

For Publication

**Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Executive Committee
26 May 2022**

REPORT AUTHOR: ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER

SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

For further information on this report contact: Steve Frank
Head of Strategic Support and Assurance
Tel No: 07876 144846

Background Papers: See previous review of Fire and Rescue Authority effectiveness bedsfire/AnnualReviewsofFRAEffectiveness

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to present members of the Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) with options for an independent review of governance.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members discuss the contents of this report and advise on their preferred approach. Members are invited to comment on and make suggestions for scoping methodology and review questions.

1 Summary

- 1.1 The three options presented in this paper give sufficient scope for Members to shape the review. We have had a number of conversations with the Local Government Association (LGA) and as a result is the most developed option (option 2 in this paper). The scoping questions could equally be suitable for options 1 and/or 3.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Fire Authority publishes an annual Review of its Effectiveness together with a Record of Members' Attendance. Reviews of Effectiveness and their associated Action Plans are included in the Annual Governance Statement, which forms part of the Statement of Accounts.
- 2.2 In 2019/20 Members decided that the annual review process was not required for that year and that the exercise would be completed again following a Governance review which included restructuring the committees and appointing Executive Committee Members as Portfolio Leads for:
- Prevention and Protection
 - Operational Response and Resilience
 - Workforce and Organisational Development
 - Assets and Collaboration
 - Digital and Data
- 2.3 The system of Portfolio Leads has been operating for a just over a year and has had sufficient time to operate and deliver results. We have given an agreed public commitment to do a new Review of Effectiveness review in 2022-23. This commitment was published on our website in early 2020.
- 2.4 The FRA Chairman recently attended the LGA Conference where there was a great deal of interest in Governance reviews ahead of the long-awaited White Paper.

3. Option 1 – carry out an in-house review of governance

3.1 Advantages

- Cheaper – mainly officer time;
- Could be quick to do;
- Flexible with start and end dates of the review;
- Can easily tailor scope at start and midway through the review;
- Can include Officer and Member development options; and

3.2 Disadvantages

- Not independent and as a result we may lose some public and stakeholder confidence in the process;
- Difficulty in finding suitable Member peers;
- Lack of officer capacity to carry out the review;
- Members & officers may not feel confident in having direct conversations with each other and may prefer an independent intermediary; and
- Potential unconscious bias may lead to imbalanced review outcomes.

4 Option 2 – independent review by the Local Government Association (LGA)

4.1 We have met the LGA on two occasions and are proposing a diagnostic option followed by Governance Training and Development. Indicative costs are based on the diagnostic elements provided gratis, and a day rate charge for Member training and development.

4.2 The diagnostic elements could include:

- Desk Review of Bedfordshire FRAs written materials – Conducted by a serving Monitoring Officer Peer, there is an opportunity to undertake a desk-based review of the existing materials and documentation with the outcome being a detailed set of improvement recommendations. This could include a full review of the FRA Handbook.

- Member Discovery Session – Facilitated by an LGA Officer and an LGA Member Peer(s), a workshop session supported by targeted one to one conversation, will provide Bedfordshire FRA Members with an opportunity to voice any governance issues and start to co-design solutions.
- Officer Discovery Session – Facilitated by an LGA Officer a workshop session supported by targeted one to one conversation, will provide Bedfordshire Officers with an opportunity to voice any governance issues and start to co-design solutions
- Member and Officer Discovery Session – Bring both Officers and Member together in a facilitated session led by the LGA and including both Officer and member Peers. The session is intended to explore organisational understanding of governance using the RACI (Responsible/Accountable/Consulted/Informed) framework and how it how relates to the Bedfordshire FRA context.

4.3 Scoping questions discussed so far include:

- 1) Are the roles of members and officers clear?
- 2) Are there appropriate officer-member and member-member relationships?
- 3) What are the key governance issues from a political and officer perspective?
- 4) Is scrutiny welcomed and supported?
- 5) Is scrutiny effective?
- 6) Does the Annual Governance Statement cover the key issues?
- 7) Are members given enough support and do they all have the opportunity to inform and influence?
- 8) How effective is Member development?
- 9) How effective and appropriate are the number, frequency and sequencing of FRA meetings?
- 10) How effective is public participation?
- 11) Are there any issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion that hinder Members in fulfilling their governance role?

- 12) Are there effective governance structures and processes to monitor and scrutinize the delivery of policy and performance, and our Community Risk Management Plan?
- 13) Does the FRA Handbook contain all the relevant information and are they reviewed and updated regularly enough?

4.4 Advantages

- The leading governance supplier valued highly by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS);
- Well known brand name;
- A tried and tested methodology;
- More opportunities to receive help from peers used to working in a Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) with similar characteristics;
- Officers and Members may feel more confident in talking in a safe and confidential environment with independent peers based on honest advocacy;
- Easier publication process; and
- Costs are subsidised through LGA membership.

4.5 Disadvantages

- Costs for the Member training and development elements may escalate following the diagnosis phase.
- No online survey currently proposed;
- The review could take longer to complete;
- Needs to include Officer and Member development options; and
- Continuity of peers and peer support between discovery/diagnostic and member development phases may not be guaranteed.

5 Option 3 – review conducted by another supplier

5.1 Advantages

- Could be cheaper as it's a crowded supplier market;
- Can tailor scope easier and quicker;
- Could be a more local supplier; and
- May get more challenge and analysis.

5.2 Disadvantages

- Not the same brand value;
- May not be a tried and tested methodology;
- May be difficult to compare results with other FRAs;
- Costs and fees may be less well known;
- Supplier may have capacity issues or conflicts of interest; and
- Publication of results may not be straightforward due to intellectual copyright issues.

6 Next Steps

6.1 The best timing of the review will be when the new Monitoring Officer is appointed and after the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June.

6.2 The preferred option will be vigorously pursued to fruition and Members presented with a finalised proposal on 22 June.

7. Recommendation

7.1 Members discuss the contents of this report and advise on their preferred approach. Members are invited to comment on and make suggestions for scoping methodology and review questions.

GAVIN CHAMBERS
ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER