at short notice to carry out home fire safety checks in areas where the RDS station is short of a rider and this would put the appliance on the run.

Case study

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service: joint fire and police stations

Introduction

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) indicated how an existing fire station can be refurbished and at the same time become a source of income through cooperation with Suffolk Constabulary on co-locating fire and police stations.

Collaboration

By working closely with Suffolk Constabulary, Suffolk FRS have reached an agreement for a number of stations where there is the potential to extend, upgrade and share existing accommodation.

Pilot

The pilot scheme was initiated at a RDS station in Framlingham: a station in need of improvement, and now has improved community access, heating, kitchen, DDA-compliance, WCs, lecture area and additional security.

Suffolk FRS's radical thinking has broken down traditional barriers and improved collaborative working.



5. Improved procurement

Case study South east region: the collaborative procurement challenge and the way forward

Introduction

The south east region shared procurement of a workwear uniform has led to a saving of around £500,000 and has now been rolled out nationally to 24 FRSs. This cooperation has led to a number of other opportunities in the south east.

The project

The project to develop a workwear uniform for the south east region involved representatives from all nine FRSs in the south east and nominees from key stakeholder groups agreeing a specification for workwear.

Advantages

- significant cashable and efficiency savings of approx £500,000 (approx £2 million cost and efficiency savings across the region over the next four years)
- development of a core common workwear and specification provides better supply resilience and a higher-quality product at a lower cost
- clear evidence that a collaborative procurement approach really does work.

Political drive

Councillor Judith Heathcoat, lead member for regional procurement for the south east FRSs', said:

“I am delighted with the excellent results achieved from this south east fire service collaborative procurement.”

Key pointers

By developing a procurement strategy and business case that clearly identifies the costs, resources, risks and benefits, the south east has proved a collaborative procurement approach really does work. A number of collaborative procurements and projects are now under way. These include:

- personal protection equipment such as operational uniforms
- BA equipment and compressors
- appliances and operational equipment
- education courses for managers.

Conclusion

The success of this project has led to discussion and cooperation over training and in operational procedures. This, together with increasingly common equipment, is both cost-effective and improves interoperability.

It appears that when customers get together there are big savings to be made. Procurement, for 50 appliances a year, is one of the items on the south east's

shopping list. If it goes ahead, nine services working together will be able to drive a far harder bargain than if they were individually purchasing appliances.



6. Sharing chief officers and other senior staff

Case study Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service: sharing Chief Officers

Introduction

This case study provides an insight into an amalgamation of separate council directorates in Cornwall Council. The intended saving is just under £2 million.

The new directorate

This new directorate brought together Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service, Emergency Management, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Team (Community Safety), Environmental Health, Licensing, Port Health, Registration, Coroner's Services and Trading Standards. The new directorate is led by a single director and heads of service.

Rationale for amalgamation

- Release capacity to deliver major transformation programmes linked to shared services such as combined intelligence-led targeting and risk mapping.
- Harmonisation of back-office functions to create a central support function and joined-up working to realise £300,000 from combination and £250,000 Cornwall FRS back-office efficiencies.
- Harmonisation and integration of wider Cornwall Council enforcement role.

They use an economic rationale to substantiate the amalgamation.

“Our main long-term focus is to deliver cost savings anticipated to be in the region of £2 million across the directorate, whilst ensuring that the qualities of our frontline services are not detrimentally affected.”

Conclusion

Cornwall FRS's sharing of their CFO and amalgamation with another directorate provides an anticipated saving of just under £2 million.

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, and Dorset FRS have agreed to pilot shared management team model.

7. Voluntary amalgamations between Fire and Rescue authorities

Overview

Amalgamations of FRSs are delicate matters. As a study of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service amalgamation (to be published by DCLG imminently) will doubtless show, there is a wide range of political, legal, financial and organisational considerations.

We have collated evidence on two potential mergers. Both are in what may be called the 'feasibility stage' and preparing to present their findings to their respective politicians.

West and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Services

West and East Sussex FRSs have identified five options:

1. Status quo – some collaboration.
2. Full collaboration of back office functions and controls but retaining two senior management teams and two authorities.
3. Full collaboration but establishing one senior management team and two authorities.
4. Full collaboration with one senior management team and the establishment of a joint board sitting between the two authorities to manage the single management team.
5. Combination between East and West Sussex FRS.

They hope for these five options to potentially be reduced to two. Alternatively there could be a decision not to proceed with any of the options.

Cumbria and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

The retirement of Northumberland FRS's CFO provides a timely opportunity for discussions between Northumberland FRS and Cumbria FRS, and councillors have commissioned a feasibility study to consider sharing fire and rescue service management up to a full merger. Key to this is the evaluation of how services would be improved and budgetary savings. Both services suggest they:

- are performing at similar levels
- share similar risk profiles
- have a mixture of full-time, day crewing and retained duty systems with broadly similar operating practices and equipment
- share a significant border with good road and rail links between the two.

Devon and Somerset provide some guidance

Once the feasibility studies are complete, councillors will need to recognise to what extent they are prepared to proceed, and the challenges involved. CFO Lee Howell, from Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, has listed some reflections on his experience in Devon and Somerset FRS on how to create a successful amalgamation:



- have broad support and sufficient leadership for the change
- communicate openly, honestly and regularly with staff and stakeholders
- implement decisively and swiftly to limit uncertainty
- members need to be clear what they are seeking from the merger (or shared services short of a merger)
- have elected members on an oversight board allows control to be exercised and the scope of any review to be determined by them
- offer a voluntary redundancy package during the 'lead in' period would allow the team who will be implementing the merger (the most difficult part) to be in place on day one.

Conclusion

These case studies provide a short insight into what is a very complicated process that will cause much concern in both organisations, and call for powerful leadership from councillors.

Whilst retaining a level of caution, any complex long-term model of this size will need considerable political will – particularly as the people who are appraising and making decisions are potentially holding the jobs that are most vulnerable.

8. Other innovative approaches

Case study

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service: becoming a precepting authority – the Total Place concept

Introduction

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service are looking to establish a standalone Community Protection Authority with precepting powers that would combine the fire and ambulance services and make both services more accountable to the public providing more control over their finances.

A new Community Protection Authority would involve:

- prevention to reduce demand on the new blue light service
- protection (combined law enforcement roles, so as to create a safe environment in all of its facets. This may include joint working with trading standards and environmental services)
- coordination via emergency planning (that would have the power to direct responding agencies in both the emergency and recovery phases of an incident).

Rationale

The FRS is well respected by the public, and considers that with structural change it can use its public standing and reputation to be even more effective at reducing risk and preventing suffering across a wider range of potential emergency incidents.

Northamptonshire FRS is one of the cheapest in the country, in terms of cost per head of population, and in recent years has been reducing incidents and fire risk by a significant amount. As a county council-based service it is spending is a very small percentage of the county council's overall budget. The local government settlement has treated county councils differently from standalone fire and rescue services. As the foreword has indicated, county councils are receiving a 25 per cent front-loaded cut along with the rest of local government, (as opposed to FRAs where the cut is back-loaded 25 per cent and only on the revenue support grant element of their funding). A Community Protection Authority would release the FRA from county council financial restrictions which can compromise FRA/community development plans and strategies.

Councillor André Gonzalez De Savage (portfolio holder in Northamptonshire for the Fire and Rescue Service) and CFO Martyn Emberson recognise that it may be difficult for the county council to effectively support their fire and rescue service in the future.

Concept of localism

CFO Martyn Emberson recognises that with precepting powers similar to the combined and metropolitan fire and rescue authorities, the Community Protection Authority would be more transparent and accountable to the public in directing public safety.

Conclusion

This new approach to public governance and service delivery is a model that fits firmly into the framework of localism and the concept of Total Place through which an interested public may challenge professional silos (Redfern 2009).

It is unlikely that many people have ever interpreted localism as a potential way of increasing funding. The Audit Commission recognised just how much the fire and rescue service can mobilise public support when stations are threatened with closure; in fact they chastened fire authorities over not winning these debates. In seeking to use public support rather than challenge it, CFO Emberson has political support locally and potential support from Government Ministers too.

Case study London Fire Brigade: incident risk modelling

The London Fire Brigade (LFB) Incident Risk Analysis Toolkit, or 'iRAT', is an umbrella term used to describe a suite of statistical analysis techniques which have been adopted to better understand where incidents occur and who is affected by them.

Developed during 2005 and launched in the autumn of 2006, iRAT combines what LFB know about incidents with the information they have about people and where and how they live. Developed to support the LFB performance management framework, iRAT identifies the areas of London where incidents are most likely to occur so that preventative campaigns and activities can be focused in those areas to reduce incidents, stop fatalities and casualties and improve LFB performance.

iRAT can be used to identify the likelihood of any type of emergency incident occurring, but most of the work in developing the models has focused on accidental fires in the home (accidental dwelling fires or ADFs), where most fire casualties occur and where they target their Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) and the majority of their fire prevention and community safety campaigns.

In 2008, the outputs from the statistical modelling and our knowledge about lifestyle risk were combined to create 'priority postcodes' for targeted HFSVs. Priority postcodes enable the iRAT risk information to be more easily interpreted and provides an easy tool for station-based staff to plan and prioritise their HFSV work.

There were three key outcomes from the iRAT project, which were:

- the end product was a proactive, risk-based tool
- the tool was easy to understand, its outputs were simple, focusing on those that were most at risk from fire in London
- the strategy was completely evidenced based with data supporting each part of the process.

Additional resource for the project was negligible:

- use of existing information management staff
- off-the-shelf statistical analysis software
- off-the-shelf mapping software for presentation.

Efficiencies from the tool include:

- fire stations save time, no need for local work in prioritising areas to conduct community fire safety.

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