

Review of Operational Assurance Arrangements

**Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes
Fire and Rescue Service
October 2016**

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Glossary

ADSU	Automatic Distress Signalling Unit
ARA	Analytical Risk Assessment
BMKFRS	Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire & Rescue Service
CC	Crew Commander
FDO	Flexible Duty Officer
ICLx	Incident Command Level (1,2,3,4)
ICTT	Incident Command Training Team
ICU	Incident Command Unit
IRMP	Integrated Risk Management Plan
JESIP	Joint Emergency Service's Interoperability Programme
KLOE	Key Line of Enquiry
NOGIC	National Operational Guidance Incident Command
OA	Operational Assurance
OAL	Operational Assurance Ltd
OISG	Organisational Improvement Steering Group
PDR	Personal Development Review
QA	Quality Assurance
SDS	Shift Duty System
SSRA	Site Specific Risk Assessment
SFJ	Skills for Justice (an accrediting body)
SOP	Standard Operating Policy
WC	Watch Commander

1. Executive Summary

In July 2016 BMKFRS contracted Operational Assurance Ltd. (OAL) to provide an objective appraisal of service Operational Assurance (OA). The review was to consider the application of a newly developed Assurance Model, following a significant internal restructuring which included its staffing model, departmental make up and its financial arrangements.

It was made clear by BMKFRS management during scoping that they fully expected OAL to identify gaps in the Assurance Model as a consequence of the resource reductions, some years of change, and recent departmental restructuring. BMKFRS management intend to use this review as one of the means to consolidate procedures, processes and operational matters in order to confirm the assurance model required.

A four-person team from OAL carried out the review during October 2016. All team members are former senior FRS officers with currency, accreditation and experience in the fields of incident command, internal operational assurance and verification, auditing, quality assurance and the management of health and safety. Prior preparation, working closely with the BMKFRS leadership, had identified a number of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLoEs).

By prior agreement with BMKFRS the review examined two areas:

- **Incident Command:** This element tested the function of the Assurance Model and internal OA team through focusing on the adoption and application of the 'National Operational Guidance for Incident Command' (NOGIC).
- **Operational Training and Command Competence:** This element tested the function of the model and team through focusing upon the BMKFRS Training Framework and its impact upon OA and competency.

During the course of the review the OAL team conducted a range of structured interviews involving a cross-section of BMKFRS staff and employing a multi-layered approach to include strategic managers, department heads, systems managers, operational officers and firefighters. The review team attended operational incidents where practicable and training events at several locations, including a medium-scale (five pump) exercise held at a disused military establishment. BMKFRS staff were candid and helpful, providing the OAL team, without exception, to all information requested including access to all recording systems.

Review Results

BMKRS has undergone significant change in recent years, in particular to meet stretching financial challenges. Many changes have been innovative and creative in both conception and application, with evidence of much vision, planning and forward thinking.

OAL found clear evidence that BMKFRS has a comprehensive organisational understanding of the importance of effective incident command to the safety of operational staff and the public, and to the limitation of economic and community impact arising from incidents. Further, there is a clear understanding of the 'Safe Person Concept': The newly introduced NOGIC is

being largely applied and where resources allow, improvement opportunities are being fully exploited.

The BMKFRS Operational Assurance model has been well promulgated and adopted at senior level but more unevenly at Station Commander and less senior ranks.

The model relies on inputs of information from external sources (eg. public enquiries or coroners reports) and internal ones (eg. feedback from operational incidents or training exercises) to focus improvement action planning.

- **Use of external analysis** has until recently been good with evidence of learning throughout the service. Currently however it is suffering from resource shortfalls, with potential weaknesses emerging. OAL understands that plans are in place to address these resourcing issues.
- **Internal information** streams have the potential to be very strong. There is a widespread use of monitoring officers at operational incidents, and evidence from leadership and staff is that intense training at the Fire Service College is both welcome and beneficial. There is however potential for improvement: there are weaknesses in the I.T. system which allows staff to store, recall, use and manage learning, to the extent that it may be hampering effective improvement across the service. More, larger, exercises (more than two pumps) may also be beneficial.

Once inputs which will lead to improvement has been gathered, there is considerable evidence that the OA process throughout BMKFRS is driving significant change in the key areas of Learning & Development, Policy & Resilience and Organisational Development. Such change is progressing due to organisational culture and individual commitment. Whilst clearly positive, there is a current potential weakness in the lack of formal tracking of improvement actions both in management structures and once again in underpinning I.T. There is therefore the potential that individual actions will get 'lost' if key individuals move to new roles or short term priorities.

Recommendations

OAL has identified 30 recommendations for improvement, which BMKFRS may wish to consider. Each is discussed in the relevant section of this report, and highlighted in bold. For ease of review and action planning, all recommendation are then tabulated at Appendix E . Many were, naturally, already being addressed by BMKFRS at the time of OAL's review and it must therefore be stressed that this report simply provides a snapshot of the situation during the week of the report not a forecast of completion of those actions.

Of the 30 recommendations identified, there are three themes which OAL suggest should be of particular priority – these are summarised below and at Appendix D.

Priority Recommendations	
P.1	BMKFRS should continue to develop and resource effective internal processes through which matters arising from significant external and internal events are captured, communicated and effectively managed through to a conclusion that is acceptable to the service. This should include (for example) processes for undertaking gap analysis, communicating findings to operational staff and informing resultant training delivery.
P.2	In support of recommendation 1, BMKFRS should develop the use of an active monitoring system to act as a smart, service-wide tool. This system should incorporate a user-friendly database that is capable of providing auditable records and is easily accessible to all staff.
P.3	BMKFRS should consider re-establishing an effective Operational Assurance forum, with the necessary direction and authority to assist in the formal management and progression of issues arising, through to meaningful resolution.

Conclusion

BMKFRS has a culture of positive response to internal and externally driven change. OAL found many examples of excellent practice in its approach to Operational Assurance. Where however, weaknesses and areas for improvement were identified, the service should be able to identify clear routes to improvement, and in some cases is already doing so.

2. Scope and Focus of the Review

OA and Resilience in BMKFRS is largely dependent upon two key factors; the implementation of the BMKFRS Assurance Model and the role of the BMKFRS OA Team, (formerly known as the Performance and Evaluation (P&E) Team).

The BMKFRS Assurance Model (Appendix B) sets out the methodology by which the service will obtain OA and incorporates a wide array of inputs and outputs to achieve this. In order to test the function of the model it was agreed that the review would focus on two risk critical functions, namely:

Incident Command

This element of the review tested the function of the Assurance Model and OA team through focusing upon the adoption and application of the 'National Operational Guidance for Incident Command' (NOGIC) in BMKFRS.

Operational Training and Command Competence

This element of the review tested the function of the Assurance Model and OA Team through focusing upon the BMKFRS Training Framework and its impact upon OA and competency.

3. Methodology

OAL is a company that comprises former senior FRS professionals, specialising and trained in providing the commissioning client with a professional, focused and fully independent review of agreed risk critical functions. Each team member has wide reaching FRS experience across a number of disciplines, which is used to inform the recommendations within this report.

3.1 Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs)

In preparation for the BMKFRS Review (the review), OAL worked closely with colleagues from within BMKFRS to identify and agree a number of primary KLOEs around which the body of this report has been constructed. These included:

To consider the Assurance Model:

- Test the effective implementation of the NOGIC in BMKFRS
- Ensure all inputs are effectively reported, captured, and reacted to thereby promoting organisational learning
- Confirm all resultant actions are proportionate and appropriate
- Confirm that information flows through the organisation effectively
- Confirm that information reaches the stakeholders and is clearly understood
- Confirm continuous operational improvement is universally acknowledged as a key driver within BMKFRS
- Test the effectiveness of the key inter-relationships considered central in providing OA and continuous operational improvement
- Test the 'end to end' process
- Test the provision of reassurance to the Fire Authority
- Test for compliance with the BMKFRS training framework and its impact on operational assurance and competency
- Confirm compliance with the National Framework and the FRS Act 2004 in respect of operations

To consider the role of the BMKFRS OA Team in respect of:

- Facilitating delivery of the Assurance Model
- Considering all potential external and internal inputs
- Conducting and reacting to active monitoring
- Conducting and reacting to audit and review
- Facilitating the debrief and review of front line crew activities
- Reacting to safety critical issues
- Progressing outputs to influence
 - Policy
 - Guidance
 - Learning and development
 - Internal governance arrangements

4. Delivering the Review

The on-site element of the review was undertaken by a four-person OAL team and was carried out between October 10 and 13, 2016. All team members are former senior FRS officers with currency, accreditation and proven experience in the fields of:

- Incident command training, assessment and competence
- Strategic fire service management
- The provision and review of operational assurance
- Internal assurance and verification
- Business auditing
- Quality assurance systems
- Health and safety management
- Active monitoring systems

Short biographies of the attending OAL team are included at Appendix C. The OAL team Leader, Garry Jones, provided coordination and performed the role of OAL single point of contact. Providing the principal points of contact for BMKFRS were Steve Wells, (Group Commander Training, Learning and Development) and Station Commanders Keith Carmichael and Nick Honor (OA Team).

During the course of the review the OAL team conducted a range of structured interviews involving a cross-section of BMKFRS staff and employing a multi-layered approach to include strategic managers, department heads, systems managers, operational officers and firefighters. The review team attended operational incidents where practicable and training events at several locations, including a medium-scale (five pump) exercise held at a disused military establishment.

The above approach ensured the OAL team were provided with sufficient opportunity to triangulate evidence and thereby to inform and strengthen the findings and recommendations offered within this report.

During the review period, evidence was gathered using the following approaches:

- i. Scheduled interviews with operational commanders
 - These interviews were conducted in the interviewee's own workplace
 - Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder with the interviewee being offered the choice to decline its use if so wished. It should be noted that none of those being interviewed declined the use of the recorder, providing in over 50 hours of recorded information.
 - The findings from each interview were uploaded to a secure web-based application and subsequently analysed, with the resultant outcomes providing the evidence to inform and support this report.
- ii. Scheduled interviews with department heads or their representatives in accordance with the stated aims and objectives of operational assurance or training.

- iii. Scheduled interviews with operational Station Commanders responsible for the operational competence of station based personnel.
- iv. Scheduled interviews with operational Watch and Crew Commanders responsible for the operational competence of station based personnel.
- v. Unplanned opportunistic questioning of operational firefighters at various locations, training events and operational incidents.
- vi. Attendance at planned station training events.
- vii. Attendance at operational incidents.
 - The attendance at operational incidents was, by its very nature, opportunistic. However, this provided a rich source of information and evidence that was directly observed by the review team.
- viii. Scheduled interviews with the BMKFRS OA Team.
- ix. Thorough analysis of BMKFRS operational policies and procedures to include operational eLearning, recording systems and personal training records.
- x. Attendance by the review team at a medium-scale (five pump) exercise at a former military language school, with specific areas of interest designated for each OAL team member.
- xi. Daily briefings to BMKFRS managers to advise on any significant findings and to confirm the direction of the review at each stage.

The above approach provided a challenging schedule for the review team to deliver, however, the highly supportive approach from BMKFRS removed any potential barriers and facilitated unbridled access by the team to valid and credible evidence. This included unconditional access to staff, full disclosure of any evidence requested and the approval to attend incidents.

Consequential Findings

Although not strictly falling within the scope of the review and the associated KLOEs, any matters arising as 'Consequential Findings' have also been included within the body of this report, so as to maximise the potential value of the review to BMKFRS and its key stakeholders.

5. Key Findings

It was made clear by BMKFRS management during the review scoping stages that they welcomed the independence of the review and looked forward to receiving recommendations as an important way to build on the changes they had implemented, including environmental factors such as resource reductions, and recent departmental restructuring. BMKFRS management intend to use this review as one of the means to consolidate procedures, processes and operational matters in order to confirm the assurance model required.

OAL found this open and honest position statement most encouraging, and wholly reflective of an organisation that welcomes challenge and change. OAL found BMKFRS staff to be industrious and candid and provided the team with access to all areas with no exceptions, including full access to the recording systems currently employed within the service.

OAL found clear evidence that BMKFRS has a comprehensive organisational understanding of the importance of effective incident command, to the safety of operational staff and the public, and to the limitation of economic and community impact arising from incidents.

The recent organisational restructure has resulted in challenges to the effective delivery of the training model and the provision of operational and organisational assurance. Many of the identified issues from this review and their associated recommendations may well already be in the process of being resolved. However, this report, is based upon what the team observed and was able to evidence during the week of review. It will be for BMKFRS to determine the final levels of priority applied to each recommendation.

Specifically, with regard to the review objectives: there is a clear understanding of the 'Safe Person Concept': The newly introduced NOGIC is being largely applied and where resources allow, improvement opportunities are being fully exploited. In each area, however, recommendations for improvement are provided.

The review identified 30 recommendations, of which 3 are, in OAL's view, items which BMKFRS may wish to consider a priority, particularly those around the progression and communication of external inputs. Recommendations are contained within this report (highlighted in bold) within the discussion of each area studied. They are then summarised in a single table at Appendix E, with the three priority themes also extracted at Appendix D.

A number of cross-cutting issues also emerged of which the most important are:

5.1 Active Monitoring

As the service moves towards employing a single 'one stop shop' electronic system for the identification, collation, allocation and conclusion of risk based activities (e.g. VIPER), the service will need to ensure this system is compatible with the reduced OA Team establishment and so enables more effective management of risks and issues to a satisfactory conclusion. Additionally, such a system should be accessible by those staff who would be most at risk. In most cases this will be the operational crews and their managers. The OAL team observed that this is not always the case at the moment.

As examples, the review team found evidence of:

- i. Difficulty using the multi layered filing systems used online on the service networked drives. Such difficulty has resulted in staff being unaware of key risk information, even though it was later proven to exist on the drives.
- ii. A system heavily reliant on individual diligence and unbroken attendance at work when managing identified issues to conclusion. Broadly these issues are recorded within individual's emails with a potential for them to go unaddressed should staff move on through promotion, retirement, etc.
- iii. Underpinning awareness and knowledge of risk management by those undertaking the role of Monitoring Officer requires attention to strengthen the effectiveness of this vital role.

5.2 The Role of the OA Team

It was evidenced that the establishment of the OA Team has been reduced, however it was also evidenced that the responsibilities and systems of the Team remain broadly unchanged from the previously fully resourced Performance and Evaluation Team. As such, it was apparent to OAL that the current team are experiencing significant difficulty fulfilling their individual and team commitments and will continue to do so unless effective tools are provided to assist them in delivering the role.

5.3 Management of External Inputs

During the review, considerable time was spent to determine the service response to significant national and local events, examples used by OAL were recent firefighter deaths and injuries resulting in a 'Preventing Future Deaths Report' (as set out in paragraphs 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013).

It was evidenced that while certain service managers had a good awareness of these events and their resultant reports and recommendations, operational staff had almost no awareness or knowledge of the recommendations they provide, with the consequent risk of a reoccurrence in BMKFRS. **[This informs OAL's suggested priority theme P.1 in Annex D and Recommendation 6.2.1 explained in Section 6 of this report and also extracted as part of the summary list of recommendation in Appendix E)**

5.4 Policy and Guidance

During interviews, BMKFRS principal managers confirmed that the Assurance Model is designed to be the primary method of progressing external and internal inputs with specific regard to:

- Horizon scanning of external and internal inputs
- Gap analysis with regard to risk
- Internal review of standing operational procedures
- Internal review of existing policy and any consequent changes required
- Audit and continual review (active monitoring)
- Embedding training and development strategy
- The provision of assurance, audit and scrutiny to the Fire Authority

During the review several examples were observed where service managers were clearly aware of the newly designed Assurance Model (an example being that several of these managers had the model printed and displayed in their office) yet operational watch officers and firefighters had little awareness of the models' existence or its potential impact on their safety and competence.

5.4.1 It is recommended that the Operational Assurance model is clearly published and communicated, that roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and finally, that understanding is confirmed.

5.5 Debriefing Activities

BMKFRS provide an electronic recording system that allows operational staff to conduct debriefing of operational incidents and training events. Although staff are aware of the process involved, it was evidenced that the potential organisational learning was not being fully exploited. OAL established that submitted debriefs are often not responded to by the relevant teams (See Section 7.1: 'The Role of the OA team'), potentially reducing 'buy in' from crews and their commanders. Staff reported that they had difficulties obtaining reports submitted by other crews and as such were often unaware of identified improvement opportunities submitted by other watches and stations. It was also observed that the requirement to complete an operational debrief is primarily driven from management, rather than from those crews in attendance. Such methodology may not promote organisational learning as set out in NOGIC as it is reliant upon managers identifying such incidents that merit these debriefs, followed by an instruction to complete.

NOGIC states:

'If this information is not recorded, post-incident debriefs will not have a decision-making audit trail to review. This may limit the lessons learned from an incident and may not support effective feedback to aid service improvements'¹

5.6 Quality Assurance of Operational Training

It was evidenced that the current QA process is broadly unachievable due to staffing issues in the QA Team and the demands placed upon the Area Trainers' in delivering the FSC aspect of the role, alone. OAL recommend the QA targets should be reduced in quantity and increased in quality, so as to incorporate other aspects of operational preparedness. [Recommendations 7.8.1 and 7.8.2 relate] Examples would be Station Reviews, planning of training, management of attendance, etc. This matter is discussed in greater detail within Section 7

5.7 Operational Briefing and Handover

OAL interviewed a selection of operational commanders to confirm the current BMKFRS arrangements for briefing and handing over information at incidents and training events. In particular, this line of enquiry focussed on the interviewees' understanding of shared situational awareness, and what they considered to constitute 'key information'.

¹ Extract from National Operational Guidance for Incident Command (NOGIC): Page 65

BMKFRS staff demonstrated a good level of underpinning knowledge with regard to shared situational awareness and examples of key information were provided without prompting. However, it was noted that a number of recurring omissions were evident within the formulated 'briefing and handover' information and it is the opinion of OAL that these omissions are attributable to use of the "OTHERS" acronym;

OTHERS:

- Objectives
- Tactical Mode
- Hazards
- Existing resources
- Resources required
- Safety systems

As can be observed, the above acronym makes no reference to the 'tactical plan'.

5.7.1 OAL recommend that BMKFRS gives consideration to revising or replacing the 'OTHERS' methodology, to ensure the procedure includes the following points. Any revised handover methodology should be adopted for training BMKFRS staff at the FSC:

- Situation
- Hazards identified
- Objectives
- Plan to meet the objectives
- Resources present and requested
- Incident command structure
- Tactical mode(s) in use

5.8 Appraisal and Acquisition training at Fire Service College

It has been evidenced that the joint undertaking with FSC has produced satisfactory results in line with service expectations and this report provides recommendations that will hopefully build on these successes. This joint undertaking has proven to be very popular with crews and commanders and is reported to provide high quality training in the management of one to three pump incidents. The value of exercising larger incidents is discussed below.

5.9 Operational Exercising

Training Section managers confirmed that organisational changes have resulted in a slowdown in the medium and large-scale exercise schedule. OAL recommend a strengthening of this activity in order to provide command opportunities to officers and crews and to develop skills in the use of the functional roles at larger incidents, in line with guidance contained within the NOGIC. **[See Recommendations 7.3.1 and 8.1.1]**

6. The Assurance Model

Through reviewing the BMKFRS Assurance Model at Appendix A, it can be quickly established that the service seeks to provide operational assurance through the comprehensive capture of external and internal issues (INPUTS) and the effective analysis, prioritisation and progression of these within the organisation (OUTPUTS), so as to influence policy, training, organisational development and continuous improvement (OUTCOMES).

An initial observation of the review team is that BMKFRS's desire to implement a structured Assurance Model, with an aim to embed this into all aspects of the service is seen as best practice. The Assurance Model is considered to be a sound starting point on which to build a credible and comprehensive system.

6.1 The Role of the OA team

The Performance and Evaluation (P&E) function was first introduced into BMKFRS in 2011 and consisted of a team of five experienced Station Commanders (SCs), supported by a dedicated administrator, undertaking a range of related duties in satisfaction of the service's OA policy. The general perception of the team amongst operational staff was that they conducted a monitoring and 'policing' role.

As a result of the financial challenges facing the organisation and in line with a related restructuring programme, the P&E Team was reduced through natural wastage and as team members retired the decision was made not to have them replaced. The final substantive member of the former P&E Team retired in December 2015, leaving one temporary SC as the only remaining incumbent. As a direct result of the loss of resources most of the previous activities undertaken by P&E (including the collation of external inputs and Station Reviews) were discontinued and a remodelling programme saw responsibility for the quality assurance (QA) of station based activity pass to the Learning and Development function.

In September 2016 responsibility for P&E moved under a new directorate and the team (now consisting of two SCs), was rebranded 'Operational Assurance'. An advertisement has recently circulated to attract three new members into the OA Team, notably one Watch Commander (WC) and two Crew Commanders (CCs), with the intention of providing a new OA Team structure that will consist of one SC, one WC and two CCs, with a shared administrator role (with Learning and Development).

6.2 External Inputs

In order to test this element, OAL developed a number of KLOEs that sought to establish if BMKFRS has captured and effectively progressed key recommendations and outcomes arising from a number of recent high-profile incidents that involved the loss of firefighter lives in other UK FRSs.

OAL set out to determine the extent to which the key lessons identified within a number of public reports had been captured and scrutinised by BMKFRS and where appropriate, progressed to influence operational and organisational change.

A range of external sources have been identified as raising the same (or very similar) concerns and recommendations regarding factors that have contributed to the loss of life at these incidents, these reports include:

- i. Coroner Regulation 28 Report: Report to Prevent Future Deaths (Stephen Hunt): Published: 8 June 2016
- ii. Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser (CFRA) Report: Health and Safety in the Fire and Rescue Service: Embedding Lessons Learned: Published: 3 Feb 2016
- iii. The Fire Brigades Union Report: Fatal Accident Investigation Report into the death of firefighter Ewan Williamson at The Balmoral Bar, Dalry Road, Edinburgh: Published: 20 March 2015

The KLOEs developed by OAL related to common areas of concern and the recommendations raised within the above reports, which included:

- i. Recognising the effects of heat and humidity
- ii. Handing over and taking over at incidents
- iii. Briefing and debriefing Breathing Apparatus teams
- iv. The assessment and management of risk (7(2)d, ARA, DRA, etc.)
- v. Emergency evacuation at incidents and the use of ADSU equipment

Each of the above lines of enquiry were designed to determine the level at which BMKFRS had effectively progressed and embedded the lessons learnt within its policy, procedures, training and development protocols and most importantly as a result, if safe practices were actively promoted on the incident ground itself.

Observations

Prior to recent departmental restructuring the P&E Team comprised five officers performing a variety of tasks, one of which was an outward facing role that included collating information from external sources, (see '6.2: *External Inputs*').

The review team evidenced that external reports (such as Shirley Towers² and Marlie Farm³) were previously progressed by the P&E Team who conducted a gap analysis and produced a related internal report to establish the potential for similar circumstances in BMKFRS. Staff from the Command Training Centre (CTC) worked alongside P&E colleagues to capture such information and to incorporate any related findings within the training delivery.

Interviews with staff confirmed that the restructure of the service saw the size of the P&E Team (now OA) reduced to a level where (due to capacity) such tasks have proven difficult to effectively undertake. Additionally, it was reported that restructuring of the BMKFRS training delivery model and the subsequent closure of the CTC, has impacted on the ability to contribute towards the capture of external issues and also a reduced ability to directly incorporate remedial actions within the training and development processes.

Notwithstanding that some managers demonstrated a good knowledge of recent external events (most notably the Head of Health and Safety), targeted questioning of staff

² Shirley Towers report published by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service: Final investigation report: 15 March 2013.

³ Marlie Farm Significant Findings Report: Published by East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service: Last Update 13 February 2015.

confirmed a general lack of awareness and understanding of how external inputs are identified, managed and concluded within BMKFRS.

Few staff interviewed during the course of the review had awareness of, for example, the incident at Paul's Hair World, Oldham Street, Manchester, nor were they able to recall having sight or knowledge of the other reports listed above, their circumstance, or their resultant recommendations.

Significantly, almost all operational staff interviewed were able to recall the circumstance, recommendation and (where applicable), resultant service improvements arising from earlier incidents such as Shirley Towers (incident: April 2010, report published March 2013) and Marlie Farm (incident: December 2006, report published July 2011).

It would appear to OAL that any 'areas for development' that exist within the current processes for capturing and communicating (and indeed learning from) external incidents, coincide with the BMKFRS departmental restructuring programme and the consequential reduction in resources.

Despite this apparent slow-down in process, it was also established by OAL, (through attendance at operational incidents, training exercises, visits to fire stations and through the structured interview process), that BMKFRS does have in place the procedures and systems which satisfy the majority of the recommendations raised within each of the above reports. Indeed, through the effective and completed implementation of NOGIC alone, the service may well have addressed most (if not all) of the Incident Command (IC) related recommendations such as, for example, the provision of training for all staff to recognise the effects of heat and humidity on themselves and on their colleagues.

However, a common recommendation (or stipulation) within the external reports is for FRSs to formally review their existing processes for adequacy, and it is this requirement, if not effectively acted upon, that has potential to leave an FRS exposed in the event of any similar occurrence within its organisation.

Recommendation

6.2.1 BMKFRS should consider reviewing the processes currently employed to capture, scrutinise, manage and communicate matters arising from external inputs. This should include consideration of the service's current process for undertaking gap analysis of these external reports in order to manage identified risks to conclusion or acceptance on the service risk register.

6.3 Internal Inputs

The Assurance Model identifies a number of internal inputs as informing the process, namely:

1. Operational Incidents and Training Events
2. Debriefs
3. Station Reviews
4. Validation Training
5. Safety Events

For the purpose of undertaking the review, OAL elected to consider the elements relating to the active monitoring of operational Incidents and training events, debriefing activities and the performance of Station Reviews. Furthermore, the validation of training is covered within *Section 7.2: 'Validation (Appraisal) Training and Assessment'*.

Operational Incidents and Training Events

BMKFRS employs a rigorous approach to reviewing the performance of operational staff through the active monitoring of operational incidents and training events.

The existing active monitoring process has been in place for a number of years and involves mobilising a SC as 'Monitoring Officer' to a range of predetermined incident types. The subjects of active monitoring and the role of the Monitoring Officer are discussed in greater detail within *Section 10: 'Active Monitoring'*.

The '17.3 Incident Monitoring Report' forms produced from the above process are received by the OA Team, reviewed for any significant findings requiring immediate action and stored within a range of folders. It is notable that OAL were unable to identify any form of universally employed intelligent database to support this process.

The review team established through structured interview that BMKFRS management has already recognised the need to develop a smarter process that reports the outcomes from monitoring activities more by exception and one which is better able to inform the identification of trends.

6.4 Issue Resolution in BMKFRS

Procedure Note: '*Operational Assurance; Incident Monitoring and Improvement*' outlines the delivery of OA in BMKFRS, covering Incident Monitoring, Debriefs and the Learning Review of Command.

This procedure demonstrates how matters identified during monitoring and debriefing activities are collated in a database that is subject to analysis and review, so as to inform:

- 1) The identification and progression of 'themes'
- 2) The progression of information relevant to specific departments for consideration and resultant actions
- 3) The progression of information relating to individual observation to be forwarded to line managers for resultant actions
- 4) The production of a quarterly report offering a collation of information gathered, presented to the Organisational Improvement Steering Group (OISG).

The procedure states that information will be made available on the Service I Drive 'P&E Page' and that personnel will have access to a database of all events attended, observed and reported on by the team. Furthermore, published information is said to include:

- 1) Monthly incident monitoring reports
- 2) Monthly incident debrief reports
- 3) Station Review reports
- 4) Quarterly Steering Group Action Plans
- 5) Annual Steering Group reports

- 6) Published lessons from other Service's and agencies
- 7) Copies of relevant forms

It would appear BMKFRS currently finds itself in a transitional state between its previous arrangements for providing OA prior to organisational restructuring (i.e. its former P&E structure, out-dated procedure notes, etc.) and the implementation of its revised Assurance Model, with restructured internal departments, a new OA Team and revised practices, etc.

To help test the effectiveness of the current arrangements, BMKFRS were asked to provide a number of examples of where the issues identified by Monitoring Officers had been progressed through to a satisfactory resolution. Although the service was able to provide some reasonable examples of where this process had taken effect, it was noted that the majority of outcomes offered were achieved prior to the loss of the former P&E structure and at which point the process appears to have faltered in conjunction with the reduction in staff.

As a result of this transition, OAL noted that much of the above stated process was no longer in existence. Significant findings were considered to include:

- i. The OISG meeting forum is reported to have been discontinued some time ago. It was unclear to OAL if any clear process had been established in place of the group and to fulfil its responsibilities going forward. As a consequence on-going progression of issues arising is addressed in a manner that is heavily reliant on emails between individuals and with a consequent number of 'single points of failure'.
- ii. The current system involves the receipt of '*17.3 Incident Monitoring Report*' forms via the former 'P&E email inbox'. An 'unofficial' administrator⁴ records their receipt on a spreadsheet and files the forms in a variety of system folders. The OA Team review the incoming emails and try to act on them as necessary. Other than this, there is no recognised 'database' as described within the procedure note.
- iii. The publishing of the monthly updates on the service I Drive (as detailed above), to inform staff on OA related matters is no longer taking place.
- iv. Within the current (17.3) process the Monitoring Officer is also expected to highlight areas of notable practice, areas of compliance, areas of non-compliance and safety critical issues. This can be considered important learning for the organisation and useful for driving continuous improvement. However, currently this process is not being fully realised.

Observations

Existing arrangements for providing Operational Assurance in BMKFRS appear to no longer function as designed, following the significant organisational restructuring and the related procedure note 'Operational Assurance' is out-dated and may not stand up to scrutiny in the event of any adverse occurrence.

⁴ Following the loss of the allocated Admin Support, P&E/OA have been obtaining assistance with the administration for the team on an ad hoc and unofficial basis.

These are facts that management is both aware of and in the process of actively addressing, through the development and application of the service's new Assurance Model, and indeed through commissioning this OAL review to help further inform the process.

Whilst there is clear intent by BMKFRS to address this area of development, the current gap that exists may serve to be critical in the prevention of a future health, safety and welfare related event.

The new Assurance Model can be acknowledged as 'best practice' in its design and represents a comprehensive means to address most of the identified issues. This though, is heavily reliant on BMKFRS continuing to provide the tools, training and resources necessary to support its implementation.

Recommendations

6.4.1 BMKFRS should review its Procedure Note: 'Operational Assurance; Incident Monitoring and Improvement' at the earliest opportunity to ensure it aligns more closely with the service's new ways of working. Any revised guidance issued should clearly set out the Monitoring Officer role and re- establish the 'Thematic Reviews' process.

6.4.2 Re-establish an effective Assurance Forum, with the necessary direction and authority to manage and progress issues arising through to meaningful resolution and involving:

- a) The application of a recognised and accountable health and safety process linked directly to OA, which includes suitable arrangements to manage these elements.
- b) The progression of issues to inform the service Risk Register, Training Needs Analysis (TNA), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), etc.
- c) Clearly setting out the expectations of the Monitoring Officer role.

6.4.3 Ensure the process of OA is adequately supported by an effective, user-friendly Information Technology (IT) system that incorporates an intelligent and auditable database.

6.5 Debriefing Activities

The BMKFRS Procedure Note: *'Operational Assurance, Incident Monitoring and Improvement'* provides detailed guidance on the service's approach to undertaking incident and exercise debriefing. Within the document the three levels of debrief are set out, along with the supporting processes and mechanisms to promote continuous organisational learning.

Within the procedure note (and its supporting schematic diagram), the BMKFRS approach to debriefing is defined with such detail and rigidity that the process (if fully applied) can be difficult to achieve.

Through examining the implementation of debriefing procedures in BMKFRS, OAL established that the process is in fact 'top driven' rather than promoted from the

operational crews, with the OA Team taking responsibility for ensuring watches complete the form 17.2: 'Incident Feedback' after they have attended any incidents of any significance.

On an individual basis the OA Team take it upon themselves to continuously review the 'Daily Information Bulletin' for any incidents they consider worthy of note and from which there may be learning outcomes. The team then forward form 17.2 for the Watch Officer to complete. It is considered that were it not for the intervention of the OA Team, the 17.2 form would not often be completed, with a resultant loss of organisational development opportunities. Not only are the above practices contrary to the BMKFRS Procedure Note: 'Operational Assurance, Incident Monitoring and Improvement', it would appear that such non-compliance could (in many cases) go unchallenged.

Further examination of the process reveals that staff receive little feedback on any contribution they do make to the debriefing system (see *Section 7.3.1: 'Issue Resolution in BMKFRS'*). Consequently staff reported that they perceive little 'buy-in' towards the process.

This apparent lack of ownership of the debriefing process by watch based personnel establishes a 'point of failure' insomuch that should the OA Team member(s) fail to review any incidents occurring, or misinterpret the significance of any matters arising, the learning opportunity would most likely be lost to the organisation. In addition, the current methodology places an unnecessary burden on an OA Team that already has a high workload.

BMKFRS is looking to develop and improve its existing debriefing process through simplifying the current feedback process to an 'audit by exception' methodology which will cover:

- i. What was worthy of note that was 'good practice'?
- ii. What was worthy of note that was a 'developmental issue'? and,
- iii. Is there anything else that needs progressing under a different heading?

Recommendations

6.5.1 BMKFRS should review and re-energising its debriefing process. This should be promoted to the operational staff as a key element of continuous service improvement. Any review undertaken should consider:

- (i) Addressing current poor practices to ensure the onus for initiating a timely debrief sits firmly with incident commander.**
- (ii) Continuing efforts to simplify the existing processes.**
- (iii) Producing regular outcome reports to inform staff, promote inclusion and demonstrate the value of the process.**
- (iv) Ensuring non-compliance is identified and valued contribution recognised and rewarded.**

6.6 Station Reviews

Formerly, Station Commanders from the P&E Team performed a key role in the quality assurance of 'operational preparedness' through undertaking a programme of station-based assessments, known as 'Station Reviews'. Each Station Review included elements that tested the knowledge of station based staff on technical matters, current hot topics, assessing the practical skills of watch members, etc.

Through undertaking this programme the P&E Team recognised a reduction in basic operational standards at BMKFRS fire stations, in response to which the service is reported to have introduced a 'back to basics' regime in 2012/13. This programme resulted in the issue of a number of development plans and was reported to have been generally unpopular with station based staff.

The station review process was later refined to adopt a more relaxed, developmental approach, which included observing pre-arranged lectures and practical drills delivered by watch personnel. This approach is reported to have been better received by the operational workforce. The last formal Station Review undertaken by P&E was at Beaconsfield fire station in late 2015 and at a point following this, the responsibility for Quality Assurance (QA) of station based activity passed to the Learning and Development function, albeit that this role would be more focused upon the QA and verification of training delivery.

Interviews with service delivery managers reveal that BMKFRS is consciously moving away from the practice of having dedicated teams and departments to undertake specific, focused tasks in isolation. In its place, the service is said to be striving towards a "blended approach" where more outcomes are delivered through inter-departmental collaboration.

Moving forward the service intends to have Area Trainers and members of the OA Team working together with the SCs to review operational preparedness at fire stations.

This reality is still some distance away, as the OA Team currently consists of only two members whilst at the same time the demands of delivering the validation training at the Fire Service College (FSC) alone, are such that the Area Trainers currently have insufficient capacity to undertake regularised visits to stations.

As discussed within *Section 7: 'Operational Training and Command Competence'*, currently the Area Trainers require the continuous support of associate instructors (former BMKFRS training school staff) to also attend FSC, in order to deliver the validation training alone. This situation leaves station based Commanders to observe the standard of training sessions unsupported, which they observe in very general terms and for which there is currently no formal process or obvious outcomes produced. (See also *Sections 7.5: and 7.8 regarding quality assurance of training.* ***The recommendation captured at 7.8.2 may offer a way to address this resourcing issue).***

6.7 Maintenance of Operational skills

The service's innovative approach to resourcing its crewing has many benefits for the individuals concerned. Such benefits include an increased earning potential, increased opportunity to gain operational experience, etc. However, the continuous movement of staff around the organisation on a daily basis also brings with it a number of challenges for

the service. In particular, the watch officers now experience significant difficulties in overseeing the day-to-day training of their substantive watch members and thereby ensuring that individuals are able to adequately maintain their operational skills.

The continued development of the 'Heat' system will undoubtedly help with the situation. This system now hosts the service training records and generates a quarterly report to SCs, to inform them on the progress their staff are making with respect to the required learning and development.

It was apparent during the review that the flexible approach to maintaining operational crewing levels is now well established in BMKFRS and the development of a transient workforce is likely to be continued still further. Due to the flexible approach to operational crewing it is recommended by OAL that the service places an emphasis on increased personal responsibility, particularly with respect to the completion and maintenance of operational skills.

The ethos of personal responsibility for maintenance of operational skills will undoubtedly take time to achieve, as several of the watch members interviewed during the course of the review admitted to never having viewed their own training records within the last three (or more) years and confirmed they had little idea if they were up-to-date or not. Most presumed their records were current, as otherwise "the Watch Officer would say something", a clear demonstration of the cultural and attitude issues that would need to be addressed, to successfully achieve personal responsibility in the area.

The quality assurance of 'operational preparedness' was a key role of the former P&E Team. However, responsibility for delivering this was passed over to the training function in-line with the service's restructuring and remodelling. The reality is that Area Trainers have insufficient resources to deliver the validation training alone, and consequently the formal QA of station based activities is currently difficult to achieve in its present format and with current resources.

Recommendations

- 6.7.1 BMKFRS should place greater emphasis on the individuals' responsibility for completion and maintenance of their own skill-set.**
- 6.7.2 BMKFRS should consider incentivising the process through making the completion of Maintenance of Skills (i.e. competence), a prerequisite for being able to access the bank working system.**

6.8 Thematic Review

An established method in BMKFRS for ensuring significant issues are being adequately addressed, is for members of the P&E/OA Team to make the issue the subject of a 'thematic review', whereby members of the team would respond to any incidents occurring of that particular nature (for example high rise buildings), to monitor and provide additional support if necessary.

Thematic reviews can arise from internal or external events such as the adoption of a new National Operational Guidance into the service, feedback from reactive monitoring activities, recommendations following significant incidents, etc. As an example the BMKFRS OA Team are currently considering a range of issues related to the delayed medical response experienced at incidents, which they are building into a thematic review.

However, the OA Team in its current guise (of two SCs) does not have capacity to undertake such reviews unaided and instead relies primarily upon the FDO cadre to pursue such trends on their behalf.

Observations

The use of thematic reviews to target and manage specific areas of concern can be considered best practice and a clear demonstration of due diligence. This is providing, of course, the process is effectively conducted, adequately resource, accurately recorded and managed to conclusion.

Enquiries made by OAL were unable to identify any formal BMKFRS records related to the thematic reviews undertaken to date, the drivers behind these, or the resultant outcomes. Furthermore, it was difficult to establish any specific guidance or criteria ever being made available to the SCs in their pursuance of this task and in order that they may undertake such observations in a unified and consistent manner.

Despite the comprehensive arrangements in place to capture information through the active monitoring and debriefing processes, BMKFRS OA Team does not currently have sufficient resources or the complementary systems, to enable them to effectively manage and progress the outcomes from this process.

Formerly members of the P&E Team would analyse the information gathered from this and other internal inputs (debriefing, Station Reviews, training exercises, etc.) and complete an outcome report to inform the next available meeting of the ORISG. The team would also publish a version of the outcome report (and other related information) on the service 'I Drive', to provide feedback to operational staff. These tasks were initially performed on a monthly basis, and then quarterly, and finally, in line with the continued loss of resources the process was halted in 2015.

During the course of the review, OAL evidenced examples of where the current incomplete processes could potentially present some risk to the organisation. Within one example a significant shortcoming was identified in terms of a Commander's underperformance at an operational incident involving a road traffic collision. The actions of the attending Monitoring Officer to 'mentor and support' at the scene, and to subsequently consider this occurrence in terms of its wider implications for continuous service improvement, are both to be applauded. However, the lack of rigorous process, as previously identified within this report, has led to the most significant element remaining unaddressed i.e. the service has identified underperformance of an individual that has not been fully addressed through either:

- The production of a development/improvement plan.
- The notification of the individual's line manager to allow for awareness, support, guidance and supervision.

- The notification of Learning and Development, for their consideration and awareness i.e. the identification of trends in training deficiencies, maintenance of skills, etc.
- A review process to ensure the situation has been effectively addressed.

As a result of the above factors, the consequence of such individuals as underperforming at any subsequent, similar incident, would potentially leave BMKFRS exposed to criticism.

7. Operational Training and Command Competence

This section of the report provides feedback on the BMKFRS approach to achieving and maintaining operational and command competence.

In order to fulfil its commitment to ensuring the competence of its operational commanders, BMKFRS embarked on a partnership with the FSC. This partnership enabled the closing of the Marlow Command Training Centre (CTC) and the transfer of the associated activities to the FSC in Moreton-in-Marsh in order to realise some of the financial savings discussed previously within this report.

Attendance at the FSC satisfies two key functions for BMKFRS, these are:

1. Acquisition⁵ training and assessment – linked directly to promotion and designed to ensure commanders are 'safe to ride' in charge of BMKFRS fire engines and special appliances.
2. Validation development and assessment – linked to confirmation and assurance of continued operational competence, of existing commanders and their crews.

7.1 Acquisition Training and Assessment

In order to provide competent CCs it is necessary to ensure not only operational competence, but also to ensure the underpinning knowledge required for enhancing crew safety and effective incident management is both attained and tested. In BMKFRS this is known as 'Acquisition Training and Assessment'.

Following the discontinuation of the Fire Service Examination Board (FSEB), many of the UK FRSs have placed a requirement for aspiring commanders to attain qualifications provided by the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE), as a demonstration of acquired underpinning knowledge. This approach is considered best practice and has been adopted by BMKFRS for all its aspiring commanders, whether wholetime service or 'On Call'.

Prospective CCs are required to obtain an IFE Level Two qualification through passing papers in the two 'compulsory papers' of Fire Service Operations and Fire Service Science, and then two further 'optional papers' involving any of the other available subjects. The attainment of this qualification is achieved entirely in the candidates' own time.

Once the required qualification has been achieved the aspiring CC is afforded access to the development gateway and the opportunity to attend a five-day residential course at the FSC. During this course the candidate receives training and development in theoretical and practical skills in accordance with the National Occupational Standard 'WM7' (1 to 4). The FSC course culminates in a formative (practice) assessment with development, followed by a summative (final) assessment with an outcome of pass or fail.

As confirmation of command competence, successful candidates are provided with an accredited Skills for Justice (SFJ) certificate which permits them to take charge of a fire engine and its crew in BMKFRS.

⁵

Not to be confused with the acquisition training designed to develop new recruits firefighters or apprentices.

An additional benefit of attending the FSC is that courses usually comprise candidates from a number of UK FRSs, affording the opportunity for attendees to broaden their knowledge through shared experience and ideas.

Those CC who are desirous of temporary promotion with a view to substantive appointment must complete a comprehensive workbook that seeks to confirm operational and management skills.

Observations

The Acquisition Training and Assessment is delivered by a qualified team employed by FSC, in an established and tested venue. SFJ rules require the course content, candidates and outcomes to be both internally and externally quality assured. It would appear that these arrangements are achieving the expectations of BMKFRS and the partnership agreement on which it is based.

It was confirmed, through discussion with operational firefighters and officers, that recent changes in the Shift Duty System (SDS) have provided opportunities for staff (on a voluntary basis) to achieve additional pay through the 'BANK' shift duty system. It was also confirmed that this SDS has addressed immediate shortfalls in operational staffing but has provided individuals with the concern that temporary promotions may affect their access to the BANK system with a consequent loss in potential earnings.

Recommendation

7.1.1 As discussed within the recently published Adrian Thomas report⁶ concerning 'Conditions of Service for Fire and Rescue Staff', there are increasing challenges in attracting candidates to the promotion process. In view of the challenges being faced, BMKFRS should give consideration to making the qualification acquisition process more attractive to its prospective candidates.

7.2 Validation (Appraisal) Training and Assessment

As well as the need to provide operational commanders with the opportunity to attain command skills through the acquisition process, the FRS is also required to ensure the continued command competence of its existing commanders through scenario based learning and assessment. In BMKFRS this is known as Validation (Appraisal) Training and Assessment.

This is achieved by attendance at FSC and using the high quality training venues available on site. The facilities provided by FSC seek to be 'as realistic as possible' and usually include controlled burning to simulate real fire conditions, as well as realistic Road Traffic Collision (RTC) facilities, etc.

⁶ Section 5.2: Recruitment: Independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff in England February 2015: Undertaken by Adrian Thomas.

Pump commanders attend FSC with their crews and are presented with a challenging schedule of operational scenarios of varying types and complexity. The commanders and their crews are observed and assessed by qualified assessors and provided with an outcome report of competent, or not competent. Each of these outcomes ordinarily includes developmental feedback on the performance of the commander and where necessary, the performance of the respective crew members.

7.3 Staff Opinion

OAL conducted a series of interviews with SCs, Pump Commanders and operational firefighters to ascertain the perceived value they placed on the training and assessment being delivered at the FSC. In addition to these scheduled interviews, OAL also discussed this topic with numerous staff on an ad-hoc basis and it can be confirmed that there is a universal appreciation of the training and assessment being delivered at FSC. Indeed the only common criticism levelled by those questioned was that operational crews would like more opportunity to undergo this form of training, development and assessment.

Observations

This form of training and assessment is highly praised by the operational staff and OAL would agree that it has high value. It is widely accepted that providing these challenging scenarios in a realistic environment assists in building confidence in team tactics, operational equipment and command decision making, particularly when the opportunity to attend similar operational incidents is in continual decline. However, despite the scale of the training venues available, the current learning opportunity is restricted by the maximum number of pumping appliances involved (two) and consequently there is limited opportunity to develop the skills necessary for dealing with incidents of greater complexity. This deficiency can of course be addressed by creating the opportunity to exercise (either internally or with neighbouring brigades) at multi-pump training events. This subject is discussed in greater depth within *Section 8: Operational Exercising*.

Recommendation

7.3.1 BMKFRS to explore a joint enterprise with neighbouring FRS in order to share facilities and provisions at FSC. Such a joint enterprise should seek to explore:

- a) Economic savings by combining appraisal assessment with other FRS.**
- b) Potential renegotiation of the service level agreement between FSC and BMKFRS.**
- c) Greater flexibility in the provision of larger scale scenarios with the consequent strengthening of the functional role competences.**
- d) Opportunities to include risk critical functions such as Operational Support Units and Incident Command Units.**
- e) Shared operational awareness between FRSs.**

- f) **Shared operational awareness between all emergency services and other first responders. (this will have the added benefit of meeting JESIP exercising requirements).**
- g) **A strengthening of inter-service working and coordinated operational procedures.**

7.4 Management of FSC outcome reports

All Acquisition Training and Assessment undertaken results in the production of a summative report on the commander's performance, which includes:

- Command decision making
- Command presence
- Risk identification and management
- Resource management
- Information gathering
- Briefing
- Incident handover
- Other development feedback

These reports are communicated to Training Section managers and are scrutinised to establish if the candidate has demonstrated any significant training needs. The reports are then forwarded to appropriate line managers, who are required to design a suitable development plan and to work with the candidate to ensure this is effectively completed.

Observations

The training section managers confirmed there is currently no requirement (or capacity) for them to review completed development plans with and this provides the potential for under-performance to go unaddressed, as well as a missed opportunity for organisational development.

It was apparent to OAL that improvement in this area would demonstrate the service's commitment to the wider development process and serve to ensure it is being effectively managed to conclusion, in line with service expectations. Additionally, this would provide a rich source of evidence to inform the service Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and advise on potential trends in performance or underperformance. It would also provide as the opportunity to realize economic savings by through targeting of required training subjects.

Recommendation

- 7.4.1 BMKFRS should review its processes for monitoring staff during their development phase. In particular the service should consider strengthening its feedback process to include organisational awareness of an individual's performance through to completion of any related development needs and/or associated development plans.**

7.5 Quality Assurance of Training

The Quality Assurance (QA) of operational training in BMKFRS is managed by the Head of Operational Training and Development (HOTD). As stated in the BMKFRS Fire Authority Training, Learning and Development Strategy and Framework 2015/18, BMKFRS will provide Area Trainers to assist in delivering QA and has developed a model that employs suitably qualified staff to undertake the dual tasks of:

- i. Supporting the validation (appraisal) assessment process at FSC and;
- ii. Monitoring and feedback of operational training on fire stations and training events

7.6 Supporting the validation (appraisal) assessment process at FSC

Supporting this function is considered a priority in BMKFRS, not least in accordance with the contractual arrangement between FSC and BMKFRS but also to continually support individual development and the operational support that offers. Training section managers confirmed that the Area Trainers have been able to fulfil their commitments at FSC and there appears to be no significant backlog of candidates waiting to attend these courses.

7.7 Operational training on fire stations and training events

As discussed in *Section 6.6: 'Maintenance of Operational skills'*, historically QA was a key role of the former P&E Team. However, responsibility for delivering this was passed over to the training function in-line with the service's restructuring and remodelling. The methodology applied requires Area Trainers to visit the fire stations or training venue to observe pre-arranged training delivery and to provide feedback. Any issues identified are reported to the responsible manager within the training section.

Observations

The commitment to FSC and other high priority training plans has resulted in a slowdown of the QA process within BMKFRS.

Recruitment of the Area Trainers

Within its annual TNA, BMKFRS sets out its intention to provide a pool of six Area Trainers. However, the recruitment process has proven problematic and the Area Trainer pool (which currently stands at five) is below establishment. This shortfall is evidenced as having additionally impacted the service's ability to deliver the QA model.

Factors that have impacted on the QA process include:

- i. Appraisal assessments at FSC
- ii. Introduction of National Operational Guidance for Incident Command (NOGIC)
- iii. Introduction of National Operational Guidance for Breathing Apparatus (NOGBA)
- iv. Introduction of Dräger PS7000 BA Set telemetry
- v. The recruitment process

Fulfilling the QA quota

It was reported to OAL that an agreed aspirational commitment for QA on fire station training is for the delivery of four 'QA Assessments' per trainer, per month. This totals approximately 48 assessments per trainer, per year or 288 QA per annum for the team.

Training section managers and the QA Manager confirmed that this target was unachievable following the restructuring of BMKFRS. OAL would agree that the target would appear to be unachievable though recognising its aspirational nature.

Established Quality Assurance models (SFJ) state that:

'Assessors who are experienced with the qualification or unit they have been assigned to and continually meet the standard required would seek to achieve a 25% sampling rate with an assessor observation every 12 months'.

An adjustment in the QA quota to (for example) one QA for each watch in BMKFRS would meet the sampling rate above and as such the added resilience could support other quality assurance processes such as reviews of operational preparedness, station standards, operational equipment reviews and the provision of community projects etc. **(A recommendation regarding such an adjustment is captured at para 7.8.1)**

7.8 Quality Assurance of station based training

As has been previously stated in this report, BMKFRS seek to assure the standard of operational training through the use of trained assessors in the form of the QA Team. OAL reviewed the completion rates of the QA processes and in particular the ratios of wholetime and On Call assessment.

During the review it was evidenced that:

- In the year 2015/16 **51** assessments were carried out
- In the year to date (2016/17) **23** assessments were carried out

Of these conducted assessments, the records confirm that the balance of assessments has become heavily weighted towards the wholetime staff and on average:

- 81% of assessments were of wholetime watches
- 19% were for On Call assessments.

Discussions with managers confirmed that the primary reason for this imbalance is the heavy commitment of the QA team at FSC, etc. combined with the predominantly out of hours training sessions for On Call crews. In order to provide a QA process during these hours QA staff would need to be released from other activity, which is proving increasingly difficult.

Recommendations

7.8.1 BMKFRS should review (and consider reducing) the quota of 288 QA assessments (summative sampling) per year to a more achievable figure.

- 7.8.2 It is recommended that BMKFRS consider extending the QA role in line with the service's 'blended approach'. This may include offering the Vocational Assessor qualification to wholetime and On Call personnel and allowing them to undertake lower tier QA processes (interim sampling).**

8. Operational Exercising

In April 2012, BMKFRS set out and published its six-year plan to deliver up to 24 operational training exercises per year, designed to meet four operational levels or 'tiers'. Each tier increased in complexity as well as being designed to meet specific training objectives within BMKFRS as determined by the training section.

The NOGIC – Command Skills states that:

'Command skills are complex in nature and can be developed with understanding and practise. It is essential that fire and rescue service's prepare and develop incident commanders to use these skills effectively when commanding an incident. This includes providing appropriate opportunity for practise under realistic pressure'.

These opportunities are met by planning, conducting and reviewing operational exercises that are closely linked to the service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The exercises would usually be conducted 'in house' with the intent that all staff should take part over a pre-determined training cycle, usually one to two years.

Recent reductions in staff and resources has presented significant challenges to the delivery of these larger scale operational exercises and managers have been required to design alternatives to meet requirements.

As discussed above, the primary alternative has been the close liaison with FSC in the form of the appraisal training and assessment process involving the attendance at FSC of two fire engines per training session. The crews are presented with realistic and challenging scenarios in a real time environment.

OAL acknowledge the high value of these training sessions and no improvement requirements are suggested for this element of exercising. However it has been evidenced that the planned medium and large scale exercise schedule within BMKFRS of up to 24 exercises per year has not been fully achieved.

8.1 Obtaining Evidence

In order to provide the review team with guaranteed opportunity to observe the practical implementation of NOGIC in BMKFRS, OAL requested that a multi pump exercise be carried out during the review period. In response to this request, BMKFRS conducted a medium-scale exercise at a disused military training venue, involving five pumps and the service Incident Command Unit (ICU). It is not within the scope of this review to feedback on any individual or group performance at this event, as this is the role of respective watch commanders and members of the training section that attended. However, the value of this training delivery cannot be overstated, as not only did this test the practical application of NOGIC as intended, but also the service's capacity to deliver such larger scale operational training exercises.

The exercise organising officer confirmed that the availability of resources within BMKFRS made the provision of multi pump exercise opportunities increasingly difficult to achieve.

As a consequence, the service places a reliance on the appraisal assessments undertaken at FSC and satisfaction of the Site Specific Risk Assessment (SSRA) trigger points that require some form of training (every three years for Level 3, annually for Level 4, on-site and/or via desktop), to broadly constitute the service's operational exercising at this time.

It was however evident during the observed exercise that appetite among the attending crews for this form of operational training was healthy. Staff showed themselves to be enthusiastic, professional and receptive to developmental feedback. Several areas of individual and procedural improvements were identified, rewarding the effort put into the planning and execution phases and enhancing the value of the exercise itself.

The difficulties facing management are acknowledged and fully understood by OAL and evidenced during the planning, organising and execution of the exercise conducted for the OAL review.

Consequential Finding

NOGIC provides guidance in Incident Command, which includes the conducting of operational exercising as well as incident command management and the use of functional officers.

In order to effectively train in the functional officer role of Operational Commander, Safety Sector Commander, BA Sector Commander etc., and to create realism, a certain number of appliances would be required for each role.

The two fire engine attendance at FSC would not meet the required numbers and so, as a consequence there is a potential for skills fade in the management of these roles due to lack of exposure. It was evidenced during the review that two recently promoted interviewees had performed the role of Sector Commander at a real incident, yet had not exercised in the role previously.

Recommendations

8.1.1 BMKFRS should review the provision of operational exercising in order to provide increased opportunity for commanders to: (a) Practise command decision making, (b) Practise logistical controls and (c) Practise operational procedures etc. at larger, developing and more complex scenarios

9. Risk Management

This section of the report provides feedback on the risk management processes employed in BMKFERS during operational and training events.

During the period of the review OAL attended operational incidents and training events and used these opportunities to assess and confirm the underpinning knowledge and understanding of staff in the use of Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) and Analytical Risk Assessment (ARA).

9.1 Dynamic Risk Assessment

Lines of enquiry for this element concerned staff awareness of the firefighter safety maxim as contained in the NOGIC document. Staff were asked if they could describe the maxim and its intent.

The maxim states:

“At every incident the greater the potential benefit of fire and rescue actions, the greater the risk that is accepted by commanders and firefighters. Activities that present a high risk to safety are limited to those that have the potential to save life or to prevent rapid and significant escalation of the incident.”

Many of those questioned, while not able to recite the maxim verbatim, fully understood the intent of the maxim and how it affects them and their firefighting operations.

Importantly, those questioned also understood the value of the BMKFERS discretionary statement and how it is applied when standard operational procedures (SOPs) do not wholly fit the desired outcome at an operational incident.

Staff were also able to explain how crews move from a position of applying the discretionary statement to one where they can return to the application of SOPs.

9.2 Analytical Risk Assessment

The application of Analytical Risk Assessments (ARAs) in BMKFERS was proven to be comprehensive and effectively managed on the incident ground. In recent years the ARAs were processed by the P&E Team, which included the receipt, analysis and feedback on completed ARAs from operational incidents.

However, it was evidenced during the review that the reduced staffing in the OA Team has impacted on the processing of ARAs and it was further confirmed that operational crews were unclear as to what actually happens to the ARA following its submission.

During operational incidents and training events in BMKFERS, risk is identified and recorded on gatefold command packs using waterproof markers, (these command packs are carried on all fire engines in BMKFERS). Control measures are captured and time stamped for review. These simple yet effective systems have become best practice and

when managed effectively, are proven to be of high value during debriefs and even during HSE investigations and Coroner's inquests.

During operational incidents the packs are completed by a suitably qualified and trained officer (usually qualified to Institute of Occupation Safety and Health (IOSH) as a minimum standard) thereby adding continued value to the process.

It was identified during the review that it is common practice to secure the packs to the rear of the fire engine on provided hooks. JESIP doctrine places a fundamental importance on the value of shared situational awareness between first responders. It was identified that there is a likelihood of other first responders entering a risk area without seeing the key safety information

Recommendation

9.2.1 It is recommended that risk management packs be placed in line of sight of the risk entry points, so as to allow other first responders the opportunity to view their content and respond accordingly.

9.3 Site Specific Risk Assessment

Section 7(2)d of the Fire and Rescue Service's Act 2004 conveys a responsibility for obtaining information required for the purposes of extinguishing fires (amongst other things). As an element of this process, BMKFRS gathers such information in the form of Site Specific Risk Assessments (SSRAs) which are used to inform incident predetermined attack plans. This information is added to an online resource and subsequently uploaded and stored on the mobile data terminals (MDTs) on fire engines. This is a proven system and utilised by many UK FRS.

During the review, interviewees confirmed their competence in adding SSRA information effectively and a review of the associated records also confirmed that on most occasions the risk information was well managed with future review of the site(s) included in station work routine planners.

Observation

At the fire stations visited by the review team, it was unclear if any formalised methods of appraising On Call staff of the existence of any new SSRA information added to the MDT. Those questioned confirmed that the potential existed for such risk information to be retained on the MDT for long periods, without the knowledge of On Call staff.

It would appear that this situation could deny On Call colleagues the opportunity to review current risk information, prior to a potential incident occurring at that site.

Recommendations

9.3.1 BMKFRS should consider reviewing its internal communication processes to ensure the effective communication of SSRA information between wholtime and On Call crews.

10. Active Monitoring

This section of the report seeks to provide feedback on the methods used in BMKFRS to meet the requirements of active monitoring. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides guidance on the need for active monitoring and provides a description of monitoring methods which are:

Active methods which monitor the design, development, installation and operation of management arrangements. These tend to be preventive in nature, for example:

- routine inspections of premises, plant and equipment by staff
- health surveillance to prevent harm to health
- planned function check regimes for key pieces of plant

Reactive methods which monitor evidence of poor health and safety practice but can also identify better practices that may be transferred to other parts of a business, for example:

- investigating accidents and incidents
- monitoring cases of ill health and sickness absence records

The benefits and elements of a smart, service-wide system geared towards the identification, prioritisation and management of risks would serve BMKFRS in meeting the required elements of Health and Safety Executive Guidance: Successful Health and Safety Management (HSG65) to include the elements of:

- Policy
- Organising
- Planning and Implementing
- Measuring Performance
- Audit
- Review

Where best practice has been observed in FRSs across the country, such systems have been used as the key tool for the assurance of operational activities, and for effective monitoring of risks, performance and equipment improvements. These systems can include:

- Operational and Training Debriefing Procedure
- Operational Preparedness Audits/Reviews on fire stations
- Tactical Commander Maintenance of Competence Records (TCMCR)
- Supervisory Commander Maintenance of Competence Records (SCMCR)
- A means of capturing emerging themes within the service
- The outcomes of thematic reviews
- Issue identification and logging
- Action logs
- Audit and review tools
- The ability to create Action Plans following an operational event
- A means of capturing individual and organisational learning points
- Other reporting tools as required
- Easy access by all key stakeholders so as to promote organisational development

During the review and through pre-reading, OAL were advised of the development of a tool in BMKFRS called VIPER. This software is described as a 'performance plus' and also 'a business intelligence' tool that will be developed to meet the needs of BMKFRS and is designed to grow and change as the service grows and changes. Recent reports to the fire authority have confirmed that the system is achieving approximately 20% of its capacity and this was further evidenced through planned interviews with staff during the OAL review.

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Future planning will be based upon the intelligence and performance information which is now input to "VIPER" (the Authority's business intelligence system) and improves the availability of information to all stakeholders. This will continue to develop and incorporate further aspects of performance management (projects, corporate risks, elected members area and a citizens portal) to further enhance the information that is available for decision making and the 'open data' agenda.

Observations

The development of the VIPER system is incomplete and so for the purposes of this review OAL will only be able to report on the current methodology applied. It will be for BMKFRS management to determine if any identified gaps or refinements in active monitoring can or will be addressed in the final version of the VIPER tool.

10.1 Locating Key Documents

During the planned interviews, interviewees were asked to locate documents they had created which reported back to management, training section or the OA Team. It became quickly evident that these documents were stored on several networked drives and in innumerable layers of folders within these drives. The primary method of finding such documents was to utilise the provided search engine which consequently offered several pages of options which would individually require opening to determine if it was the required file.

Additionally, these interviewees were also asked to locate documents submitted by other officers and specifically debrief reports. These proved increasingly difficult to obtain and in some cases unsuccessful. The primary reason for this is that these documents were in either MS Word, Excel or Adobe PDF format which is difficult to batch filter. Finally, the ability to store these documents in a naming structure of the creators choosing adds more difficulty with the potential for key information to be missed by key stakeholders.

OAL are of the opinion that this is an opportunity missed as these documents are fundamental to organisational and operational development (NOGIC 2014) and any future system for the active and reactive monitoring of operational risk should allow the rapid location and filtering of key information for any user.

Recommendation

10.1.1 BMKFRS should develop the use of an active monitoring system to act as a smart, service-wide tool. This system should incorporate a user-friendly database that is capable of providing auditable records and is easily

accessible to all staff. It should allow the rapid location and filtering of key information for any user. This issue is further covered in Section 12: 'Internal Communications'.

10.2 Allocation of Action Plans

For all identified issues there should be an outcome. It was evident early in the review that BMKFRS is highly proactive in its approach to active monitoring and staff were highly industrious in its application. However it became clear that the heavy reliance on individual staff attendance and diligence could be a potential weakness in the process. Due to the recording systems identified above, there is potential for key issues to be overlooked if the person managing them leaves the service, takes extended sick leave or merely moves on from role. This was evidenced during management interviews and through gap analysis.

Recommendation

10.2.1 That any system used for this purpose should operate independently of any individual in the service and each issue should remain 'live' on the system until resolved or accepted on the risk register.

10.3 Reporting by Exception

Reporting by exception is the principle of only documenting or recording events or occurrences that are not standard or normal, and therefore demand or deserve attention. The primary aim of an active monitoring system is to identify, record, action and communicate any event that has the potential to contribute towards the improvement of the FRS. This should also include examples of good practice and not just areas for development.

Potential ratings and their descriptions, as recommended by OAL are captured below:

- **Safety Critical**, an event or individual displays potentially safety critical actions that put people in immediate danger. *An individual needs significant support and guidance, with major development requirements.*
- **Area of Concern**, an event or individual displays actions that are an area for concern, but people are not put in immediate danger. *An individual needs some support and guidance, with development requirements.*
- **Good Practice**, an event or individual displays actions that have the potential to contribute towards service improvement if recorded and shared for the benefit of all. *The identified good practice is not already standard or embedded practice in the operational arena.*

It was evidenced that BMKFRS are intent on promoting 'reporting by exception' which will ensure that the evidence gathered and managed will be that which truly matters to the service. This was confirmed by the newly developed monitoring reports to be used by monitoring officers at operational incidents. No such report currently exists for use at training events. OAL believe to include training in the 'reporting by exception' system would be of benefit the organisation.

Recommendation

10.3.1 It is recommended that BMKFRS extend 'reporting by exception' to include training events; with the consequent benefits to organisational learning and that these reports are included for staff review (commensurate to suitable anonymity measures).

10.4 Staff Access

It was evidenced during interviews that staff would require access to many elements of the provided Active Monitoring System (AMS) so as to allow personal and team development. It was also evidenced that such access would provide a level of ownership of their identified issues and in particular how they were managed to conclusion. Current procedures used in BMKFRS have resulted in staff submitting issues and never hearing of the conclusion reached even though OAL were able to confirm later that the issue was resolved. It was clear that staff felt comfortable raising issues in BMKFRS and receiving an end result would add further value.

Recommendation

10.4.1 Include a provision within the AMS to provide feedback on concluded issues and in particular to the source of the initially identified issue.

10.5 Role of the Monitoring Officer

It has become accepted practice within UK FRS to mobilise a monitoring officer to operational incidents. This officer would typically provide a mentoring role for developing commanders, fulfil the active monitoring function by completion of monitoring reports and ensure required actions are designed and submitted to relevant stakeholders.

The existing Active Monitoring process within BMKFRS has been in place for a number of years and involves the mobilisation of SCs to a range of predetermined risks (incidents with three pumps, life risks, etc.), for the purpose of undertaking the Monitoring Officer role. It is incumbent upon this officer to assume command of the incident at any point considered appropriate by them and BMKFRS mobilising procedures require that they must take over at four pumps, regardless and then to request a replacement monitoring officer.

Monitoring at Operational Incidents

Monitoring Officers are required to complete an electronic 'Active Monitoring Report' to record their observations. This report breaks down observed activities under 11 broad headings. However, it is common practice to feedback on all elements of the incident

rather than those areas specifically requiring improvement or promoting good practice. In this way it was evidenced that it can be difficult for the service to 'sort the wheat from the chaff' when seeking to promote organisational and individual development.

Following the incident, the monitoring form is received by the OA Team, reviewed for any significant findings requiring immediate action and is stored within a range of folders, (during the interviews OAL were unable to identify any form of universally employed database to support this process).

Monitoring at Training Events

The Active Monitoring of training events is undertaken on an invitational basis at the instigation of the organising officer. It was unclear what criteria is applied to this attendance with particular regard to the numbers of attending fire engines, this results in the monitoring requirement at operational training events being different to the requirement at operational incidents. Furthermore, BMKFRS does not currently assign a monitoring officer to the training being delivered at FSC. (See Section 8: 'Operational Exercising').

Those role holders interviewed stated that the Monitoring Officer role in its present guise is too prescriptive and is viewed negatively by some of the operational workforce. As a consequence BMKFRS is reviewing its existing approach to undertaking active monitoring, with the intention of developing the Monitoring Officer role to become more advisory in approach, and one that mentors and provides informed input and support to the incident commanders and crews.

Managers also recognised the need to develop smarter processes that report the outcomes from monitoring activities more by exception and so better assists with the identification of trends. Moving forward, managers stated that the revised active monitoring forms would directly correspond with the WM7 National occupational standards.

The role of the BMKFRS Monitoring Officer was evidenced at operational incidents during the review period. These opportunities were used to determine the methodology applied and also to question the officer on any remedial actions that they could implement.

Observations

During the review, interviewees reported that the perceived quality of incident monitoring varied from officer to officer and very much depended on 'who you got on the day' but in general the crews were praiseworthy of these officers and understood the need for their attendance at incidents.

OAL observed that BMKFRS do not currently utilise monitoring officers at the FSC, for the appraisal process. OAL are of the opinion that these opportunities should be maximised by allowing monitoring officers to observe the training, so as to practice the application of monitoring at incidents, to test reporting procedures and feedback methodology and to allow a full interaction between officers and crews with the consequent breakdown of any perceived interpersonal barriers.

During a range of interviews with Monitoring Officers it was identified:

- Role holders had received no formal training and instead relied heavily on peer support and guidance.

- Staff found the related filing systems confusing and time consuming.

Recommendations

- 10.5.1 Provide formal training and/or guidance for Monitoring Officers to ensure a uniform approach to monitoring and to clarify the operational standards required from all staff.**
- 10.5.2 Moving forward, the new active monitoring form should directly correspond with the WM7 NOS.**
- 10.5.3 Active monitoring should be expanded to the training events taking place at FSC to ensure the service is effectively capturing and progressing all available learning opportunities.**

11. National Occupational Guidance for Incident Command

In 2014 The National Operational Guidance program produced the guidance on incident command (NOGIC). Following the publication of the NOGIC, BMKFRS decided, (with the exception to some minor terminology), to implement the guidance in its entirety. This included a full review of the guidance, planning and resourcing the training of its staff and finally its inclusion in all aspects of its training packages (HEAT).

The outcome of this is the implementation of NOGIC is now complete and included on the HEAT training package.

The BMKFRS training model provides the opportunity to arrange and conduct two and three pump training exercises. These exercises are provided either through the validation assessments at FSC or through local arrangement between fire stations and seek to allow the NOGIC underpinning knowledge to be tested among officers and crews. Any difficulties encountered in the provision of these exercises are discussed in *Section 8: Operational Exercising* of this report as well as the consequential difficulty in providing opportunities to test individual competence in functional roles.

Observations

During the review it was evidenced that staff awareness and underpinning knowledge of some elements of NOGIC require strengthening. These elements of NOGIC include:

- Operations Commander
- Safety Sector Commander
- Safety Officer
- Operational Support Officer
- Sector Commander

It was noted that these elements of NOGIC would ordinarily be those implemented at incidents above two and three pumps. When asked to describe the roles and responsibilities of these key functional officers the answers were generic in nature. For example, when asked to describe the specific role and responsibilities of a Safety Sector Commander, answers included 'making sure operations are safe and complete the ARA' rather than the documented responsibility of:

- Surveying operational sectors, identifying hazards, and advising the sector commander
- Working with sector safety officers to support and exchange information
- Confirming the validity of the initial risk assessment and recording as appropriate
- Collating and recording an analytical risk assessment
- Acting as an extra set of eyes and ears to the sector commanders in monitoring the safety of personnel
- Working with the incident commander or operations commander
- Reporting health and safety issues, including accident investigation management of safety officers, identifying evacuation zones, development of the safety plan

It has already been identified in this report that these roles are held on the MDT for use on operational incidents however these are an aide memoir and not considered as 'first required reading' during the emergency phases of an operational incident.

Recommendations

- 11.1.1 BMKFRS should ensure all staff have awareness and understanding of the functional roles within NOGIC, and that this is tested.**
- 11.1.2 Station and Watch Commanders should be provided clear guidance on the standards of NOGIC specific knowledge expected from its commanders and crews.**
- 11.1.3 Station and Watch Commander and crews should be provided the opportunity under assessable and/or developmental conditions to exercise the acquired skills and underpinning knowledge set out in NOGIC.**

12. Internal Communications

Ensuring the effective flow of information is a concern for all large organisations. Within BMKFRS there has been a continuous progression from paper based to electronic media over recent years and the service utilises a series of 'networked drives' to manage the storage and communication of information.

The BMKFRS 'I Drive' provides one of the primary means of communicating with operational staff at fire stations, with important messages such 'Safety Event Awareness Sheets' being promulgated as a 'mandatory read' on the drive.

Observation

IT systems provide excellent opportunities for an organisation to communicate with its staff, quickly update documents and in many cases, to obtain quick and effective feedback. However, a lack of robust strategic controls can also result in an intranet that is so information rich that staff have great difficulty in obtaining relevant key information or documents.

Through discussions with operational staff and by reviewing the operation of the system at station level, it was apparent that 'I Drive' (and others) would benefit from some improvements. Notably, staff expressed their frustrations at the speed and functionality of the system and, in particular, stating it is extremely difficult to search and locate older information. As an example, Staff were asked to locate several key documents such as completed debrief forms from other stations, their own submitted debrief forms and also any outcomes as a result of submission. Most staff (including Station Commanders) could not locate this information readily and in some cases not at all.

It was also noted that the search engine within the 'I Drive' returns so many 'hits' when searching for specific documents, that staff stated they often gave up looking as there was no way to tell if the hit was the one they were seeking, other than to open each one to look. Feedback showed that this was considered time consuming and often unproductive.

As a consequence of the above issues, it was identified that staff may retain documents and guidance on their own desktop login for convenience, presenting a risk of staff referencing out of date material.

OAL were unable to ascertain how the service currently satisfies itself that the published 'mandatory reads' have been received and understood by those it intends to reach. Furthermore, it appears common practice to post articles on the drive as a 'mandatory read', when clearly many of these could be considered to be 'for information purposes only'. Staff identified this as something that devalued the required importance and impact of the mandatory read articles.

Recommendations

12.1.1 Review the functionality 'I Drive' as the systems appears not to meet with service expectations with specific regards to ease of use.

12.1.2 Review the content of the service's Intranet to ensure key information is easily accessible by staff, which should include a more logical hyperlink

process. Any review should also consider the communication of key information between wholetime and On Call staff.

12.1.3 Review the methods employed for communicating and validating the passage of important messages to operational staff at fire stations.

13. Appendix A: Operational Assurance Defined

The process of achieving 'Operational Assurance' (OA) is complex and multi-faceted. This foreword is intended to provide those unfamiliar with fire service operations and its related support service's, with a basic understanding of the general principle of OA, before considering how this is currently being achieved in Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service (BMKFRS), as discussed within the body of this report.

OA is the means by which a Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) ensures it is providing a safe and competent work force that is capable of meeting the demands being placed upon it and that such matters are being achieved in an efficient and effective manner. In its simplest terms OA involves the process of identifying and managing risks to operational service delivery and in particular, providing legitimate and accountable assurance to the Fire Authority and Senior Managers that fire service operations are carried out:

- i. In a safe, efficient and effective manner.
- ii. In compliance with national legislation, national and local policy and guidance, etc.

A common misconception is that OA is the sole responsibility of a nominated team (usually referred to as the 'Operational Assurance Team'), or a dedicated function. In fact, the assurance of operational activity should run as a constant throughout all parts of an organisation, including those functions not immediately involved in the emergency response function of the service.

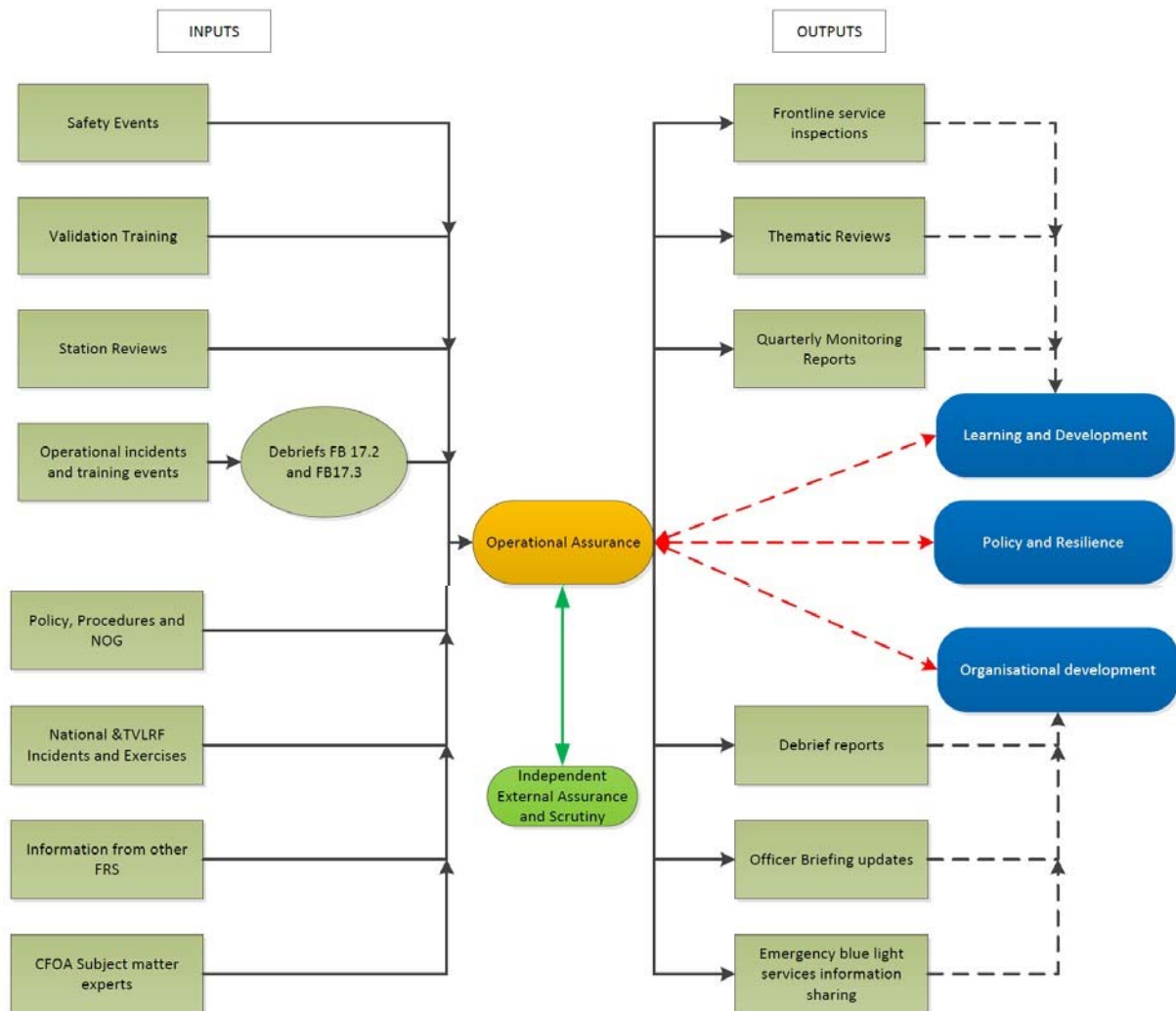
Although it is understandable why such misconception may occur, in order for the concept of OA to become embraced and embedded within an organisation, it is necessary to view OA in a broader sense, with the provision being universally acknowledged as the responsibility of all those it affects and supports.

As an example, those responsible for the procurement of equipment used on fire service appliances (fire engines) would not ordinarily consider themselves members of the OA function. However, it is obvious that the provision of such equipment is fundamental to the safety and effectiveness of the operational crews and therefore, the procurement team make a significant contribution towards the service's OA.

A further example of the collective contribution to OA would be when a commander of a fire engine (a Pump Commander), identifies risk critical information that could help prevent injury to staff, or damage to equipment. This information, when effectively communicated and acted upon, will inform service delivery improvements and thereby support the principles that underpin OA.

The above examples demonstrate how key stakeholders can (and should) contribute to the OA process and support the delivery of safe, effective and efficient fire service operations, whilst not necessarily being direct members of a dedicated OA Team.

14. Appendix B: The BMKFRS Assurance Model



15. Appendix C: Review Team Profile

Garry Jones – Team Leader

Garry retired from Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service in October 2014, having served 27 years at some of Greater Manchester's most operationally challenging inner city fire stations. For the last ten years of his career Garry served as a Group Manager, with responsibility for Performance Review and Operational Assurance.

Paul Clark

Paul joined the London Fire Brigade in 1982 and retired in March 2012. During his fire service career Paul served at some of London's most operationally challenging East End locations. In 2000 Paul was promoted to Group Manager and served 2 years in the Operations, Training and Performance inspectorate (OTPI), followed by 4 years as the Borough Commander of Redbridge. Paul then spent 6 years working within London Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters in Service Delivery before his final promotion to Deputy Assistant Commissioner. For the last 2 years of his career Paul was Head of LFB Internal Operations Review and Audit Team (ORT), Incident Management Policy and incident Management Systems (IMS).

Garry Geoghegan

Gary joined the London Fire Brigade in 1981. Gary served at some of the busiest stations as an operational firefighter and Watch Officer. Gary served at London Fire Service HQ and London Eastern Command and held responsibilities which included managing London's Arson Reduction Teams and Community Engagement Manager for London. Gary also worked directly for the Commissioner for London, performing the role of London's link Officer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Gary has extensive experience in writing operational policy and standard operating procedures for Fire Service's.

Kevin O'Connor

Kevin has wide ranging operational experience having served at some of Greater Manchester's most operationally challenging locations as a firefighter and Watch Officer. Kevin also spent 5 years at Fire Service Headquarters within the Operational Assurance Department. In his role as Head of the Greater Manchester Incident Command Academy, Kevin was instrumental in the development of command competence development and assessment. Kevin was the subject matter lead officer in enabling GMFRS to become an approved 'Skills For Justice' Centre for incident command, providing accreditation to the level of Strategic Commander. Additionally he was GMFRS lead coordinator for the JESIP rollout in 2013.

Kevin was singularly responsible for assuring and maintaining the command competence of all GMFRS Officers up to the role of Assistant Principal Officer. Kevin retired from the service in July 2016.

16. Appendix D: Priority Recommendations

The table at Appendix E collates the recommendations from throughout this report. The three areas below, are those which, in OALs opinion, BMKFRS may wish to consider priorities.

Priority Recommendations	
P.1	BMKFRS should continue to develop and resource effective internal processes through which matters arising from significant external and internal events are captured, communicated and effectively managed through to a conclusion that is acceptable to the service. This should include (for example) processes for undertaking gap analysis, communicating findings to operational staff and informing resultant training delivery.
P.2	In support of recommendation 1, BMKFRS should develop the use of an active monitoring system to act as a smart, service-wide tool. This system should incorporate a user-friendly database that is capable of providing auditable records and is easily accessible to all staff.
P.3	BMKFRS should consider re-establishing an effective Operational Assurance forum, with the necessary direction and authority to assist in the formal management and progression of issues arising, through to meaningful resolution.

17. Appendix E: Table of Recommendations

The table below collates recommendations from throughout this report. Section numbers relate to the areas where the recommendation originally appears, together with supporting observations and background information.

Section 5.4	Key Findings: Policy and Guidance
5.4.1	It is recommended that the Operational Assurance model is clearly published and communicated, that roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and finally, that understanding is confirmed.
Section 5.7	Key Findings: Operational Briefing and Handover
5.7.1	<p>OAL recommend that BMKFRS gives consideration to revising or replacing the 'OTHERS' methodology, to ensure the procedure includes the following points. Any revised handover methodology should be adopted for training BMKFRS staff at the FSC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situation • Hazards identified • Objectives • Plan to meet the objectives • Resources present and requested • Incident command structure • Tactical mode(s) in use
Section 6	The Assurance Model
6.2	External Inputs
6.2.1	BMKFRS should review the processes currently employed to capture, scrutinise, manage and communicate matters arising from external inputs. This should include consideration of the service's current process for undertaking gap analysis of these external reports in order to manage identified risks to conclusion or acceptance on the service risk register.
6.4	Issue Resolution
6.4.1	BMKFRS should review its Procedure Note: 'Operational Assurance; Incident Monitoring and Improvement' at the earliest opportunity to ensure it aligns more closely with the service's new ways of working. Any revised guidance issued should clearly set out the Monitoring Officer role and re-establish the 'Thematic Reviews' process.
6.4.2	<p>BMKFRS should consider re-establishing an effective Assurance Forum with the necessary direction and authority to manage and progress OA issues arising through to meaningful resolution and involving:</p> <p>a) The application of a recognised and accountable health and</p>

	<p>safety process linked directly to OA, which includes suitable arrangements to manage these elements.</p> <p>b) The progression of issues to inform the service Risk Register, Training Needs Analysis (TNA), Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), etc.</p>
6.4.3	BMKFRS should ensure the process of OA is adequately supported by an effective, user-friendly Information Technology (IT) system that incorporates an intelligent and auditable database.
6.5	Debriefing Activities
6.5.1	<p>BMKFRS should review and re-energising its debriefing process. This should be promoted to the operational staff as a key element of continuous service improvement. Any review undertaken should consider:</p> <p>(i) Addressing current poor practices to ensure the onus for initiating a timely debrief sits firmly with incident commander.</p> <p>(ii) Continuing efforts to simplify the existing processes.</p> <p>(iii) Producing regular outcome reports to inform staff, promote inclusion and demonstrate the value of the process.</p> <p>(iv) Ensuring non-compliance is identified and valued contribution recognised and rewarded.</p>
6.7	Maintenance of Operational Skills
6.7.1	BMKFRS should seek to place greater emphasis on the individuals' responsibility for completion and maintenance of their own skill-set.
6.7.2	BMKFRS should consider incentivising the process through making the completion of Maintenance of Skills (i.e. competence), a prerequisite for being able to access the bank working system.
Section 7	Operational Training and Command Competence
7.1	Acquisition Training and Assessment
7.1.1	BMKFRS should give consideration to making the qualification acquisition process more attractive to its prospective candidates.
7.3	Staff Opinion
7.3.1	<p>BMKFRS should explore a joint enterprise with neighbouring FRS in order to share facilities and provisions at FSC. Such a joint enterprise should seek to explore:</p> <p>a) Economic savings by combining appraisal assessment with other FRS.</p> <p>b) Potential renegotiation of the service level agreement between FSC and BMKFRS.</p> <p>c) Greater flexibility in the provision of larger scale scenarios with</p>

	<p>the consequent strengthening of the functional role competences.</p> <p>d) Opportunities to include risk critical functions such as Operational Support Units and Incident Command Units.</p> <p>e) Shared operational awareness between FRS.</p> <p>f) Shared operational awareness between all emergency service's and other first responders. (this will have the added benefit of meeting JESIP exercising requirements).</p> <p>g) A strengthening of inter-service working and coordinated operational procedures.</p>
7.4	Management of FSC Outcome Reports
7.4.1	BMKFRS should review its processes for monitoring staff during their development phase. In particular the service should consider strengthening its feedback process to include organisational awareness of an individual's performance through to completion of any related development needs and/or associated development plans.
7.8	QA of Station Based Training
7.8.1	BMKFRS should review (and potentially reduce) the quota of 288 QA assessments (summative sampling) per year to a more achievable figure.
7.8.2	It is recommended that BMKFRS consider extending the QA role in line with the service's 'blended approach'. This may include offering the Vocational Assessor qualification to wholetime and On Call personnel and allowing them to undertake lower tier QA processes (interim sampling).
Section 8	Operational Exercising
8.1	Obtaining Evidence
8.1.1	<p>BMKFRS should review the provision of operational exercising in order to provide increased opportunity for commanders to:</p> <p>a) Practice command decision making</p> <p>b) Practice logistical controls</p> <p>c) Practice operational procedures etc. at larger, developing and more complex scenarios</p>
Section 9	Risk Management
9.2	Analytical Risk Assessment
9.2.1	It is recommended that risk management packs be placed in line of sight of the risk entry points, so as to allow other first responders the opportunity to view their content and respond accordingly.
9.3	Site Specific Risk Assessment
9.3.1	BMKFRS should consider reviewing its internal communication processes to ensure the effective communication of SSRA information

	between wholetime and On Call crews.
Section 10	Active Monitoring
10.1	Locating Key Documents
10.1.1	BMKFRS should develop the use of an active monitoring system to act as a smart, service-wide tool. This system should incorporate a user- friendly database that is capable of providing auditable records and is easily accessible to all staff. It should allow the rapid location and filtering of key information for any user. This issue is further covered in Section 12: 'Internal Communications'.
10.2	Allocation of Action Plans
10.2.1	That any system used for this purpose should operate independently of any individual in the service and each issue should remain 'live' on the system until resolved or accepted on the risk register.
10.3	Reporting by Exception
10.3.1	It is recommended that BMKFRS extend this form of monitoring to include training events; with the consequent benefits to organisational learning and that these reports are included for staff review (commensurate to suitable anonymity measures).
10.4	Staff Access
10.4.1	Include a provision within the AMS to provide feedback on concluded issues and in particular to the source of the initially identified issue.
10.5	Role of the Monitoring Officer
10.5.1	Provide formal training and/or guidance for Monitoring Officers to ensure a uniform approach to monitoring and to clarify the operational standards required from all staff.
10.5.2	Moving forward, the new active monitoring form should directly correspond with the WM7 NOS.
10.5.3	Active monitoring should be expanded to the training events taking place at FSC to ensure the service is effectively capturing and progressing all available learning opportunities.
Section 11	National Operational Guidance for Incident Command
11.1.1	BMKFRS should ensure all staff have awareness and understanding of the functional roles within NOGIC, and that this is tested.
11.1.2	Station and watch commanders should be provided clear guidance on the standards of NOGIC specific knowledge expected from its commanders and crews.
11.1.3	Station and Watch Commanders and their crews should be provided opportunity under assessable and/or developmental conditions to exercise the acquired skills and underpinning knowledge set out in NOGIC.

Section 12	Internal Communications
12.1.1	Review the functionality 'I Drive' as it appears the system does not meet with service expectations with regard to ease of use.
12.1.2	Review the content of the service's Intranet to ensure key information is easily accessible by staff, which should include a more logical hyperlink process.
12.1.3	Review the methods employed for communicating and validating the passage of important messages to operational staff at fire stations. Any review should also consider the communication of key information between wholetime and On Call staff.