


# Isle of Man Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge

Isle of Man

23 January 2023 to 26 January 2023

Feedback report





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# 1. Background

This report outlines the key findings from the Local Government Association's (LGA) peer challenge at the Isle of Man Fire and Rescue Service (IOMFRS) which took place between 23 and 26 January 2023. The FRS invited the LGA to carry out this peer challenge to maximise organisational learning and awareness and to inform future improvement planning.

The peer challenge process involved a team of experienced external senior peers from the Fire and Rescue Service sector spending four days on-site at the FRS. During this time, the team acted as critical partners to assess both the strengths of the service and areas for improvement. They used their experience and knowledge of Fire and Rescue Services to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer challenge process is voluntary and demonstrates the IOMFRS's openness to external challenge, transparency and improvement. The peer challenge has provided an opportunity for local leaders and senior officers to obtain analysis, advice and support from a team of experienced external peers on their service.

The peer team were pleased to hear how the FRS is already working with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the development of their Risk Management Plan, but this peer challenge has identified other capability gaps in the FRS due to resourcing.

Building on this peer challenge, the peer team would encourage the service to continue to look externally to other FRSs and the National Fire Chiefs Council (in the UK), in support of mutual learning and shared practice across the FRS sector.

This report outlines the peer team's key recommendations to the FRS. In developing these recommendations, peers have sought to understand, consider and reflect the unique small Island context in which the service operates. The Island is a self-governing British Crown Dependency with its own Government, parliament and legislative framework.

## 2. Executive Summary

The FRS is self-aware of its strengths and the challenges it faces in delivering a modern-day Fire and Rescue Service. This was demonstrated both through the Chief Fire Officer's position statement/self-assessment shared with the peer team in advance of our time on site, and in conversations that the peer team had with a range of stakeholders. Key themes, explored in more detail throughout this report, include governance and accountability, the incident command structure, legislative reform, risk management, digitalisation and use of data, workforce and equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer, working alongside both the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and the Chief Executive, is bringing a long-term vision and fresh approach to the leadership and management of the service. Peers heard how the Interim Chief Fire Officer is "*wanting to improve things*" and the Minister is "*someone we have a lot of faith in.*" Peers also spoke with a range of internal and external partners (police, ambulance, building control, external fire safety stakeholders and developers) who see the FRS as a valued partner to work with.

Peers heard that a number of senior leadership team posts within the FRS, including that of the Chief Fire Officer, are currently held on an interim basis which has created some uncertainty amongst staff about the future direction for the service. The peer team would encourage the Department of Home Affairs and FRS to work towards creating greater stability within the service's senior leadership team as soon as possible.

The FRS should also build greater clarity and understanding around the scheme of delegation for decision making. This will help ensure greater organisational clarity in relation to ownership and accountability for decision making. There should be a clear and well defined 'scheme of delegation' which considers the decision-making powers of the Minister, Lead Member, Chief Executive, Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and senior officers. Governance processes should also be strengthened around the management of the FRS Risk Register. The FRS should set out clear governance arrangements for reviewing and monitoring the Risk Register.

Officers and firefighters who met with the peer team are clearly dedicated,

enthusiastic and passionate about what they do. They are willing to go 'above and beyond' to save lives and protect the Island's communities and are proud of the work they do. Officers and firefighters are committed to being adaptable, flexible and multi-disciplined – this is important given the Island's small size and isolated geographical location in relation to other Fire and Rescue Services. Although the Island's FRS has resilience arrangements in place with other FRSs, any external support would take time to arrive and therefore the service needs to be prepared to provide an operational response to the Island's risks. This is different to many FRSs in the UK who can rely on cross border arrangements to supplement their operational response at times of high demand.

Uniquely the Island's firefighters also provide maintenance and engineering support to maintain operational equipment and again, this is different to most FRSs in the UK. Peers heard how during the pandemic, this worked well as the Island's FRS could operate independently to the UK and maintain service delivery.

However, the peer team heard how this, at times, can result in officers feeling stretched and undervalued due to undertaking multiple roles. For example, peers were told that some officers have up to eight lead responsibility areas in addition to their primary role. Some officers also felt that current shift patterns and ways of working are not flexible enough to ensure a positive work life balance. Peers heard that *"our biggest strength is our biggest weakness, everyone wears multiple hats,"* that *"workloads are high, and we feel we are spinning plates."*

To help address this, the FRS should undertake a workforce review. This should be aligned to work to develop an FRS Risk Management Plan (see section 5.2). The workforce review will help to ensure that officer and firefighter resources, ways of working and skills are aligned to priorities and risk and that employees are able to achieve a positive work-life balance. Key to this will be a fundamental review of the on call and wholetime on call duty systems. Strengthening staff engagement approaches and continuing to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the workforce will also be an essential aspect.

Peers were pleased to hear that a Safeguarding Policy is under development which includes a requirement for all FRS personnel to complete safeguarding training. The FRS should look to finalise this draft strategy at pace. Peers would also recommend

that the background checks in place, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, are reviewed to ensure they reflect the role undertaken by all staff across the FRS.

The FRS (as part of the Department of Home Affairs) is supported by a range of wider Government corporate support services (Shared Services). These services cover key areas such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Shared Fleet/Estates and Human Resources (HR). These Shared Services aim to facilitate smarter, more cohesive and efficient public services across Government departments.

Peers learned of the challenge relating to the capacity and accountability of some elements of Shared Services support for the FRS which can, at times, place further demands and pressures on officers within the FRS. For example, the FRS is producing its own maternity and paternity policy amongst others, and it is the view of the peer team that this should fall within the remit of the Human Resources (HR) Shared Services function and not uniformed FRS staff. The trade unions and non-unionised groups expressed concerns over the lack of progress on some HR policies, linking this lack of progress to a lack of corporate investment in the FRS.

The peer team would strongly recommend a review of Shared Service arrangements applicable to the FRS to ensure they are fit for purpose and are providing an effective service. The review should explore how the FRS requirements are met and how any barriers, real or perceived, can be addressed. The FRS should, as a minimum, adopt service level agreements (with relevant Shared Services) which set out agreed ways of working and timescales for achievement in order to strengthen accountability.

The Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026) sets out the FRS's mission to 'save life, reduce risk, provide humanitarian services and protect the environment'. Officers and Firefighters had recently been engaged on the development of this Strategic Plan through a series of meetings and visits (to all stations) led by the Interim Chief Fire Officer. They told the peer team that they welcomed this increased senior management visibility and engagement. A clear and consistent message to the peer team was the need for this to continue and not be seen as a one off. A workforce review would provide an opportunity for the senior leadership to build engagement and communication with staff and demonstrate their commitment to co-design future

change. The appetite to support this work was evident across the whole workforce including non-unionised and unionised members of the operational workforce.

The legislative framework for the FRS differs from that in the UK. In particular, it is less prescriptive in relation to the requirement to produce a Risk Management Plan. However, peers were pleased to hear how the Department of Home Affairs has committed to allocating drafting time to modernise fire legislation from 2023. (Including fire safety legislation).

The peer team were particularly pleased to learn how the FRS has already started work (still in its early stages) that will inform the development of a Risk Management Plan. The FRS needs to resource and maintain a relentless drive and commitment to the development of a Risk Management Plan that reflects and responds to all foreseeable risk on the Island based on the tenants of risk, demand and vulnerability (people factors).

The Risk Management Plan will need to be informed by relevant, timely and accurate data. Peers heard from officers who welcome improved digital solutions and systems in some areas of the service (see 5.2), However, there is more work to do to support digital transformation, automation and remote access to systems which facilitate the production of real time, accurate data collation and analysis to inform decision making.

The FRS should also review the approach to scrutiny and assurance of the FRS. It is the view of peers that the current performance framework can be strengthened to include smarter, more outcome focussed indicators, standards and targets which are more closely aligned both to the Strategic Plan and emerging FRS Risk Management Plan.

During the peer challenge, the peer team visited fire stations that were built over 50 - 60 years ago and heard how these stations need capital investment to facilitate the type of work carried out by a modern-day FRS including management of contaminants. Capital investment is also required to ensure the provision of dignified changing facilities for all staff at some stations. The peer team recommend the FRS works with the Department of Home Affairs to develop a long-term estates strategy which aims to ensure the provision of accommodation that matches the requirements of a modern-day FRS and aspirations for the future. The development of the strategy

should consider opportunities to collaborate with partners, particularly the other emergency services.

Peers met with representatives from other blue light services who described positive and collaborative working relationships with the FRS. That said we did hear of examples where cost recovery modelling had caused some tension, and whilst this appears to be historic, we recommend a formal 'blue light' forum be established to discuss all matters related to joint working and collaboration. This will strengthen work already taking place to explore wider collaboration such as opportunities for co-location, including the feasibility of developing a 'Blue Light Hub.' Given the small Island context and budget pressures, the peer team believe that this type of collaborative working is vital.

As part of the peer challenge process, peers were pleased to meet with representatives from the Island's strategic and tactical emergency planning groups. We also visited the Emergency Services Joint Control Room (ESJCR).

It is our view that the FRS should review arrangements in place to deal with significant/major incidents. This should include a review of the FRS's strategic, tactical and operational command capabilities. The peer team expressed real concern over the FRS's ability to service a Strategic Coordinating Group in conjunction with a Tactical Coordinating Group whilst dealing with the operational demands of an incident.

Peers do not think it is wise to upskill ICL3 commanders to undertake ICL4 roles as we would not expect Assistant Divisional Officers or Divisional Officers to take on Principal Officer responsibilities and make organisational decisions.

The FRS needs to consider how the strategic (Principal Officer) incident command roster is maintained on a 24/7 basis. At the same time, it should also review the distribution of TAC advisors across the flexi officer call groups to provide a consistent level of cover.

In addition, the peer team expressed real concern that the Emergency Services Joint Control Room would be overwhelmed by a major incident. With no 'buddy arrangements' the staffing levels are inadequate to deal with a large-scale incident, this needs to be dealt with as a matter of priority with the other CAT 1 responders.



## 3. Recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the FRS:

### 3.1. Recommendation 1

Review the FRS legislative framework in support of modernisation and the delivery of statutory responsibilities. Peers understand the Department of Home Affairs has committed to allocating drafting time and the appropriate resources to modernise fire legislation from 2023.

### 3.2. Recommendation 2

A number of senior leadership team posts within the FRS, including that of the Chief Fire Officer, are currently held on an interim basis which has created some uncertainty about the future direction of the service. The peer team would encourage the Department of Home Affairs and FRS to work towards creating greater stability within the FRS's senior leadership team as soon as possible.

### 3.3. Recommendation 3


The FRS should review the approach to scrutiny and assurance of the service. The FRS should consider how the performance framework can be strengthened to include smarter, more outcome focussed indicators, standards and targets which are more closely aligned both to the Strategic Plan and emerging FRS Risk Management Plan. This will support greater managerial and political oversight, enhanced accountability and improved service delivery.

### 3.4. Recommendation 4

The FRS should review and refresh the FRS's risk register and align this to the wider department's risk register. It is important to undertake this update as a priority and then to agree a regular future cycle for reviewing and updating the register. The FRS should also set out clear governance arrangements for monitoring the risk register.

### 3.5. Recommendation 5

The scheme of delegation for the FRS was unclear to the peer team and as such the FRS should consider how they can build greater clarity and understanding for all



involved. There should be a clear and well defined 'scheme of delegation' which considers the decision-making powers of the Minister, Lead Member, Chief Executive, Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and senior officers. This will help ensure greater organisational clarity in relation to ownership and accountability for decision making.

### **3.6. Recommendation 6**

The FRS should, as a priority, develop a Risk Management Plan that reflects and responds to all foreseeable risk, with agreed timescales for development and delivery. The FRS needs to both resource and maintain a relentless drive and commitment to this work. This plan should be informed by the FRS's strategic priorities and Island plan.

### **3.7. Recommendation 7**

A formal 'blue light' forum should be established to discuss all matters related to joint working and collaboration. This will strengthen work already taking place to explore wider collaboration such as opportunities for co-location including the feasibility of developing a 'Blue Light Hub.' Given the small Island context and budget pressures, the peer team believe that this type of collaborative working is vital.

### **3.8. Recommendation 8**

Review arrangements in place to deal with significant/major incidents. This should include revisions to the FRS's strategic, tactical and operational command rota. These revisions should ensure appropriate levels of command are in place to deal with major incidents, and that the capability exists to service a strategic coordinating group alongside a multi-agency tactical group whilst dealing with the operational demands of an incident. The service also needs to work with the Emergency Service Joint Control room (ESJCR) management team to ensure that the capacity and resilience of the ESJCR is sufficient to mobilise, coordinate and control a large, protracted, multiagency incident.

### **3.9. Recommendation 9**

Undertake a Workforce Review to ensure you have the right people, in the right place with the right skills. The review should consider workloads. It was clear that in certain areas of the organisation staff were overstretched. The review should consider if it can identify additional resource or release capacity to ease the burden on those individuals. This review should include a fundamental review of the on call and whole-time on call duty systems.

### **3.10. Recommendation 10**

As part of the proposed Workforce Review take steps to strengthen approaches to staff communication and engagement. Processes should be in place which recognise the value of staff.

### **3.11. Recommendation 11**

A draft Safeguarding Policy is under development. The FRS should finalise this at pace and continue to engage all stakeholders in its implementation. Peers would also recommend that the background checks in place, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks, are reviewed to ensure they reflect the role undertaken by all staff across the service.

### **3.12. Recommendation 12**

Work alongside ICT Shared Services to agree the direction that digital investment will take over the next four to five years to support the FRS Strategic Plan. This should include investment in data and digital solutions which facilitate the production of real time, accurate data collation and analysis to underpin future business cases, management of risk, inform decision making and improve service delivery.

### **3.13. Recommendation 13**

Review the Shared Service arrangements applicable to the FRS to ensure they are fit for purpose and are providing an effective service. The review should explore how the FRS requirements are met and how any barriers, real or perceived, can be addressed. The FRS should, as a minimum, adopt service level agreements (with relevant Shared Services) which set out agreed ways of working and timescales for achievement in order to strengthen accountability.

### 3.14. Recommendation 14

Promote and strengthen Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the workforce. Utilise insight to inform the approach including staff engagement, networks, data collection and equality analysis.

### 3.15. Recommendation 15

The FRS should work alongside colleagues within the Department of Home Affairs to develop a long-term estates strategy which aims to ensure the provision of accommodation that matches the requirements of a modern-day FRS and aspirations for the future. The development of the strategy should consider opportunities to collaborate with partners, particularly the other emergency services.

## 4. Summary of the peer challenge approach

### 4.1. The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced officer and elected member peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the FRS peer challenge and unique Island context. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Phil Garrigan OBE, Chief Fire Officer, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
- Councillor Nick Chard, Chairman, Kent and Medway Fire & Rescue Authority
- Angela Opie, Group Manager, Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service
- James Lucy, Acting Area Manager, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service
- Cindy Lowthian, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

### 4.2. Scope and focus

The service used the LGA's Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge toolkit to help develop and agree the scope and focus of this peer challenge as follows:

1. **Governance** – are there clear governance arrangements in place and do officers, partners and stakeholders understand the vision and values of the service? Is there a culture of constructive challenge and scrutiny?

2. **Understanding of local context and priority setting** – does the service have clear priorities informed by the local context? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and communities? The peer team were asked to share particular reflections on the work (recently begun) towards developing a Risk Management Plan (RMP).
3. **Organisational and managerial leadership** - how effective is the current organisational structure in relation to delivering services to the local community? Is there sufficient capacity and resilience in the current organisational structure beyond business as usual? Peers were asked to share particular reflections on the current incident command structure.
4. **Organisational capacity (including digitalisation, data and ‘corporate functions)** - peers were asked to consider a number of areas including digitalisation, on call model (wholetime and on call) and how the service is working within wider Government including Human Resources (HR), fleet management, estates and minor capital building management to support continuous improvement within the IOMFRS and if these arrangements provide greater internal capacity?
5. **Financial Planning and Management** - does the service have a clear understanding of its current financial position, opportunities and challenges? Does the service provide value for money?
6. **People and culture** – do staff, partners and stakeholders understand the vision and values of the service? Is there a culture of respect and constructive challenge?

#### **4.3. The peer challenge process**

Peer challenge is an improvement focused process. It is important to note that peer challenges are not inspections. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of FRSs to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the IOMFRS, the Island context and the opportunities and challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days onsite at the IOMFRS, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 125 people including a range of wholetime and on call firefighters, officers, partners, lead member and Minister. The peer team spoke with many of these 125 people more than once due to the breadth of their respective roles.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow Fire and Rescue Service officer peers.

## 5. Feedback

### 5.1. Governance

As a self-governing British Crown Dependency, the Isle of Man has its own Government, parliament and legislation. The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) sits within the Government's Department of Home affairs which has a dedicated Minister and Chief Executive. A number of political members have been appointed with responsibility for specialist areas of the Department, including a dedicated lead member for the FRS. The FRS is led by the Interim Chief Fire Officer and a further five officers who make up the Senior Leadership Team.

During the peer challenge, it was clear to the peer team that relationships between the Minister, her lead member and senior officers are positive and are built on trust and mutual respect. Together, there is a commitment to work collaboratively to drive improvement and modernisation. Both internal and external stakeholders who met with the peer team are encouraged by this intent and the fact that firefighters and

officers across the FRS are open to change, transformation and modernisation.

A number of senior leadership team posts within the FRS, including that of the Chief Fire Officer, are currently held on an interim basis. The peer team were told this has created some uncertainty, amongst staff, about the future direction of the service. The peer team would encourage the Department of Home Affairs and FRS to work towards creating greater stability within the FRSs senior leadership team as soon as possible.

The 'Our Island Plan' sets out the Island's vision, for the next 10-15 years, as '*building a secure, vibrant and sustainable future for our Island*'. The Department of Home Affairs, where the fire service sits, has an agreed delivery plan (2022 – 2023) in support of the Island Plan with a vision "*to be the safest and most secure small Island community*". The peer team were pleased to learn that FRS has, in turn, agreed its own Strategic Plan for the next four years with a mission to '*to save life, reduce risk, provide humanitarian services, and protect the environment.*'

Peers were pleased to hear how officers had been engaged on the development of the Strategic Plan through a series of visits to all stations, led by the Interim Chief Fire Officer. Staff at all levels told the peer team that they welcomed this increased senior management visibility and engagement and are encouraged by this. A clear and consistent message to the peer team was the need for this communication and engagement to continue.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the 'golden thread' that links the Island Plan, Department of Home Affairs Delivery Plan and FRS Strategic Plan together. Peers heard from a number of FRS staff who would welcome more engagement in the development of the Island Plan to ensure this more clearly reflects the key contribution the FRS make in support of its priorities. Moving forward, the Department of Home Affairs should consider how the views and priorities of the department can be better reflected within the Island Plan. This is also important because the Island Plan informs the Government's spending priorities and budget.

The FRS should review the approach to scrutiny and assurance of the service. Currently, the service provides monthly performance updates to the Home Affairs Department and quarterly update reports to the Minister. This performance information, shared with the peer team, includes a range of performance data



including number of incidents, active calls, prevention and protection data. The service should consider how the performance framework can be strengthened to include smarter, more outcome focussed indicators, standards and targets which are more closely aligned both to the Strategic Plan and emerging FRS Risk Management Plan. This will support greater managerial and political oversight, enhanced accountability and improved service delivery.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the FRS approach to the management of risk through the FRS's Risk Register. A copy of the FRS Risk Register was shared with the peer team which was out of date. The FRS should review and refresh this register and align it to the wider Department's Risk Register. It is important to undertake this update as a priority and then to agree a regular future cycle for reviewing and updating the register. The FRS should also set out clear governance arrangements for monitoring their Risk Register.

The scheme of delegation for the FRS was unclear to the peer team and as such the FRS should consider how they can build greater clarity and understanding for all involved. This includes the decision-making powers of the Minister, Lead Member, Chief Executive, Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and senior officers. This will help ensure greater organisational clarity in relation to ownership and accountability for decision making.

The FRS is supported by a range of Government corporate Shared Services. These cover core functions such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Shared Fleet/Estates management and Human Resources (HR). Shared Services work across Government departments with the aim of facilitating smarter, more cohesive and efficient public services.

There were examples of positive working relationships with colleagues across Shared Services. However, there is frustration around the capacity and flexibility of some elements of Shared Services to provide the level of support required due to other competing priorities. This can, at times, place further demands and pressures on officers within the FRS. For example, the peer team heard from FRS strategic managers who are writing people related policies such as annual leave agreements and maternity and paternity policies. It is the view of peers that this should fall within the remit of Human Resources, with the strategic intent reflective of the FRS and



Department of Home Affairs captured. The trade unions and none-unionised groups expressed concerns over the lack of progress on some HR policies, linking this lack of progress to a lack of corporate investment in the FRS.

Peers also heard examples where FRS staff are undertaking work relating to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and equality policies. Whilst these are key pieces of work, this is clearly impacting on the capacity of the FRS. It is the view of the peer team that this type of work should be undertaken by support services, again with the relevant support services engaging closely with the FRS to capture the strategic intent of the FRS.

Another example involves shared fleet services and the procurement of replacement vehicles. Peers heard from some officers who said that this had involved extended procurement processes and subsequent delays, resulting in an increase in project costs.

There are opportunities to work across Shared Services to set out and agree the future requirements for the FRS in support of its modernisation. The peer team would strongly recommend a review of Shared Service arrangements applicable to the Fire Service to ensure they are fit for purpose and are providing an effective service. The review should explore how the FRS requirements are met and how any barriers, real or perceived, can be addressed. The FRS should, as a minimum, adopt service level agreements (with relevant Shared Services) which set out agreed ways of working together in order to build capacity, including timescales for achievement and measurable targets which should help strengthen accountability. There may be opportunities to share learning and approaches with other UK County FRS's who have experienced similar challenges. The use of wider procurement frameworks could also reduce the burden placed on the service, where feasible and applicable to the governance arrangements.

## **5.2. Local context and priority setting**

As outlined earlier in this report, the peer team were pleased to hear how the FRS has agreed a four-year Strategic Plan. The plan identifies five priority areas of focus: prevention, protection, preparedness, response and people. In delivering these

priorities, the service operates within a different legislative framework to that of the UK. A number of officers within the service and also within other departments described current legislation as '*outdated*' and '*in need of modernisation.*' Peers heard that '*our legislation acts as a barrier.*'

An example of this relates to the work of the Protection Team that operates under the Island's Fire Precautions Act 1975. The type of designated properties listed as part of the Act differ from the UK and do not cover all workplace environments. The latter are covered by the Island's Health & Safety legislation which falls within the remit of the Health and Safety Inspectorate (HSI). The FRS's position statement outlines challenges associated with the capacity for the HSI to proactively inspect these types of premises in addition to their work to investigate serious health and safety breaches. All those who met with the peer team are open to exploring the benefits of adopting a similar framework to the UK but recognise that this would require a change in legislation.

A number of officers told the peer team that the Island's legislative framework can also present challenges when sourcing suitable training providers for newly qualified fire protection officers. This is because training providers very often operate to UK based legislation. There are also challenges for some UK based developers who are less familiar with the issuing of fire certificates compared to the risk-based type of legislation in the UK.

The legislative framework is also less prescriptive in relation to the requirement to produce a Risk Management Plan. Risk Management Planning involves using data, intelligence and community insight to identify and assess risk. The process brings together the different aspects of Fire and Rescue Service delivery into a single strategy covering prevention, protection, preparedness, response, collaboration, business continuity and resilience.

It is a positive step that the Department of Home Affairs has already committed to allocating drafting time to modernise fire legislation from 2023. The FRS position statement shows how this would likely mean that changes to legislation would be expected through the Tynwald Court in 2024 or possibly early 2025. Peers recommend that the department maintains its focus on prioritising drafting time to support the modernisation of fire legislation.

The peer team were pleased to hear that the service has already commissioned work to develop an evidence-based risk profile of the Island. This work, still in its early stages, will inform the development of the Risk Management Plan. It is important that the development of a Risk Management Plan, with agreed timescales for development and delivery, remains a priority. This plan should be informed by the FRS strategic priorities and Island plan. The peer team also recommend that, as part of this work, the FRS should review the current operating model of the service to ensure it reflects risk, capabilities, resources and people (through a workforce review referred to in section 5.4). It is important that the FRS resources and maintains a relentless drive and commitment to the production of a Risk Management Plan that reflects and responds to all foreseeable risk on the Island.

The Risk Management Plan will need to be informed by relevant, timely and accurate data. Peers heard from officers who welcome improved digital solutions and systems in some areas of the service. Progress includes the implementation of the PDR Pro System which is facilitating the more efficient planning, recording and monitoring of personal development plans and training across the service. The service has also implemented a GARTAN system to manage on call availability across the different shift patterns.

Building on this, there is more work to do to support digital transformation, integration of systems, automation and remote access to systems. We heard examples of aborted attempts to get risk critical information to the incident ground via mobile data terminals and a lack of digital recording solutions. It is the view of peers that these issues are risk critical, placing firefighters at risk unnecessarily. As such the provision of risk critical information to crews at an incident should be considered a priority for the FRS.

The FRS should develop integrated systems which feed into each other to facilitate the production of real time, accurate data collation and analysis to inform decision making. This should also include data generated from within the Emergency Services Joint Control Room (ESJCR).

The peer team recommend that the service works alongside ICT Shared Services to agree the direction that digital investment will need to take over the next 4- 5 years. Peers appreciate that this work will need to be aligned to the Isle of Man

Government's wider digital strategy and vision to "*enable the modernisation of Government digital services through effective use of technology.*"

The peer team found that the FRS is highly regarded and valued by statutory and non-statutory partners. These partners described working relationships as positive and officers as committed, knowledgeable, professional and helpful. Representatives from other blue light services also described positive and collaborative working relationships with the FRS. For example, peers heard how the service is working with the ambulance service to provide a first response service to certain call categories. The service also works collaboratively with both the police and ambulance services in relation to a range of prevention initiatives including road safety and alcohol harm.

That said we did hear of examples where cost recovery modelling had caused some tension, and whilst this appears to be historic, we recommend a formal 'blue light' forum be established to discuss all matters related to joint working and collaboration. This will strengthen work already taking place to explore wider collaboration such as opportunities for co-location including the feasibility of developing a 'Blue Light Hub.' Given the small island context and budget pressures, the peer team believe that this type of collaborative working is vital.

The FRS has, over the past six months, renewed its focus on prevention including the formation of a dedicated prevention team. A draft Prevention Strategy was shared with the peer team. Peers were pleased to see that this draft strategy recognises the importance of engaging with partners and volunteers to deliver prevention activities. It will be important that this work is informed by an understanding of risk as captured in the emerging Risk Management Plan and includes a process for evaluating the effectiveness of prevention activities.

Peers were pleased to speak to staff and partners who told us that the FRS is an active partner in the Island's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. A draft FRS Safeguarding Policy is under development which includes a requirement for all FRS personnel to complete safeguarding training. The FRS should look to finalise this draft strategy at pace and continue to engage all stakeholders in its implementation. Peers would also recommend that the background checks in place - including DBS checks - are reviewed to ensure they reflect the role undertaken by all staff across the service.

### 5.3. Organisational and Managerial Leadership

The Chief Fire Officer, working alongside both the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs and the Chief Executive, is helping to bring a long-term vision and fresh approach to the leadership and management of the service. Peers heard how “*we have someone we have a lot of faith in*” (referring to the Minister) and “this Minister is proactive and well respected” and the Interim Chief Officer “*is wanting to improve things.*”

The Chief Fire Officer has, in the past few months, visited all stations to engage officers on the development of the Strategic Plan and future direction of the service. Officers welcomed this increased senior management engagement and visibility. As outlined (above) a clear and consistent message to the peer team was that staff want this increased visibility, engagement and communication to continue.

As part of the peer challenge process, peers spoke with representatives from the Island’s strategic and tactical emergency planning groups. We also visited the Emergency Services Joint Control Room (ESJCR).

Civil contingency planning requirements (for dealing with emergency events) differ to the UK as the Island is not covered by the UK Civil Contingencies Act and there is no requirement to establish a Local Resilience Forum. However, there are a number of tactical and emergency planning groups which have been established and the FRS is an active partner. The team heard that these arrangements had worked well during the pandemic but there appears to be an over reliance on the Emergency Planning Officer, which represents a single point of failure. The absorption of the Emergency Planning Unit into the FRS to strengthen the resilience of this function and improve governance, should be a consideration.

The peer team were pleased to hear that the group were considering the benefits of introducing a more formalised LRF model to define respective roles, responsibilities and accountabilities more clearly. This should be considered a prerequisite. The peer team also suggest that group members receive the appropriate training to allow them to operate in this environment. The minimum strategic and tactical command competencies to operate effectively in this multi-agency environment should be defined and kept under review to demonstrate strategic competence. The operating

requirements and terms of reference for the group should also be defined and agreed.

The ESJCR is responsible for dealing with emergency calls for the Fire & Rescue Service, Isle of Man Constabulary and the Isle of Man Ambulance Service. The ESJCR sits within the Department of Home Affairs and is managed through its Communication Division. This can present challenges for the FRS who have limited direct management control over how the ESJCR operates. In the UK most fire service control rooms are operated by the Fire Authority.

The Department has established an ESJCR Strategic Group, which includes the FRS alongside the police and ambulance service. This strategic group facilitates cross service collaboration of the ESJCR. Peers were pleased to hear that the FRS have also started to look at how they can strengthen their own analysis of monthly operational call data to inform their future planning and to inform the development of the FRS Risk Management Plan. However, as outlined in section 5.2 of this report, there is a need to develop ICT systems to facilitate the production of real time, accurate data collection and analysis.

Unlike most other emergency control rooms, each control room operator deals with both emergency calls and the dispatched response (instead of being either a call handler or dispatcher). When fully staffed, each shift includes four operators and a supervisor. Peers heard it regularly operates to a minimum staffing level of a supervisor and two operators due to staff leave and other absences. The Christmas period had been a particularly challenging time.

A staffing review has recently been implemented and an extra post has been added to each shift to help build capacity and resilience. This review should consider if this additional post is sufficient to deal with the increasing calls being received and the potential for a largescale incident affecting all blue light services. It should also consider whether the ESJCR has the ability to increase staffing levels at short notice to meet demand. Consideration should also be given to future staffing arrangements being more flexible and aligned to expected demand. The peer team do not feel the current staffing model is sufficient to meet the demand. Neither does the current model consider predictable fluctuations in demand or build in resilience in the event of a major incident.



Unlike other services and due to the unique Island context, the FRS does not operate a 'buddy' system with other FRSs to re-distribute emergency calls during periods of significant pressure. The peer team would encourage the FRS, working through the ESJCR strategic group, to consider the potential of introducing a buddying system, with another FRS, or a local solution, to help build resilience in the event of a major event.

The FRS has adopted the National Operating Guidance (NOG) Incident Command Structure. Peers heard of some fragility in the current structure as, depending on the time of day and officer availability, it can sometimes take more time to expand the command structure across all levels. It is the view of the peer team that this needs to be addressed. Senior officers are aware of this issue and have considered upskilling level two commanders to level three to help build further capacity in the event of a serious incident. As outlined in the executive summary of this report, it is the view of the peer team that this is not an appropriate solution as we would not expect Assistant Divisional Officers or Divisional Officers to act as Principal Officers and make organisational decisions. The FRS needs to consider how the strategic (Principal Officer) incident command roster is maintained on a 24/7 basis (all year round). At the same time, it should also review the distribution of TAC advisors across the flexi officer call groups to provide a consistent level of cover.

The peer team recommend that the FRS review arrangements in place to deal with significant/major incidents. This should include revisions to the FRS's strategic, tactical and operational command rota. These revisions should ensure appropriate levels of command are in place to deal with major incidents, and that the capability exists to service a strategic coordinating group alongside a multi-agency tactical group whilst dealing with the operational demands of an incident. The service also needs to work with the Emergency Service Joint Control room (ESJCR) management team to ensure that the capacity and resilience of the ESJCR is sufficient to mobilise, coordinate and control a large, protracted, multiagency incident.

#### **5.4. Organisational Capacity**

All staff who met with the peer team are enthusiastic, committed and flexible and are willing to go above and beyond in carrying out their roles. The peer team were

impressed with their flexible and multi-disciplined approach which is important given the Island's geographical location. However, this also means that officers often feel stretched and unable to do their job in the way they would like due to undertaking multiple roles. For example, the FRS has no dedicated training instructors; these roles are fulfilled on a voluntary basis where staff have agreed to take on extra responsibilities. This is particularly evident around the provision of on-island breathing apparatus training which is now solely delivered in house and is undertaken in addition to the normal working week.

Lack of capacity also means that there was no operational assurance process in place. This should be in place to give assurance on the adoption and application of national guidance, whilst identifying learning leading to procedural change.

As outlined earlier in this report, the peer team were told that there are some officers who have up to eight lead responsibility areas in addition to their primary role. This is unacceptable and, in reality, unproductive. If left unaddressed it is likely to have an adverse impact on the wellbeing of staff, leaving the FRS at risk.

This can be exacerbated by the challenges outlined earlier in this report regarding core corporate support services (Shared Services). The peer team heard how *“this is a great job to have, I love it and the skills set it gives you”* and *“we do well but at some point, it is going to break.”*

The FRS has a small support team of 3 (FTE) staff tasked with providing reception, payroll and administrative cover for the service. This further exacerbates capacity issues because it means officers across the service often undertake their own administrative tasks due to the limited capacity of this team. Recommendation 13 of this report, relating to the review of Shared Service arrangements applicable to the fire service, provides an opportunity to look at this with a view to seeing if further administrative support from Shared Services can be sourced.

The FRS operates several shift patterns across the workforce. In addition to the standard 42 hour working week, peers heard from wholetime officers who are required to work additional hours of up to 84 hours on call as wholetime on call firefighters, to supplement crewing levels at Douglas Station, provide TAC advisor cover and to support the incident command structure. The peer team heard from a number of wholetime on call officers who would welcome more flexibility in shift



patterns to support a better work life balance.

The FRS has 107 on call firefighters who provide on average 120 on call hours per week based across the Island's seven fire stations. Peers heard a strong message that on call firefighters would welcome more flexibility to reduce these hours to improve their work life balance. Some would welcome the opportunity to work more flexibly at more than one on call station. We also heard from on call firefighters who would be open to carrying out instructor or other specialist roles to help relieve pressures on wholetime staff (recognising that the use of on call staff may come with additional cost).

The peer team recommend that the FRS undertakes a workforce review as a priority. This should be aligned to the Strategic Plan and the work to develop a Risk Management Plan. The workforce review will help to ensure that there is capacity to deliver priorities and resilience to deliver statutory duties. It should also ensure officer resources, recruitment, pay, ways of working and skills are aligned to priorities and risk and support employees to achieve a positive work-life balance. Key to this will be a fundamental review of the on call and wholetime on call duty systems. The review should consider wellbeing of staff alongside the requirements of the role and statutory duties, to ensure a balance is struck. Continuing to promote and strengthen Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the workforce will also be an essential aspect.

## **5.5. Financial Planning and Management**

The financial governance of the FRS is different to most other FRS because the service is part of the Island's Government and not a separate county council or fire authority. The allocation of the Government's budget is aligned to five inter-related priorities within the Island Plan and a vision, over the next 10-15 years of '*building a secure, vibrant and sustainable future for our Island Nation*'. The Island Plan identifies more detailed actions to be taken over the course of the Isle of Man Government's administration (to 2026).

A period of financial austerity has meant that the majority of the Island's public sector budgets were reduced each year up to 2016 and then remained static up until 2021 (with the exception of some increases for pay awards). In this context, FRS senior managers and the Department of Home Affairs have worked hard to make a limited revenue budget of £5.3m work (2022/2023).

The FRS's position statement shows how, over the past 10 years, the FRS has overspent on its revenue budget between £95k to £295k per annum (to put this in context, the net revenue expenditure was around £5.1m to £5.3m each year between 2020/2021 and 2022/2023). The FRS has relied on savings within the Department of Home Affairs to cover this shortfall. At the time of the peer challenge, the 2023/2024 budget process had not been confirmed. However, the peer team were pleased to hear how work has been undertaken between the FRS, Department of Home Affairs and Treasury to ensure the budget allocation better reflects predicted demands, pressures and commitments from April 2023 onwards.

The FRS receives an annual, fixed revenue budget allocation each year. This is based on the previous year's allocation and uplifts to reflect inflation and other increased costs. Government departments are required to produce business cases (to the Treasury) to bid for additional funds. As outlined earlier in this report, there is more work to do to support digital transformation across the FRS to facilitate the production of accurate data collation to inform robust business case development. Peers heard how challenges associated with the ability to produce and analyse data is impinging on the FRS's ability to produce robust business cases.

Peers were pleased to learn that the departmental approach to business case development has changed for 2023/2024. Business cases for each service within the Department of Justice and Home Affairs (including FRS) have been brought together into a single overview proposal. This proposal, submitted to the Treasury, highlights the financial risk and opportunities for the whole Department, rather than each individual service within the Department.

The rolling one-year revenue budget setting cycle means it is more difficult to plan ahead and align future budgets to the FRS Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026). Peers also heard how it does not allow the FRS to carry forward revenue underspend into the next year or put these into reserves which also disincentivises longer term planning.

Capital budgets, with the exception of the equipment replacement programme, are managed outside the FRS, falling within the remit of Shared Services including Fleet and Estates and ICT. Capital budgets are also agreed on a rolling yearly basis which makes the procurement of equipment over multiple years difficult. Peers visited fire stations that were built over 50 - 60 years ago and heard how these stations need

capital investment to facilitate the type of work carried out by a modern-day FRS including management of contaminants. Capital investment is also required to ensure the provision of dignified changing facilities for all staff. Peers witnessed cramped accommodation spaces at a number of fire stations.

Peers heard of frustrations relating to this and of the lack of the FRS's direct management and control over capital projects and associated priorities. This is because capital spending priorities are considered alongside those of other Government departments and peers were told that procurement processes are often extended or delayed.

The peer team strongly recommend the FRS works with the Department of Home Affairs to develop a long-term estates strategy which aims to ensure the provision of accommodation that matches the requirements of a modern-day FRS and aspirations for the future. The development of the strategy should consider opportunities to collaborate with partners, particularly the other emergency services.

#### **4.6. People and Culture**

Over a number of years, the FRS have worked towards creating and developing a more inclusive workplace culture. This has involved engaging officers on expected behaviours including an agreed set of service values. Those who met with the peer team described the working environment as “friendly” and “close knit.” The peer team heard how “the culture has changed” and “people do pick up on things and challenge things more.”

There is an acknowledgement, from senior managers, that there is more work to do in support of equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes ensuring consistency in the use of language across the service when referring to firefighters. The peer team still heard the use of the term ‘firemen’ by some. This does not reflect the inclusive environment that the senior leadership team are seeking to embed.

The FRS was able to provide information on the make-up of the workforce in relation to sex and ethnicity. Building on this, the FRS should ensure that it collates and analyses equality data across a broader range of equality characteristics e.g., disability, age, sexual orientation, gender and religion. This will support the FRS in developing a deeper understanding of their employees to inform future workforce planning.

This data can also be used to develop recruitment approaches to attract a more diverse workforce. Peers heard how female firefighters currently make up around 6% of the workforce and firefighters from an ethnic minority background less than 1%.

The workforce review, recommended earlier in this report, would provide an opportunity to review recruitment processes to encourage applications from diverse groups. This should include targeted marketing of vacancies, fitness support and open days to dispel myths about working for the FRS including the benefits of being an on call firefighter. Creating a more positive work-life balance, as part of the workforce review, will also be important.

The peer team heard of challenges relating to the provision of kit for some female firefighters - primarily Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - and how these challenges have been raised with relevant colleagues but there were still delays. The peer team is clear that this is an issue that needs to be looked into and addressed at pace.

As outlined in section 5.5 of this report, peers also heard from a number of fire officers about the need for investment in some of the Island's fire stations to ensure the provision of dignified changing facilities for all staff. The peer team understand that the case for investment has been made to the relevant Shared Services team.

It is the view of the peer team that the FRS has an opportunity to develop 'equality analysis' approaches to inform the development of the FRS and future plans e.g., applying this to the development of the draft Prevention and Safeguarding strategies. This would support the FRS in assessing, understanding and consulting on the effect of policies and services on diverse groups in support of equality, diversity and inclusion.

The peer team recommend that the service explores opportunities to co-create equality networks including a women's network. It is the view of the peer team that this would provide an opportunity for colleagues to discuss issues of mutual interest and raise concerns in a safe and welcoming environment. They would provide mutual support, signposting, networking opportunities and increase staff awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion activities. The networks could help the service engage with diverse groups and use them as a platform for identifying and resolving staff issues and to provide feedback e.g., improvements to facilities, PPE, maternity

and paternity policy development.

The peer team also heard from some on call staff regarding perceptions of value about their role compared to that of a whole-time officer. Peers heard that sometimes, it can feel like *“it is us and them, they are the masters”* (referring to Douglas) and *“we are not rated at the same level as those in Douglas.”* As part of the recommendation relating to undertaking a workforce review, there are opportunities to consider how these perceptions can be addressed to ensure all on call staff feel that they are an integral and valued part of the FRS.

As outlined throughout this report, the recent visits, to all stations, undertaken by the Interim Chief Fire Officer, had been welcome by staff who appreciated this increased visibility and engagement. A clear and consistent message to the peer team was the need for this to continue and not be seen as a one off. For example, peers heard of some examples where staff told us that they had raised ideas or issues but had not received feedback.


Undertaking a workforce review would provide an opportunity for the senior leadership to build engagement and communication with wholetime and on call staff. These approaches should help the FRS to listen, explain, feedback and demonstrate value and appreciation to all staff. There are also opportunities for the FRS to draw upon the wider IOM Government’s staff survey results to inform this review.

Peers were pleased to learn that the FRS has an appraisal process in place for all staff up to Assistant Divisional Officer level and were told that all on call appraisals have been completed. There is currently no formal appraisal system in place for Divisional Officers, Deputy Chief Fire Officer or Chief Fire Officer ranks. The FRS has looked at the National Fire Chief’s Council Leadership Framework and other IOM Government appraisal systems, but due to capacity issues (referenced throughout this report) they have not been able to make further progress to address this gap.

## 6. Next steps

It is recognised that senior leaders will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

In the meantime, Cindy Lowthian, Senior Regional Adviser, is the main contact



between your authority and the Local Government Association. Cindy Lowthian is available to discuss any further support required [cindy.Lowthian@local.gov.uk](mailto:cindy.Lowthian@local.gov.uk)