

# **Review of Operational Assurance Arrangements Progress Checkpoint**

**Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes  
Fire and Rescue Service  
November 2017**

# Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	4
2. Background.....	5
3. Review Results.....	6
3.1 Key Findings of 2016 report.....	6
3.2 The BMKFRS Assurance Model.....	7
3.3 Operational Training and Command Competence.....	12
3.4 Operational Exercising.....	16
3.5 Active Monitoring.....	17
3.6 National Operational Guidance for Incident Command.....	20
3.7 Internal Communications.....	21
4. Conclusion.....	22

## 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 October 2016, Operational Assurance Limited (OAL) undertook an independent review of Operational Assurance (OA) within BMKFRS. The review considered the application of a newly developed Assurance Model, and examined two core areas: 'Incident Command' and 'Operational Training and Command Competence'. OAL made 30 recommendations, of which 26 were accepted by the BMKFRS management team.

In November 2017, OAL were invited to revisit BMKFRS to provide an independent check on the Service's progress on implementation of those recommendations.

OAL's conclusions from this checkpoint were extremely positive. BMKFRS has made considerable progress against all the accepted recommendations and, in particular, three areas identified as 'Priority' have received significant attention and progression.

Service management are to be congratulated in the efforts made to redistribute finite resources towards delivering this important work-stream and most notably the resourcing of an Operational Assurance function that now has the capability of meeting service expectations.

While undertaking this follow up review, OAL were provided with strong evidence to support and demonstrate the progress made by the service during the preceding 12 months period. Of particular note was the work undertaken to address Priority Recommendation 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."*

In addressing this recommendation, the work undertaken to ensure the organisation can effectively capture, analyse and embed the lessons learnt from significant external events has been comprehensive. Specifically, a training package based on the 'Balmoral Bar' incident and development of an operationally focused Monthly Report are considered exemplar.

Whilst some recommendations have been confirmed as complete, a number were found to be in progress due to interdependency with other work-streams, such as the introduction of an Active Monitoring System (AMS) and attendant operational debriefing repository. Service managers are committed to maintaining effort and focus in order to ensure that those work-streams still in progress are pursued through to completion, in order that the considerable and comprehensive work undertaken to date will not be lost to competing priorities.

The body of this report lists each recommendation made, with an assessment of the current status of implementation and a narrative examining the evidence provided to OAL in order to reach that assessment.

## 2. Background

In October 2016 representatives from Operational Assurance Limited (OAL) undertook an independent review of service Operational Assurance (OA) within Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire & Rescue Service (BMKFRS).

The review considered the application of a newly developed Assurance Model introduced following significant internal restructuring, and examined two core areas:

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

During the course of the review OAL identified some 30 recommendations for BMKFRS to consider, along with three key themes that OAL suggested should be of particular priority.

*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*

*P.2 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.*

Of the 30 recommendations made, 26 were adopted by the BMKFRS management team. Those remaining were:

- Recommendation 9.2.1 Placement of risk management packs
- Recommendation 9.3.1 Internal communication of SSRA information
- Recommendation 11.1.1 Awareness of NOGIC roles for all staff
- Recommendation 11.1.3 Station and Watch commander NOGIC exercising

BMKFRS management incorporated the accepted recommendations into a comprehensive action plan for progression.

In November 2017 OAL were invited to revisit BMKFRS in order to provide an independent review of progress in action implementation.

### 3. Review Results

#### 3.1 Key Findings of 2016 report

Recommendation	Key Findings: Policy and Guidance	Current Position – In Progress
5.4.1	<p>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.</p>	<p>Comment: The BMKFRS Operational Assurance model has been recently redesigned to more effectively capture the developing function and is also more cyclical to remove the previous pinch points identified in the initial report, whereby all activities were depicted as being channelled through the OA department.</p> <p>Whilst the revised version appears more holistic (and comprehensive), service managers confirmed the model will require explanatory documents to explain the specific roles and responsibilities to key stakeholders. Although there is clear sight and knowledge of the revised OA model at strategic level, this has yet to be shared with operational staff, or their understanding confirmed.</p> <p>A Procedural Note to capture the revised model for delivering Operational Assurance in BMKFRS is currently under development. It is intended that once completed and communicated, this Procedural Note will address the above issues with the result that this recommendation will be fully addressed.</p>

### 3.2 The BMKFRS Assurance Model

Recommendation	Key Findings: External Inputs	Current Position – Complete
6.2.1	<p>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.</p>	<p>Comment: Work undertaken to ensure the organisation can effectively capture, analyse and embed the lessons learnt from significant external events has been comprehensive. Specifically, the training package developed and delivered relating to the Balmoral bar incident and also the development of the operationally focused Monthly News Letter are considered exemplars of best practice. There is now a formalised process in place within the assurance model to address these external events and to manage them to conclusion within the service</p>
Recommendation	Key Findings: Issue Resolution	Current Position – In Progress
6.4.1	<p>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.</p>	<p>Comment: A Procedural Note to capture the revised model for delivering Operational Assurance in BMKFRS is currently under development. Once completed this recommendation will be fully addressed.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: Issue Resolution	Current Position – Complete
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 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>	<p>Comment: The BMKFRS Operational Assurance Group (OAG) was established in early 2017. The OAG is chaired by the Head of Operational Training and Assurance and supported by a broad selection of standing members including representatives from Health and Safety, Training Department, Quality Assurance, Operational Assurance, two Territorial Commanders, representative bodies and ah-hoc attendees.</p> <p>The OAG is supported by a comprehensive terms of reference and since the inaugural meeting in February 2017 has met on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Regularised minutes from the monthly meetings evidence OAG management of Operational Assurance issues and demonstrate the groups’ authority to progress matters through to a meaningful resolution.</p> <p>The role of the OAG is considered to be embedded within BMKFRS and its function accepted as business as usual. This recommendation is now fully addressed.</p>



Recommendation	Key Findings: Issue Resolution	Current Position – In Progress
6.4.3	<p>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.</p>	<p>Comment: BMKFRS is currently progressing development of its electronic Active Monitoring System (AMS). This work stream is considered pivotal to the effective delivery of the BMKFRS Assurance Model and links directly to a number of recommendations within the OAL report and the related improvement plan.</p> <p>OAL has directly observed preliminary prototypes of the proposed system as well as dataflow process maps which appear comprehensive and fully designed to meet the expectations of the service. Reports from responsible officers confirmed that the initial rollout of the software will begin by the end of quarter 3 (2017/18) with additional modules being introduced as they become available. Once this system is in full use within BMKFRS this recommendation will be fully addressed.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: Debriefing Activities	Current Position – In Progress
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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Addressing current poor practices to ensure the onus for initiating a timely debrief sits firmly with incident commander.</li> <li>(ii) Continuing efforts to simplify the existing processes.</li> <li>(iii) Producing regular outcome reports to inform staff, promote inclusion and demonstrate the value of the process.</li> <li>(iv) Ensuring non-compliance is identified and valued contribution recognised and rewarded.</li> </ul>	<p>Comment: Since the initial review by OAL, progress has been made in the efforts to re-energise the debriefing processes.</p> <p>Notably:</p> <p>The service has recently committed to the acquisition of debrief training to take place in February 2018. This will consist of a two-day course for up to 16 selected candidates and will be based upon the JESIP principles. The intention of this training is for consequent cascade training to other personnel with follow up training as and when required.</p> <p>Whilst effort has been made to commence drafting the new debriefing policy, a conscious decision has been taken by managers to limit this process until learning from the forthcoming courses can be incorporated into the new procedures and the Active monitoring System introduced. During the intervening period the newly resourced OAT oversees the range of operational incidents to help ensure any incidents of note are subjected to an appropriate level of debrief. Once fully embedded in the AMS with supporting policy and procedures this recommendation will be fully addressed.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: Maintenance of Operational Skills	Current Position – In Progress
6.7.1	BMKFRS should seek to place greater emphasis on the individuals' responsibility for completion and maintenance of their own skill-set.	<p>Comment: BMKFRS has commenced a work stream to help address problems associated with employing an increasingly flexible approach to providing fire cover and specifically, the impact this is has upon individuals being distanced from their own training records and recognising their own development needs.</p> <p>Progress made to date includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The maintenance of individual professional competencies is now discussed during all personal development reviews of operational staff and the outcomes documented and monitored.</li> <li>• An evaluation of how maintenance of competence is being captured within the Core Training Records (CTR) has been commenced.</li> <li>• The maintenance of competence requirements are being aligned to the eight core operational skills detailed within the Fire Professional Framework.</li> <li>• Individual security access will be provided within the AMS commensurate with requirements of each user.</li> </ul>
Recommendation	Key Findings: Maintenance of Operational Skills	Current Position – Complete
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.	<p>Comment: BMKFRS has reviewed its processes for accessing the 'Bank' system, in consideration of disincentives to obtaining professional qualifications.</p>

### 3.3 Operational Training and Command Competence

Recommendation	Key Findings: Acquisition Training and Assessment	Current Position – Complete
7.1.1	BMKFRS should give consideration to making the qualification acquisition process more attractive to its prospective candidates.	<p>Comment: The outcome of the service appointment boards has been monitored and whilst it is acknowledged that the qualification acquisition process is causing a 'choke point' with Station Commander development, the recent round of examinations attracted a record number of applicants.</p> <p>This marks a cultural change for the organisation and supports corporate aspirations that all FRS operational managers of the future will have professional standards and technical qualifications.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: Staff Opinion	Current Position – Complete
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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Economic savings by combining appraisal assessment with other FRS.</li> <li>b) Potential renegotiation of the service level agreement between FSC and BMKFRS.</li> <li>c) Greater flexibility in the provision of larger scale scenarios with the consequent strengthening of the functional role competences.</li> <li>d) Opportunities to include risk critical functions such as Operational Support Units and Incident Command Units.</li> <li>e) Shared operational awareness between FRS.</li> <li>f) Shared operational awareness between all emergency service's and other first responders, (this will have the added benefit of meeting JESIP exercising requirements).</li> <li>g) A strengthening of inter-service working and coordinated operational procedures.</li> </ul>	<p>Comment: The requirements of recommendation 7.3.1 were incorporated into the operational training tender process.</p> <p>A three-year contract to support the delivery of operational training was awarded to the Fire Service College (Capita), and commenced on the 1 June 2017.</p> <p>The existing quality assurance processes within BMKFRS will be utilised to ensure service expectations are being met.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: Management of FSC Outcome Reports	Current Position – In Progress
7.4.1	<p>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.</p>	<p>Comment: The details of BMKFRS staff with outstanding development plans has been collated and circulated to Station Commanders. This information has been accompanied with interim guidance clarifying the procedures for managing development plans and supported by monitoring systems to capture when such plans are issued and completed.</p> <p>Currently the service is still progressing a number of outstanding development plans. This process is to be further supported by detailed guidance to be included within a 'Validation Training Procedure Note', currently under draft.</p>
Recommendation	Key Findings: QA of Station Based Training	Current Position – Complete
7.8.1	<p>BMKFRS should review (and potentially reduce) the quota of 288 QA assessments (summative sampling) per year to a more achievable figure.</p>	<p>Comment: In line with recommendation 7.8.1 BMKFRS has reviewed the number of Quality Assurance assessments to be completed during each training year and a revised target of 80 QA audits has now been set which is in accordance with accepted sampling ratios.</p> <p>This revised target is intended to strike the balance between maintaining an achievable workload, without undermining the evaluation of required performance standards.</p> <p>Performance against the revised target is being continually monitored and the QA process is currently well on track to achieve the set target of 80 visits during the current training year.</p>

Recommendation	Key Findings: QA of Station Based Training	Current Position – In Progress
7.8.2	<p>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 whole-time and On Call personnel and allowing them to undertake lower tier QA processes (interim sampling).</p>	<p>Comment: BMKFRS has explored options for utilising appropriately skilled Associate Instructors to QA (predominantly) On Call station instructors</p> <p>The progression of this recommendation is currently on hold in consideration of the achievement (or otherwise) of revised QA targets set in accordance with recommendation 7.8.1 above.</p>

### 3.4 Operational Exercising

8.1	Key Findings: Obtaining Evidence	Current Position – Complete
8.1.1	<p>BMKFRS should review the provision of operational exercising in order to provide increased opportunity for commanders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Practice command decision making</li> <li>b) Practice logistical controls</li> <li>c) Practice operational procedures etc. at larger, developing and more complex scenarios</li> </ul>	<p>Comment: The provision for operational exercising, to include the ability to facilitate larger scale exercises, was incorporated into the new three-year training specification that commenced in April 2017.</p> <p>In evidence of this, in July 2017 two large-scale exercises took place on consecutive evenings at the FSC and involved five available appliances, plus additional training appliance crewed by voluntary attendees and (importantly) a Command Unit.</p> <p>Each exercise involved two Station Commanders and a Group Commander, who took a full and active part and an Area Commanders attending in an observer capacity.</p> <p>These exercises were themed upon the ‘Balmoral bar incident’ and were used to recreate the same challenges (competing priorities, multiple rescues, deep seated fire, crew welfare etc.) and were used to confirm organisational learning following the considerable work previously undertaken by the OAT to earlier in the year. A further two exercises were confirmed as programmed to take place in February 2018.</p> <p>OAL also observed the comprehensive ‘internal’ exercise programme and supportive guidance and documentation currently under development. Initial plans are for the completion of one territorial exercise per month (12 per annum), to take place ‘in and around’ the service’s Site-Specific Risk Sites. The programme and guidance are scheduled for further discussion/progression at the forthcoming OAG meeting and if fully incorporated, will ensure BMKFRS has comprehensive operational exercising arrangements that afford its operational staff every opportunity to train to the highest standards, and under realistic conditions.</p>



### 3.5 Active Monitoring

<b>10.1</b>	<b>Key Findings: Locating Key Documents</b>	<b>Current Position – In Progress</b>
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'.	The AMS currently in development has supportive data flow maps so as to maintain and achieve efficiency and accuracy. OAL has observed these plans and when implemented will meet the needs of this recommendation. Prototypes are in use by OA and H&S as a means of testing the system with an intent to deliver initial Beta versions by the beginning of Q3 2017/18
<b>10.2</b>	<b>Key Findings: Allocation of Action Plans</b>	<b>Current Position – In Progress</b>
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.	Responsibilities are assigned within the AMS and are supported by an automatic email function so as to advise those allocated to resolving issues.
<b>10.3</b>	<b>Key Findings: Reporting by Exception</b>	<b>Current Position – In Progress</b>
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).	The drop down selection fields within the AMS already include training events and has capacity to be further extended to capture other events.
<b>10.4</b>	<b>Key Findings: Staff Access</b>	<b>Current Position – In Progress</b>
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.	Individual access to the AMS will be provided so as to allow all operational staff to review issues and supported by inclusion in the Monthly Reports when required.

<b>10.5</b>	<b>Key Findings: Role of the Monitoring Officer</b>	<b>Current Position – Complete</b>
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.	<p>Members of OAT have provided refresher input on the role of the Monitoring Officer, to all existing FDS Officers during recent monthly training events. This input set out Service expectations for monitoring/mentoring, scoring principles, etc. and referenced HSG65 and the 'OTHERS' methodology.</p> <p>Candidates on the FSC Level 1 course also receive input on what to expect from a Monitoring Officer, during the course.</p> <p>BMKFRS is currently developing clear guidance on performance of the Monitoring Officer role. This guidance will set out management expectation and once introduced should help support acquisition of the requisite skillset and delivery of the role. Any issues identified by the monitoring officer will be included as an item within the AMS so as to monitor resolution and to ensure visibility by the OA Team.</p>
	<b>Key Findings: Active Monitoring form</b>	<b>Current Position – Complete</b>
10.5.2	Moving forward, the new active monitoring form should directly correspond with the WM7 NOS.	A new active monitoring form and supporting checklist have been created and are now in use in a draft format. Once fully reviewed BMKFRS intend to make the form electronic and have this integrated into the AMS system and aligned with Thames Valley partners.

	<b>Key Findings: Active Monitoring at FSC</b>	<b>Current Position – Complete</b>
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.	BMKFRS has identified opportunities for Level 2 and 3 officers to perform the Monitoring Officer role at FSC during validation exercises and also to undertake active monitoring of BMKFRS operational staff whilst engaged in firefighting activities, during the four planned large-scale exercises. Evidence was produced that this is now taking place.

### 3.6 National Operational Guidance for Incident Command

	<b>Key Findings: Understanding of the functional roles</b>	<b>Current Position – Complete</b>
11.1.1	BMKFRS should ensure all staff have awareness and understanding of the functional roles within NOGIC, and that this is tested.	The L2 ICS refreshers at the FSC include a facilitated discussion session around the role of functional officers- in particular Command Support Commander, Safety Officer and Monitoring Officer. The role of Operations Commander and Sector Commander are also included.
	<b>Key Findings: Guidance for Commanders</b>	<b>Current Position – Complete</b>
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.	These roles are included in training and exercises and should now be considered as business as usual.

### 3.7 Internal Communications

Recommendation	Key Findings: Internal Communications	Transferred to Separate Project
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.	Comment: The BMKFRS document management strategy is now being reviewed independently and therefore no longer forms part of the OAL review process.
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.	Project plan, team and PID agreed with target completion date of April 1st 2018. This project now has a standalone risk register.
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 whole-time and On Call staff.	

## 4. Conclusion

As can be evidenced from the above findings, BMKFRS has made significant progress in addressing the wide-ranging recommendations contained within the previous report *Review of Operational Assurance Arrangements, July 2016*.

During the intervening 12 month period between the OAL visits, an impressive array of work has been undertaken to ensure that virtually all recommendations have been either fully addressed and embedded within the service, or have been subject to significant development and progression.

The three key areas identified as 'Priority Recommendations' have received particular attention. This has included the provision of a (now) well resourced OAT to provide a capable, motivated and clearly well managed team that is developing to meet all expectations, and the establishment of the Operational Assurance Group (OAG) to ensure that matters arising are effectively managed through to a conclusion that is acceptable to the service.

Of particular note is the work now undertaken to 'capture and communicate' matters arising from significant external and internal events. This area is considered **an exemplar of good practice** and is undoubtedly worthy of sharing for the benefit of other UK FRS

A number of recommendations were found to be 'in progress' and it will be imperative that the service maintains its effort and focus in order to ensure the above work-streams are pursued through to completion, or risk the considerable and comprehensive work undertaken to date being lost to other competing priorities.

In particular the development of an active monitoring system (AMS) to act as a smart, service-wide tool is considered pivotal to the realisation of the holistic OA Model within BMKFRS.

OAL were pleased to note the commitment of senior management to these efforts.

As with the 2016 activity, throughout this checkpoint review BMKFRS staff at all levels were open, honest, enthusiastic and gave freely of their time. OAL would like to thank all involved for their participation.