

# Committed to Excellence Assessment

Feedback Report for

Devon and Somerset Fire  
and Rescue Service



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Leading Excellence

## Executive Summary

The assessment of Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) has been conducted over an intensive one-day site visit. During this time, the Assessor Team of Diane Dibley and Gail Nicolson have interviewed approximately 28 key employees. This summary has been structured around the 5 key themes discussed during the day with some statements about the organisation's current operating environment by way of an introduction.

### **Current Operating Environment**

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service is operating in a challenging environment. Recent changes to public policy and a reduction in budget have meant that DSFRS have had to review their business model and design new more effective ways of working. DSFRS has been proactive in reacting to these changes and has put in place a strategy to meet their budget saving targets while maintaining the quality of their service. As part of this strategy there is more emphasis on collaborating with other public sector organisations, which was clearly demonstrated by the fact that they now attend more emergency medical services calls than fires.

### **Strategy & Key Results**

DSFRS has a forward looking strategy based on understanding the environment and area in which they operate as well as on stakeholders needs. The leadership team invests time in engaging with relevant groups and forums in order to gain insight to inform DSFRS strategy as well as influence national strategy and plans. This investment allows the organisation to operate with a degree of agility as changes are foreseen. The organisational structure is reviewed to ensure that it is fit for purpose to deliver the agreed strategy. In addition, the capabilities of the service are being reviewed and refined to ensure DSFRS is in the best position for future sustainability and to meet ongoing challenges.

Strategy and plans are communicated across the service however, people reported wanting communications to be more tailored for the audience. This may be achieved by having for example a small review panel to comment on important communications before they are released. There was also a perceived gap for people between strategy and personal objectives with limited understanding or visibility of the thread between the two. A clear explanation of the cascade may help to address this.

The approach to measurement has been reviewed and refined and a new basket of measures, many of these outcomes, has been developed to be more expressly linked to the DSFRS strategy and objectives. This is currently still a new approach. Past approaches to measurement have allowed trends to be developed. This is more difficult with outcome measures and DSFRS may wish to consider how they can be more creative in developing trend or ensuring a balance between measures that can be trended and outcomes. For example, a measure may be the percentage of projects completed against expected. This could become a trend whereas completion of a project might be a desired outcome.

## **Customer Management**

There is a very clear understanding and intricate segmentation of the DSFRS customer base with services and approaches developed to respond to the needs of each of group. Where appropriate, customers and other stakeholders are involved in what is required and service development.

DSFRS works collaboratively with other agencies and services in order to ensure they optimise the contribution to customers and deliver added value wherever possible. Customer results are good but the service is not complacent and is continuously looking for ways to improve. This includes being innovative and creative and a clear example was demonstrated during the visit of the Freaky House and the results that had come from this.

Learning from good practice does take place. There is potentially though an opportunity to be more systematic in the approach to good practice learning with a benchmarking strategy and a formal method of capturing and making learning available.

## **People Management**

DSFRS is clearly a people focussed organisation, throughout the site visit people commented at how people were pivotal to the organisation and the element that made it special to work there.

DSFRS has a clear understanding of its resourcing requirements both in terms of numbers, skills and competencies, their academy produces a prospectus which outlines the training needs for operational staff at each of its stations.

Employee's performance is managed through the Personal Performance and Development system (PPD). It was felt by some employees that this process has lost its effectiveness and therefore DSFRS has reviewed their approach and designed a new simpler system which is more focussed on having conversation than paper work. This new approach is to be rolled out across the organisation over the coming year.

The staff survey is another key approach which DSFRS has recently reviewed. The survey has been simplified to 9 key questions and followed by focused surveys to gain detailed feedback on specific topics. Overtime this survey will enable them to identify improvements and monitor performance.

There are a number of new approaches and initiatives being deployed and it will take a little while for these to be embedded and for DSFRS to be confident that they are working as planned. Operational communications are clearly a strength however challenges remain communicating business information, with some feeling that they are receiving information overload while at the same time they feel that strategic plans are not effectively translated into operational actions.

## **Process Management**

Service delivery processes and procedures have historically been mapped and audited. However, the Service has taken a new approach to defining and documenting processes (services) in order to ensure the processes are better managed, understood and serve the operations rather than be a mechanistic exercise. It also means the business is rigorously looking at what it does and not just writing procedures "because that's how we have always done things".

The new approach involves all stakeholders in the process of mapping the process, has process owners clearly identified and measures of effectiveness that will be used to review. This approach is currently in the early stages of deployment but will refer to operational and support processes.

Improvements to processes have happened and will continue to do so. There is an opportunity to consider process benchmarking outside of the fire service environment for some processes in order to identify best-in-class performance and drive further improvements in DSFRS.

## **Sustainability**

DSFRS has an Environmental Strategy to guide their activities managing their impact on the environment as well as facilities and assets. This strategy has guided the organisation to invest in a variety of new technologies to reduce their negative impact on the environment. For example, smaller vehicles which have been added to their fleet, which are more fuel efficient. When equipment comes to the end of life for DSFRS they ensure that it is recycled or donated to other services abroad who could benefit from the equipment.

Employees of DSFRS are involved with community activities although there is no overarching strategy to these activities. However, there is a clear awareness amongst employees that by engaging with the community outside of the Service's tradition remit can help the organisation to achieve their strategic goals.

DSFRS procurement policy is focussed on getting the best value for money rather than the cheapest deal, which helped ensure that returns on investment are maximised.

### **Special Thanks**

The Assessor Team would like to thank Paul Hodgson and Bill Harvison for arranging the assessment day.

## Detailed Feedback

### 1. Leadership

#### Strengths

- The Mission, Vision, Values and direction are reviewed and refined and Senior Leaders brief others to cascade the messages across the service as well as go out to communicate these themselves.
- The organisational structure and management system is regularly reviewed and elements refined as appropriate in order to ensure the Service is compliant and in the best shape to deliver.
- Leaders work collaboratively with other agencies and bodies to add capability to the business and to gain insight in the needs and requirements of the communities they service in order to add value and react with agility as required.
- Collaborative working and engaging in forums, projects, etc. allows leaders in DSFRS to not only gain insight useful to the service but also to help influence national policies and strategies.
- The DSFRS Leadership team continue to look at how they can best support and recognise people across the service and a number of approaches are being refined to help this e.g. approach to appraisals.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Whilst people recognise that the organisational direction etc. is communicated by the leadership team they would like this to be more tailored for the audience in order to make this more understandable.
- There are some variances on the experience of leadership for things like support, recognition and undertaking of PPDs. Some people believe there is insufficient leadership/management training.
- Some people do not believe leaders are interested in ideas as they have put ideas in and either there has been no response or responses have taken a long time, this impacts willingness to engage.
- There is a belief that there is insufficient local empowerment, e.g. to make decisions to use local resources, and that more of this would make the organisation more efficient and speed up decision making.

## 2. Strategy

### Strengths

- Significant investment is made in ensuring that DSFRS has input into strategy development from all appropriate stakeholders.
- Strategy is also developed taking account of performance data, outputs from assessment and audits etc.
- The strategy development process has recently been reviewed and refined as one of the first to undergo the new approach to service descriptions.
- The Services capabilities are explored together with those of partners to determine how these might be used or combined to deliver the strategy.
- The basket of measures used to monitor strategy implementation have been reviewed and refined and a new set of outcome measures that will better linked and monitor strategy.
- Communication of strategy and plans is undertaken in a number of ways and some measures of effectiveness are undertaken.

### Areas for Improvement

- Whilst there is good practice data used to inform strategy and plans DSFRS could be more structured in the approach to collecting, collating and using this to develop a benchmarking strategy and process.
- There is communication of strategy and plans across the business but there remains a disconnect for people between the top level strategy and the individual/team objectives.
- A number of approaches are still relatively new and are not yet embedded or are not fully deployed.
- Whilst there is some implicit ownership of strategies and policies, making this more explicit and known across the organisation would enable people to know who to approach regarding changes and suggestions etc.

## 3. People

### Strengths

- Efforts are being made to understand the resourcing levels required and the skills and competencies required within DSFRS to enable it to achieve its strategic priorities.
- Recruitment processes are being reviewed to encourage a more diverse workforce to join the service. New technologies are also being investigated in order to make the recruitment processes more efficient and fair.
- Following a detailed review of the process, the Staff Survey has now been simplified to 9 key questions. In this format, the survey has been conducted once with the intention of it being a biannual event. This survey will also be supplemented by smaller surveys focussed on specific topics.
- Some training is now being delivered using an E-Learning platform. This has allowed the organisation to maximise the benefits of time spent in the classroom which is of particular importance for part time employees.

### Areas for Improvement

- Whilst there is some understanding of the resources and skills required there is further work to be done to ensure that workforce planning is fully effective.
- The relative newness of a number of changes means that they need to be embedded and progressed through review and refinement processes to ensure that they are delivering what was intended.
- There was a general view that messages could be more effectively filtered so that only relevant employees receive particular communications to avoid clogging up employee's inboxes.
- During the visit some people reported that some of the DSFRS people policies were fit for purpose for full time employees but were not relevant for retained staff and DSFRS may benefit from further review of policies to ensure they address all colleagues.
- Employee's performance is managed through the Personal Performance and Development system. It was felt by some employees that this process has lost its effectiveness and therefore DSFRS has reviewed their approach and designed a new simpler system which is more focussed on having conversation than paper work. This new approach is to be rolled out across the organisation over the coming year.
- During the focus group discussions it was voiced that the alignment between organisational, team and personal objectives was not clear.

## 4. Partnerships & Resources

### Strengths

- Partnerships are of strategic importance to DSFRS, due to the financial pressures within the public sector DSFRS is working in collaboration with other agencies to deliver services in more cost effective and efficient ways. Leaders within the organisation are participating in a number of initiatives to increase partnership working.
- DSFRS has a clear strategy in order to meet their money saving targets, robust processes are in place to track their progress towards these targets.
- DSFRS has shown a clear commitment to the environment by maintaining a district budget for green technologies even during times when budgets have been strained.
- Environmental impact is considered in the design of new facilities.

### Areas for Improvement

- Electricity monitors are to be installed in stations so that energy usage can be monitored and controlled by all facilities.
- Knowledge management remains a challenge for business; email is used to cascade information across the organisation sometimes because there is not an easily accessible central point for it to be stored.
- The current environmental strategy is a number of years old and could be refreshed in time.

## 5. Processes, Products & Services

### Strengths

- The approach to process management has been reviewed and refined and a new approach to defining these will ensure they are well described and managed including identifying measures to monitor process efficiency and effectiveness.
- Many people are involved in process improvements through a number of ways but systematically through the new approach to process management.
- Input from a range of stakeholders is used to support service development and add value to customers. There is continual search for how innovation and creativity can support the value add including the vehicles used, contact and engaging the public.
- There is close working with partners and other agencies in order to deliver strategy and service. There is increasing collaboration to extend the benefits to all stakeholders.
- Measures of effectiveness of the Service are used and recently these have been reviewed and refined. Perception measures from different customer groups are also used to measure the quality of the service.
- Customer complaints processes exist and are reviewed and refined to ensure they are user friendly.
- Whilst the Service by nature of the role it performs is in constant contact with the public, everyone across the organisation is looking at how they can be increasingly effective e.g. the Freaky House.

### Areas for Improvement

- The approach to managing processes is not yet fully deployed.
- Whilst feedback is sought there is felt to be further opportunities to gain more feedback to add value to that already collected.



## 6. Customer Results

### Strengths

- There is a good range of customer measures used to monitor perceptions and service effectiveness. DSFRS are able to demonstrate how they used the results in order to influence strategy as well as service effectiveness.
- Performance for customer results is generally positive.
- Where targets are set performance against these is generally positive.
- DSFRS has a clear understanding of what drives the customer satisfaction with the service and there is some confidence that good performance can be sustained in the future.

### Areas for Improvement

- There is scope to improve the response rates for some feedback approaches in order to add increasing value.
- Comparators are difficult to obtain however, DSFRS may consider how they can gain some e.g. for relationship management, complaints management etc., potentially from other industries, in order to put their own performance in context.

## 7. People Results

### Strengths

- The Staff Survey is the primary approach used to measure employee perceptions. The structure of the survey was reviewed in 2016.
- DSFRS are meeting their performance targets in terms of reducing their head count and are now in a position to recruit again while still meeting their financial targets.
- Action Plans are used to track the completion of improvements resulting from staff feedback; in particular, the Academy was able to demonstrate a robust reporting system in which the impact of each intervention is analysed and reviewed the following year to identify any further improvements.
- The academy recently cleansed its database and now they have reliable data to monitor its performance and the training completed by staff at its facilities.
- DSFRS uses peer reviews with other fire services to gain feedback on performance and insights into improvement areas.

### Areas for Improvement

- A variety of communication platforms are used internally; further analysis of the methods could help to identify the most effective methods for different messages which could help to maximise the impact of communication going forward.
- It is too early to establish meaningful trends for the revised Staff Survey however this will come with time.
- Staff feedback from the discussion group held during the site visit showed that while their suggestions for improvements were acknowledged the decision-making processes is so long that they felt their suggestions were not acted upon.

## 8. Society Results

### Strengths

- DSFRS has an Environmental Strategy to guide their activities to managing their impact on the environment, their facilities and assets. This strategy has guided the organisation to invest in a variety of new technologies to reduce their negative impact on the environment. For example, the smaller vehicles which have been added to their fleet are more fuel efficient. When equipment comes to the end of life for DSFRS they ensure that it is recycled or donated to other services abroad who could benefit from the equipment.
- Since launching their environmental strategy they have had to change the primary measure to evaluate success. Initially they were measuring the total tonnes of carbon which the organisation emitted, but it was acknowledged that this measure was too positively correlated with the organisations performance. Therefore the service decided instead to measure the amount of carbon or resources which were saved by their interventions instead. For example they would calculate the amount of energy which would be saved by insulating a building. This has proved to be a more meaningful measure of effectiveness.
- DSFRS has signed up for the Euro 6 standard of filtration for CO2 emission from fuel appliances therefore DSFRS has invested in filtration systems to minimise the emissions of its fleet and closely monitors these.
- Community activities have been closely aligned to customer results. There is a clear understanding that by engaging with communities beyond the Service's normal setting can help them to identify at risk members of the community.

### Areas for Improvement

- DSFRS's environmental strategy is a number of years old now and could be refreshed. It was felt that going through this exercise would raise the profile of the environmental strategy in the organisation.
- There is no overarching strategy guiding activities in the community which go beyond the services traditional remit.
- DSFRS does not report its environmental performance externally, even though this information may be of interest to some its external stakeholders.
- DSFRS does not benchmark its environmental strategy internally or externally, which could be considered in the future.

## 9. Business Results

### Strengths

- Historically, DSFRS has measured good scope of Business Results and recently they have reviewed and refined the basket of measures in order to be increasingly useful in management of the business.
- Most results are showing positive trends or sustained good performance over some years.
- There are some targets set and performance against these is good.
- DSFRS are able to compare performance of many business results against other Services. DSFRS are comparing well in many areas.

- There is a clear understanding with DSFRS of the drivers of good results giving the assessors confidence that performance levels can be sustained in the future.

#### **Areas for Improvement**

- Whilst comparisons exist, these are perceived to be of little use because of the variances in what is compared and collected. Identifying some comparators for particular processes or activities, potentially from outside the fire service, may help drive future performance as well as frame the DSFRS performance.
- As the new measures are introduced, DSFRS may wish to consider how they can continue to build trend information to drive decision making.

## Scoring Summary

- The scoring reflects the standard methodology applied in all other EFQM Assessments.
  - The maximum possible score is 600 points
  - Scores by criteria are presented within a 10 point band e.g. 51 to 60
  - The Overall Score is presented as a 50 point range e.g. 201 to 250
- To achieve EFQM Committed to Excellence 2 Star, you must score over 200 points.

	Scoring Band
Leadership	21 to 30
Strategy	31 to 40
People	21 to 30
Partnership & Resources	21 to 30
Processes, Products & Services	31 to 40
Customer Results	40+
People Results	21 to 30
Society Results	11 to 20
Business Results	31 to 40
<b>Overall</b>	<b>251 – 300</b>

- Scores by criteria are presented within a 10 point band e.g. 11 to 20
- The Overall Score is presented as a 50 point range e.g. 201 to 250

## Outcome

Congratulations – you have achieved **EFQM Committed to Excellence 2 Star**.



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