

Isle Of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority

Organisational Assessment

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of local public services

Isle Of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority

Overall, Isle Of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	2 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	2 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

Isle of Wight Fire Service performs adequately overall.

Performance levels are generally high and the service has a good track record of improvement. Although the cost of the service is high compared to others it is delivering better than average performance. The service responds well overall to emergencies and is helping to make local communities safer. Deaths and injuries from fires are low and the number of fires is reducing. With partners it is effective in improving road safety.

Currently the service has two weaknesses holding it back, which it is working to improve. Retained duty system fire crews are often not available - retained duty system staff have other jobs and are available on call for a certain number of hours per week, living close to their local fire stations. This is being tackled by a major transformation programme, known as 'Model for Change' which aims to increase the number of whole-time fire fighters. And better risk information will be provided to fire fighters attending incidents by introducing mobile data technology.

The service works well with partners, for example in dealing with emergencies and educating the public to improve community safety.

The service has good leadership and a strong commitment to improve. Significant extra funding has been approved and robust improvement plans are in place.

It has a good knowledge of the community and its needs from extensive consultation on specific issues. However the service lacks an effective

mechanism for ongoing community engagement and has yet to fully engage with local councillors and scrutiny on fire issues.

Arrangements for managing finances are effective. The service has a good track record of managing expenditure within budgets and achieving efficiency savings. There is good use of partnership working to secure added value for money and improve service delivery.

The current workforce of the service does not match its needs in regard to skills and availability. The service has not been able to develop a formal workforce strategy until 'Model for Change' was approved but many of the components are in place such as an assessment of training needs and succession plans for future management changes. The service is making good progress in improving equality and diversity having been externally assessed at level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, Targets for diversity and equality have been set for the workforce but currently these are not being achieved and there is no clear action plan to achieve them.

About Isle Of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority

The Isle of Wight lies about 5 miles off the Hampshire coast and is accessible by a regular ferry service. The population of 140,000 are mostly white and over a quarter are over 65 years old. The Island economy is heavily dependant upon tourism and with over three million visitors a year, there is an increased burden on public services such as fire and rescue. The rural nature of the island and the poor condition of much of the road network makes some areas difficult to access quickly.

The Fire and Rescue Service is part of the Isle of Wight Council and is situated in the Environment and Neighbourhood directorate. The Council's Cabinet fulfils the role of the Fire Authority. Currently, the Service is delivered from 10 fire stations deploying 16 front line appliances and 11 specialist units. The Service relies heavily on retained duty staff - these staff have other occupations and are available on call for a certain number of hours per week and live close to their local fire stations.. Of the 204 fire fighters employed, 168 are on the retained duty system and only 36 are whole- time.

The Fire Service has four priority areas based around community, processes, resources and people:

- Community
- Ensure communities feel safer;
- Save lives and reduce injuries; and
- Protect the built and natural environment
- Process
- Community protection;

- Emergency response; and
- Incident prevention
- Resource
- Priorities drive resource allocation; and
- Manage resources
- People
- Competent and healthy workforce and
- Match our workforce to our needs

Organisational assessment

How well is the organisation delivering its priority services, outcomes and improvements that are important to local people?

Community - Ensure communities feel safer, save lives and reduce injuries and protect the built and natural environment

The Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service is achieving good results in this priority area. Performance levels are generally high and the service has a good track record of improvement since 2005. The service responds well overall to emergencies and is meeting most of its targets. It is helping to make local communities safer. Deaths and injuries from accidental fires are low. The number of primary fires is low, at 18 per 10,000 population, a reduction of 15 per cent over the last two years. The number of deliberate fires is also low at 13.7, which is a 30 per cent reduction in the last two years.

However, at certain times the availability of fire fighting crews falls below acceptable levels and increases the risk to public safety. There have been 53 failures to mobilise this year due to the lack of availability of crews or appliances. This increases response times as resources have to be diverted from other areas. While this is a small percentage of the 1447 call-outs it remains a concern that the service is striving to resolve. In 2007 the service agreed a stand by arrangement with the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide additional cover if crewing levels become low. This uses an escalating three-colour coding system to define the level of alertness - black for initial alert, followed by amber and then red for a request for assistance. So far no incidents have led to any red alerts but the number of black and amber alerts has risen sharply.

Process - Community protection, emergency

response and incident prevention

The Fire service is performing well in this area. For example, in the last two years the number of calls to fire attended has fallen by 32 per cent and the number of false alarms has reduced by 19 per cent. This resulted in considerable resource savings being made. The service responds well to medical emergencies in those areas where it can respond faster than the ambulance service. It currently operates three 'co-responder' schemes for the ambulance service and about 90 per cent of calls are attended within eight minutes.

With its partners the Fire Service is helping to educate the public to prevent accidents and improve safety. For the last three years a 'Child Safety Awareness Week' has been delivered to 2,250 children at the Isle of Wight College. The Fire Service has initiated the 'Head On' programme to promote road safety with other emergency services. This supports the national 'Safe Drive Stay Alive' initiative and is delivered to 1800 sixth form students a year. Home Fire Safety Checks are increasingly effective. They have evolved from random leaflet drops to more targeted delivery with a strong focus on an ageing population and involving a wide range of partners. Referral arrangements are in place, for example with Age Concern, the Red Cross, health visitors, Royal Institute for the Deaf, housing associations and others. The number of fires in homes has reduced and the percentage of fires attended where no smoke alarm was fitted is among the lowest compared to the national average.

The Fire Service is improving outcomes for people in vulnerable communities. It is improving its knowledge of different communities by working closely with partners in developing an online and web-based information facility that is called 'the Isle of Wight Information Observatory'. This provides access to continually updated information about a wide range of aspects of life that influence the Island and uses specialist software to profile risk in different communities. The service is supporting the national LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) course by working intensively with young people involved in anti social behaviour to teach core fire service skills and instil confidence and discipline. Ten young people from the Pan neighbourhood have undertaken the course in 2009 and continue to be involved in the area as junior wardens.

The service has improved its plans to deliver the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services. The Government requires fire services to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to identify, target and reduce risk to people and property. The Council's IRMP for 2009-14 is an improvement on its predecessor. It shows a good understanding of the links between the people, resources, community and process issues that influence performance. The plan sets out a delivery plan that shows how prevention and protection activities will be used with partners to improve public safety.

The Service contributes effectively to the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act which aims to enable communities to recover quickly after emergencies. It is a member of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum - a statutory group which helps co-ordinate responses to large scale emergencies as well as managing risk in the community - and it participates in regular exercises with other emergency services, including the Coastguard and the Environment Agency. It has appropriate arrangements

with the voluntary sector to help in emergencies, for example, enabling the British Red Cross to use the 'Fire and Emergency Support Service' vehicle to provide welfare and emotional support to people affected by major incidents. The service also contributes to the national resilience response in other parts of the country, for example during extreme flooding.

Risk management arrangements are generally good. However, a significant operational risk has been identified regarding the current reliance on paper based systems used to provide crews with up to date information on specific risks. This system is cumbersome to use and it is not always certain that the information provided is up to date. The service is addressing this weakness by purchasing a mobile data system. This will be much simpler and more convenient to use and will give access to considerably more information that will increase the safety of front line staff as well as the public.

Resource - Priorities drive resource allocation and manage resources

The Fire Service performs adequately in its use of resources. Its arrangements for managing finances are in place and effective. It has a good track record of managing expenditure within budgets and achieving efficiency savings.

There is a good knowledge of the community and its needs in relation to the service's key priorities of prevention and response. The Integrated Risk Management Plan and the Model for Change Plan have both been developed with extensive community engagement, using a variety of means including the website and public meetings held at local level. The service works closely with local communities, for example residents in Brighstone participated in a series of events to inform the risk profile for their area which is relatively remote. While consultation on specific issues has been effective, the service lacks a mechanism for ongoing public engagement and is considering setting up a citizens' panel.

The Fire Service is delivering adequate value for money. Although the cost of the service is high compared to others it is delivering better than average performance. Procurement arrangements are effective, for example it uses Firebuy - a national network - to take advantage of economies of scale. There is good use of partnership working to secure added value for money and improve service delivery. For example, the purchase of the mobile data system takes advantage of proven technology developed by Surrey Fire and Rescue and there is good collaboration with Hampshire Fire and Rescue on major events and for high risk buildings.

The Fire Service is good at performance management. It has access to good quality performance information to help it to manage effectively. It has established a comprehensive range of local and national indicators to measure performance against. Performance information is well presented, making good use graphs to show trends and forecasts compared to targets. This information is regularly monitored and used to support decisions. New performance management arrangements are being introduced using a balanced scorecard tool to measure performance against national and local objectives. Clear high level targets to support this have not yet been developed for all areas.

People - Competent and healthy workforce and match our workforce to our needs

The current workforce of the Fire and Rescue Service does not match its needs in regard to skills and availability. The service has recognised its shortcomings for some time and is making good progress in implementing a plan, 'Model for Change' that aims to significantly improve the service.

The Fire Service has a good understanding of its workforce and the capacity needed to achieve its priorities. Investment in the Retained Duty Availability Management System provides an up to date, real time picture of when fire fighters are available to carry out their duties. This has exposed serious shortcomings in the availability of part-time retained duty staff at critical times of the day, reducing workforce productivity.

The 'Model for Change' programme aims to alter the balance of whole-time and retained duty system fire fighters. This programme has now been approved in principle and is now the subject of final public consultation before it is finally adopted. This will result in 30 extra whole time fire fighters and 76 less working part-time under the retained duty fire fighter system.

The Fire Service does not have a formal workforce strategy. While it has been working to achieve the modernisation changes it has not been in a position to adopt one. Nonetheless many of the components of a plan are in place. The Fire Service understands the training needs of its workforce, especially in regard to health and safety. It has established the competencies that staff need to carry out their roles and has carried out a training needs analysis to bridge the gaps. Succession plans are well developed. Individual training needs are assessed annually through personal development reviews and a traffic light system is used for identifying and managing gaps. The service operates its own training centre for learning and development and training budgets are adequate to meet needs. Staff are given an opportunity to develop broader skills such as in language, literacy, numeracy, and information technology through the 'Skills for Life' Action Plan.

The senior management team is effectively promoting change and supporting the workforce. There is good understanding of the need for change and unions are generally supportive. Morale is being monitored through the period of change, and the recent staff survey does not show any significant deterioration. The average number of days lost due to sickness fell from 9.3 days in 2007/08 to only 6.5 days in 2008/09.

The Fire Service is making good progress in improving equality and diversity. It has been externally assessed at level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, which equates to the 'achieving' level in the new Equality Framework for Local Government. This means that monitoring systems are in place and targets for diversity and equality have been set for the balance of the workforce. However current performance is below the recruitment targets and the service does not have a clear action plan to achieve them.

Does the organisation have the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future

improvements?

The Fire Service is showing good leadership in transforming the organisation to maximise its capacity. The Chief Fire Officer has a clear vision for the service and has assembled a strong management team. He is well regarded at all levels and receives clear and strong support from the lead Cabinet Member and his Director. The public have shown strong support for the retention of an in-house service which the Council is happy to support, but only if its efficiency is improved.

The Council is strongly committed to improving the service, as demonstrated by allocating significant additional funding during a period of financial constraints. It is providing extra revenue funding of £300,000 a year to improve workforce skills and capacity. This will enable the number of full-time staff to be increased so that more time can be spent on community safety prevention and protection in areas that are currently at higher risk. It will also provide increased cover to meet current shortfalls in availability of crews around the Island both day and night. Extra crews will also be able to support additional numbers of special rescue appliances to improve response at road traffic collisions - currently the highest risk of life on the Island. Extra capital resources are also being provided. The council has approved the expenditure of £8 million to build new fire stations where they are most needed, with modern facilities that are fit for purpose for staff and can be used as a community resource.

The Fire Service has good plans for improvement. The Model for Change programme is being supported by a dedicated project manager for a three year period. This is a significant factor as the Council has historically been weak at delivering its capital programme and the fire modernisation project has to be delivered alongside some other significant transformation projects such as school reorganisation. The mobile data system project is close to being implemented. This will significantly improve safety and once it is operational the service should be able to evidence efficiency savings from it. Importantly the system has considerable potential to contribute to further improvement.

While there is good leadership at Cabinet level, the wider engagement of councillors with the fire service is not yet fully effective. Until recently scrutiny arrangements have been weak, with only one scrutiny committee and policy commissions that focused on new policies rather than scrutiny. New arrangements have been introduced that will increase the capacity of the scrutiny committee and allow fire and community safety to be scrutinised in terms of performance and progress. A new induction training programme for members covers the fire service but attendance has been poor. A greater awareness of fire issues would enable councillors to engage more effectively with community issues at a local ward level.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

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