

Annex A Fire Reform – Delivering the Authority’s Workforce Reform Programme - 2010 to date

1. Background

In 2009, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) was an underperforming Service, in relation to national community safety improvement targets and peer comparison. A Peer Review undertaken in 2009 concluded that limited progress had been made in terms of making progress against a range of serious shortcomings highlighted in an Audit Commission ‘Comprehensive Performance Assessment’ carried out in 2007. The Assessment concluded that the Fire Authority was at risk of not meeting the national targets for community safety improvement by 2010.

A further report undertaken by an Audit Commission Consultant at that same time highlighted some underlying issues. Examples included:-

- Lack of clear strategic direction
- ‘Dysfunctional family’ – the top leadership team
- Silo working
- Poor performance against national targets
- Resistance to change/risk averse
- Ineffective Communication
- Poor and lack of management practices, controls and consistency

The Authority was also faced with a rapidly changing external environment with the 2008/9 ‘Credit Crunch’ and the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR):

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203826/Spending_review_2010.pdf

In January 2010 the Fire Authority appointed a new Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer with a brief to tackle under performance within the Service and a remit to recruit a new senior management team of professionals to achieve this aim as a priority. The new senior management team were in place within six months with a mix of internal and external appointments which built on existing knowledge and experience, balanced by new appointments with a track record of leading successful organisational change.

2. Purpose of the workforce reform programme

Against the context of the CSR and consequent need to meet stringent financial targets, establish operational priorities and tackle the underperformance issues referred to earlier, the Authority acknowledged the need to set a clear direction for continuous improvement and transformation and supported the establishing of a framework of strategic aims to help shape the workforce reform programme.

The initial workforce related strategic aims were:-

- Effective organisational design and deployment of people resources to deliver the Authority's strategic priorities, ensuring flexibility is built in to adapt speedily to changing environments.
- Build people capacity and capabilities to ensure the Authority is well placed to deliver its strategic priorities and enable staff to continually develop and improve skills.
- Create and embed the cultural framework needed to support delivery of the Authority's vision for communities and for staff to thrive in a values driven high performing organisation.
- Ensure the Authority is able to attract, secure and retain the right calibre, diverse workforce, in order to deliver on going day to day services and longer term strategic plans.
- Deliver increasing value for money people services which best support delivery of the Authority's strategic plans.

The strategic aims were subsequently built into the Authority's Corporate Plan 2012 to 2015 in support of delivering the Public Safety Plan 2012 to 2017.

3. The approach

In early 2010 the Authority had very limited foundations in place to deliver successful improvement and transformation. This needed to be tackled early and at pace. With the added pressures of the CSR and significant legacy issues identified by the Audit Commission and Peer Reviews, the Authority was faced with having to improve day to day services and simultaneously deliver a 'step change' in the way the Service was run. The philosophy was to work towards a position where the Authority planned to be well ahead of the CSR financial requirements to generate funds to support organisational change and mitigate risk.

This simultaneous change programme was identified as a corporate risk in view of the financial position, the level and complexity of required change, the risk averse culture and limited experience of organisational change and potential for employee relations issues.

Mitigations were incorporated into programme plans and the management guidance and the Culture Change model described in Appendix 2. Whilst the adverse external environment and the Authority's publicly recorded under performance provided tangible reasons to answer the 'Why reform' question, it was also important to set out clear goals and direction which would later be translated into plans and a communications and consultation strategy.

The Authority's Vision set the longer term direction for the service.

'Our vision is to make Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes the safest areas in England in which to live, work and travel'.

The vision was translated into strategic aims and work programmes within a 3 year corporate plan 2012 to 2015 with clearly defined outcomes.

The initial phases of the workforce reform programme 2010 to 2012 were mainly initiated and led top down which reflected the limited change management experience and prevailing culture with the Service. The initiatives were supported by co-ordinated interventions to ensure successful reform. Appendix 2 outlines the main co-ordinated interventions set out as a flexible Culture Change Model to lay the foundations for change.

4. Main achievements

Appendix 1 sets out the workforce reform related programmes and deliverables in chronological order. Notable main achievements to highlight are:-

i) Reshaping the Service: the 'Moving Forward' Programme

This was the first significant change programme which commenced in autumn 2010 through to early 2013, delivered on a phased basis. The programme focused on delivering better community services through shifting central support services to more targeted Area based services delivered locally from within stations.

'Moving Forward' was an integrated programme covering workforce reform, systems improvements, organisational structure change and financial savings.

Fire Authority Members led by example by reducing the numbers from 21 to 17. Senior Management roles were combined and reduced, as were Group and Station Manager Numbers, leading to a 25 per cent reduction overall in management.

At key stages of the reform programme directors and managers undertook a leadership development programme which focused on equipping them to lead change, manage performance and hold difficult conversations. One key outcome of the programme was defined role-model leadership behaviours, which were later incorporated into the performance management system mentioned in ii) below. Managers are reviewed annually against these behaviours and they are now built into recruitment, development and training programmes.

ii) Performance Management System (PMS)

In 2011 and 2012 a PMS was introduced, more commonly known as an appraisal system.

By 2014 the PMS had evolved to a core requirement of any assessment and development centre process, supported Authority wide recognition procedures and identified individual and collective learning and development requirements. Although a difficult and lengthy journey, the PMS processes are now embedded into day to day service delivery. We are not complacent and continuously review the PMS annually to support ongoing reform.

The PMS and leadership development programmes were instrumental in supporting a significant shift from an 'over managed and under led' culture to leaders beginning to take ownership of the reform programme.

This culture shift did take considerable time and lessons learned were incorporated into future reform programmes.

iii) Predictive Workforce planning to align resources to risk and demand

Through strategic and tactical workforce and succession planning introduced in late 2010, the Authority has been able to predict issues and opportunities relating to an ageing workforce. For example, changes to pensions have resulted in our operational staff having to work longer. The Authority's response is to develop new roles, enhance existing ones and design new employment propositions to ensure resilience and high standards of service delivery are maintained through fit for purpose resourcing, skills development and retention programmes. These are covered in Annex B.

The Home Secretary in her Fire Reform speech, 24 May 2016 stated that "In the last 10 years, the overall size of the fire workforce has not changed significantly despite the number of incidents attended falling by 42%." The Authority has reduced the workforce by 25 percent since 2010 through introducing new and revised ways of working, with many of the ideas coming from the workforce themselves. This has been achieved without any compulsory fire fighter redundancies and reinforces the Authority's progressive approach to delivering transformation through:-

- Putting the community at the heart of everything that we do
- Focusing on positive impacts on front line service provision
- Engaging and involving the workforce and other key stakeholders to design new operating models
- Building on organisational capabilities

iv) Impacts of Industrial Action on innovation, confidence, pace of change

The Authority faced a lengthy period of industrial action, arising from a national dispute between the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) on pension reform, from September 2013 to February 2015. Whilst the dispute period was very difficult for all involved, it also resulted in high levels of innovation in relation to operational crewing models, process improvement, electronic communications and improving general flexibility. There was also significant evidence of breaking down silos and building better understanding between operational and support services staff. It was also noted that managers were supported to try out new ideas, and this began to cement the new enabling role for middle management.

Specific outcomes of the innovation are covered in Annex B, the main ones relating to demand and risk led resourcing models.

v) Fit for purpose policy to enable transformation

The Authority carried out a gap analysis on its employment related policies in late 2010 comparing the 'existing as is' with best practice requirements. Significant gaps were highlighted with existing policies out of date, ambiguous and inconsistent. By 2013 overall employment related

policy was transformed with nine overarching policies which set out the Authority's strategic intent, supported by a range of specific procedures, guidance and technical notes.

The policies were modern, fit for purpose, short, easier to understand, transparent and owned by managers. An example of a core policy and supporting strategic intent which supports the workforce reform programme is Reward and Recognition.

Since April 2012 under the Localism Act, the Authority has a duty to review and publish its Pay Policy Statement annually. The five annual reviews to date evidence continuous improvement trends in the ratio of highest to lowest pay from 12.7 to 1 to 10.71 to 1, so the Authority is well within the stated boundaries declared in the policy (no greater than 1:20 ratio).

The Authority's reward and recognition priorities are to move to localised terms and conditions of service and different employment propositions designed to attract and retain a flexible, more diverse workforce. Since 2013 the Authority's Pay Policy has included a range of options to continue to adapt the employment proposition to allow for different models of employment which fit with work patterns of a modernised workforce, supported by a range of new employment contracts. For example, the use of employee 'merit awards' that are linked to evidenced excellent performances. Potential management considerations incorporate staff reductions, combining or reducing supervisory layers, and, the policy allows for the principle of 'gain sharing' to self-fund any managerial local terms and conditions.

In 2014 the Authority introduced a local pay and grading system for Support Services staff, combined with an equal pay audit.

The current policy recognises new employees may be employed outside of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Scheme of Conditions of Service 2004; known as the 'Grey Book'. Annex B outlines current examples.

http://bucksfire.gov.uk/files/6214/5995/4700/Pay_Policy_Principles_and_Statement_2016-17_V5.0_April_2016.compressed.pdf

5. Summary

The level of sustainable workforce reform delivered by the Authority between 2010 and 2015 has been remarkable considering the starting point, level of external change, national machinery and lengthy pensions related dispute.

A key measure of cultural reform within the Authority is that since 2013 many of the workforce reform programmes have been initiated and /or led by first line management and staff through creating the framework to pilot new ideas, enabling a culture of accountability, transparency and sharing learning. This is a key shift from the more traditional approach of 'top down initiated change'.

Achievements to date have been delivered by a smaller, more flexible, professional workforce who take great pride in their contribution to saving lives.

The Authority recognised early that collaborating with other FRSs, emergency services and other sectors where we can identify and adopt best practice without reinventing wheels is the way forward. This is covered in Annex B.

More significant challenges lie ahead for the Authority and the wider Fire and Rescue /Emergency Services Sector. The Authority acknowledges that in addition to ongoing innovation, adaptability and agility within the Service; partnership, collaboration and other organisational design and governance models will play an increasing role in the workforce reform programme 2016 to 2020; covered in Annex B.