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National Resilience Assurance Team
USAR Capability assurance process
Report of the outcomes for Merseyside FRS
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Contents

1. Executive summary
2. Assurance process description
3. USAR assurance outcomes 2013/14
4. USAR assurance criteria documents
5. Key Areas of Assessment
6. Assurance outcome summary table
7. Findings of Key Areas of Assessment
8. Conclusion
9. Recommendations

Executive Summary

The assurance process has been developed as a long term procedure to ensure that the Fire & Rescue Services that have received National Resilience assets achieve and maintain an efficient, robust and effective operational capability to respond to national and major emergencies.

The purpose of the assurance process is to gather evidence specific to the assurance objectives and to measure that evidence against the identified assurance criteria documents. The outcomes of the assurance process will seek to confirm that the statutory duties outlined in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007 in relation to National Resilience assets are being satisfactorily discharged and additionally will assist the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) in producing an annual report which through the National Resilience Board will provide assurance to government that all National Resilience assets allocated for a USAR response are capable of responding to a national scale incident with the required amount of competent personnel and with equipment that is operationally fit for purpose.

Additionally the process provides an efficient and accurate tool for producing factual information on which an organisation can act to improve its performance thus supporting existing management policies and controls.

Where gaps in capabilities are identified it is the role of the National Resilience Assurance Team to provide support to that FRS to assist it in achieving its organisational goals.

Assurance process description

The assurance process uses a system of conformity or non conformity to categorise the various levels of compliance with the assurance process criteria. It also records areas of the process that can be identified as being an opportunity for improvement. Note it may occur that at the point of examination an issue is identified as non-conforming and is subsequently rectified shortly after being identified as such. The report will record the non-conformity for reporting accuracy but it will also include within the recommendations section, a statement of conformity.

CONFORMING

This category identifies those areas where the FRS has met the identified standards as detailed in the Assurance process criteria.

NON CONFORMING

Issues identified as non conformity have been evidenced as not meeting the identified process criteria. These outcomes should not be viewed as a negative finding but as an accurate marker from which to commence improvement.

Opportunity for improvement

This is an observation made by the assurance team on a process, activity, documentation or record, that when reviewed by the FRS recipients and action taken would result in an improvement to the capability.

All improvement opportunities are recorded separately and apply **only to conforming** areas of the process.

USAR assurance outcomes - 2013/14

- To ensure that the organisational strategies, policies, training and procedures that support the Urban Search & Rescue assets in meeting the National Resilience programmed expectations for responding to national level incidents are in place within the hosting FRS.
- To identify and confirm that programmed vehicle and equipment maintenance, servicing and defect records for National Resilience assets are completed in accordance within the terms and conditions of use.

Criteria documents

USAR Key Performance Indicators
Fire & Rescue Service Circular 08/08 (USAR mobilising document)
USAR SMA Information Document
USAR Competency Training Framework
USAR Standard Test Cards
National Resilience Information Notes and Safety Instructions
USAR Equipment Notes and Standard Operating Procedures

Key Areas of Assessment (KAA)

- **Prior to call preparation.**
1.0 How well prepared is the FRS in its ability to mobilise USAR assets to an incident?
- **Calls to mobilising control and support to the incident.**
2.0 How effective are the FRS in mobilising USAR assets and providing the relevant information required en route?
- **En route, decisions and actions on arrival.**
3.0 How well do USAR personnel undertake the relevant actions both en route and on arrival at an incident?
- **Deployment of attributes.**
4.0 How well do USAR teams integrate in to the Incident Command System and then operate on scene in order to achieve the objectives of the incident
- **Monitoring and review.**
5.0 How well do the FRS monitor and review incidents and exercises?

Key Area of Assessment	Element	Conformity	Non Conformity	OFI	Element focus
KAA 1.0					
	1.1				Establishment levels
	1.2				Succession planning
	1.3				Asset maintenance & servicing
	1.4				Team distribution of skills
	1.5				No of trained personnel
	1.6				USAR mobilising protocol
	1.7				Alerting on call personnel
	1.8				Response to non USAR FRS
	1.9				Consumables levels
	1.10				H&S information dissemination
	1.11				National groups representation
KAA 2.0					
	2.1				Call management
	2.2				National call signs
	2.3				Airwave talk groups
	2.4			✓	Function of SHA
	2.5				Welfare arrangements
	2.6				Role of Subject Matter Advisors
KAA 3.0					
	3.1				Convoy procedure
	3.2				External deployments
	3.3				En route information delivery
	3.4				OOA exercise objectives
	3.5				SHA attendance at exercises
KAA 4.0					
	4.1				Integration in IRMP planning
	4.2				Day to day usage of assets
	4.3				USAR Training delivery
	4.4				USAR MoS recording
	4.5				Operational awareness all staff
	4.6				Other service elements training
	4.7				Training with other agencies
	4.8				USAR in annual training plan
KAA 5.0					
	5.1				Performance & Review process
	5.2				Recorded debrief procedure
	5.3				National Resilience website OAT
	5.4				Exercise outcomes info
	5.5				Manage exercise outcomes

Findings of Key Areas of Assessment

KAA 1.0 How well prepared is the FRS in its ability to mobilise USAR assets to an incident?

Based on the supporting evidence and interview responses, MFRS are very well prepared to mobilise their USAR team and assets to an incident. The crewing model is based on a 48 whole time with 48 on-call contracts that support the whole time cover. This is backed up with the USAR strategic reserve personnel who have been trained to technician level.

This far exceeds the expected level of personnel to be USAR trained and affords MFRS a greater flexibility and resilience. At the time of the review MFRS had a full complement of USAR personnel.

Establishment levels are maintained through the provision of additional personnel available within the strategic reserve. The strategic reserve is continually replenished with all new operational personnel being trained to support USAR and also from existing members of staff who express an interest. The strategic reserve provides cover for any attrition experienced by the USAR team which is currently at a low rate. The skill levels within the USAR team are well in advance of the national KPI requirements. A full time team of 10 operates 24/7 and is available to respond to local, regional and national incidents. If the duty team is committed to an incident the recall to duty system provides a further team of 10 for deployment.

Maintenance of competence is achieved for team members via a Sophtlogic IPDS system linked to station and annual training plans.

All MFRS USAR personnel have their own e-mail addresses and have access to the National Resilience website and the documentation on it. All MFRS USAR personnel have login details to access the national USAR documentation, information notes, meeting minutes and other relevant documents on the site.

Communications are disseminated to all personnel which includes all information notes. Watch Managers (WM) who are responsible for groups of technicians (4-6) record important items in the risk critical information handover book which is signed off by each WM. This is supplemented by the e-mail system to each Firefighter who will catch up with communications should they be away from station.

Any Health and Safety information from NCC is sent to the Mobilising and Command and Control (MACC) Watch Officers PC where it is disseminated accordingly by the on duty MACC Watch Officer and issued to the relevant personnel. **(1.1.10)**

Internally a Health and Safety Event Template has been designed to back up information from NCC. **(1.1.10)**

In the event of any occurrence relating to National Resilience resources the NCC is informed both verbally (phone) as well as electronic via email. **(1.1.10)**

MFRS activate an Operational Support Room, based at their HQ to support any deployments (1.1.6).

Modules and equipment are well maintained and operationally ready.

KAA 2.0 How effective are the FRS in mobilising USAR assets and providing the relevant information required en route?

Based on the supporting evidence and interview responses MFRS have the necessary procedures in place to enable them to manage calls relating to USAR and provide crews with relevant information.

MACC are aware of the USAR team and its function and utilise a 'Vision Boss' system, which is user friendly and quickly and easily provides the information control operators need to mobilise USAR and Subject Matter Advisers (SMA). In addition an SMA will attend MACC during an incident to provide assistance with mobilisations and provide interpretation where confusion or conflict may arise (2.1.6), this is possible as MFRS currently exceed the KPI for SMAs.

MFRS's mobilising and communications SOP in conjunction with the MDT and Airwave Radio communications procedure ensure that talk groups are allocated as appropriate.

All MACC Staff are familiar with National Call signs and provide prompts to MFRS Crews attending incidents outside of their Area **(2.1.2)**.

A Senior Officer 'Out of Area Deployment' Workshop has just been developed for all Senior Officers to assist MFRS Staff attending incidents outside their area. **(2.1.5)**

Duty officers and crews are able to access the vision boss system and view incident logs and information from control regarding incidents.

MFRS have exercised Strategic Holding Areas (SHA) in Merseyside and mobilised resources to SHAs in other regions as part of national exercises.

Personnel interviewed were aware of National Coordination and Advisory Framework arrangements; however there is an opportunity to build on this awareness and provide a greater depth of knowledge, particularly at MACC. Information is available on the Portal at present but Staff would benefit from a visit from the C&C Capability Team. **(2.1.4)**

MFRS address welfare by providing Convoy Packs for each duty officer and for every incident they attend outside of MFRS Area a Welfare Officer is mobilised. All USAR team members are issued with an Individual Grab Pack and a Welfare Pack for incidents outside of their area. Also each SM is allocated a Credit Card for external deployment. **(2.1.4)** and all Prime Movers have an individual fuel card allocated. **(2.1.4)**

KAA 3.0 How well do USAR personnel undertake the relevant actions both en route and on arrival at an incident?

Based on the supporting evidence and interview responses MFRS have the necessary procedures and training in place, which has been exercised at regional and national exercises to enable USAR personnel to mobilise to the scene of operations and/or a SHA.

MFRS have in place a convoy procedure and a mobilising and communications SOP which allows them to mobilise the correct assets and teams locally, regionally and nationally to a SHA or scene of operations.

Convoy Packs are also provided for each duty officer and for every incident that they attend outside of MFRS Area a Welfare Officer is mobilised. All USAR team members are issued with an Individual Grab Pack and a Welfare Pack for incidents outside of their area.

SOPs are provided on turnout sheets as well as the electronic back up available on appliance MDT. The MDTs are provided with real time live information. **(3.1.3)**

MFRS activate an Operational Support Room, based at their HQ to support any deployments.

KAA 4.0 How well do USAR teams integrate in to the Incident Command System and then operate on scene in order to achieve the objectives of the incident

Based on the supporting evidence and interview responses MFRS have in place a competency programme for the USAR capability that has been fully embedded into their policies, procedures and protocols. These include the Operational Planning and Operational Training policies. Training is carried out 3 times per week in an organised and structured way in line with the competency framework and is linked to normal service plans and protocols in terms of training policies. A Learnpro lesson pack is available to all personnel via an intranet portal that provides information and assessment regarding collapsed structures.

LearnPro is also being developed to cascade any health and safety information provided via NCC with a requirement for all Team members to sign off. Presently this is carried out on a hard copy contained within the Station.

The USAR capability is identified in the Integrated Risk Management Plan for MFRS and is utilised locally as part of an attendance at all technical rescue type incidents involving life risk.

There is a set criteria for all Team Members of the USAR team in terms of health and safety with all Ffs/CMs trained to IOSH standard and WMs trained to NEBOSH Level. **(4.1.5)**

MFRS USAR capability is co-located with HART and a very close working relationship has been established. One glowing reference to this arrangement was the nomination for a bravery award which included not only USAR but also a HART Member. **(4.1.7)**

MFRS also chair the LRF training sub group and the Hazards and risks subgroup ensuring close liaison, exercising and information sharing with other agencies

KAA 5.0 How well do the FRS monitor and review incidents and exercises?

Based on the supporting evidence and interview responses MFRS have robust policies and procedures in place to address learning outcomes from not only incidents and exercises, but also weekly training events. MFRS have put in place an Operational Assurance Team (OAT) which is responsible for the electronic health and safety package OSHENS. This ensures that issues are identified and followed up and that all relevant personnel are informed. This is carried out via the OAT, operational improvement group, significant event reporting and operational briefing notes and monthly summary reports. All of which is quality assured via the OAT.

From Monday to Friday at 0830 hours the Operational Assurance Team host a meeting to review all activity from the previous 24 hours (Monday's meeting includes weekend previous) where all Officers plus selected personnel within the organisation feed into a review process to identify any learning outcomes. **(5.1.1)**. All FDOs commencing their rostered weekend duty are invited to a meeting every Friday afternoon with the DCO who provides them with a briefing to cover issues that might occur over the weekend. **(5.1.1)**

In addition to internal systems, MFRS fully support the NR incident and exercise reporting toolkit

Further development is in progress with the debriefing procedure being integrated into the OSHENS.

Non Conformity issues – Recommendations

There were no areas of non-conformity apparent during the assurance visit.

CAA	Element	Recommendation

CAA	Element	FRS action	NRAT action	Owner	Completion date

Opportunity for Improvement (applicable to conforming issues only)

KAA	Element	Description of actions
2	2.1.4	Personnel interviewed were aware of National Coordination and Advisory Framework arrangements; however there is an opportunity to build on this awareness and provide a greater depth of knowledge, particularly at Mobilising and Command & Control (MACC).

Conclusion

Assurance of the USAR capability is obtained through a range of methods; fundamental to which is the Assurance Review process. The aim of which is to identify by means of a systematic, objective and documented procedure that all USAR assets issued to FRSs throughout England are able to respond to national level incidents in accordance with and to the standards identified in the assurance criteria. To facilitate this, an Assurance Review team consisting of National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) members are responsible for undertaking reviews. The purpose of these reviews is to gather information at both strategic and tactical levels on the assurance outcomes for 2013/14.

The Assurance Team visited Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) on the 14th and 15th May 2013 as part of the national 2013/14 assurance review programme. As detailed above, the assurance reviews are part of a wider assurance process within the National Resilience framework; designed to provide evidence to the NRB and key stakeholders that the USAR capability provided by DCLG, is ready to respond to major or catastrophic incidents requiring mutual aid.

The Assurance review was greatly assisted by the provision of a comprehensive submission of evidence that was clearly aligned to each of the question areas and conveniently hyperlinked to supporting electronic documentation. During the visit the Assurance Review team visited the Headquarters, Training academy, the Command and Control suite and the USAR station. This included a full tour of the USAR station, training facilities, vehicles and equipment.

The assurance visit on the day began with a welcome from the Chief Fire Officer who is also the CFOA lead for USAR. The day was then facilitated by the USAR Station Manager who along with all the MFRS personnel that the assurance team met throughout the visit were welcoming, courteous, open and honest. The team were also impressed by the positive enthusiastic attitude of MFRS personnel and their belief in the procedures and systems that were in place. This translated into full and frank responses to questions, which supported the submitted evidence and ensured that the modules and equipment were in good order with up to date records.

The USAR capability in terms of numbers of technicians and skill sets has been developed by the MFRS management team beyond the national requirements and has the flexibility to enable the USAR team to respond to a wider span of incidents.

This development has resulted in a highly trained and highly motivated USAR team that now responds to all technical rescues, including swift water rescue. Evidence clearly showed that the USAR capability has been fully integrated within core business for both the USAR team and traditional firefighters. To the extent that all

new operational personnel now complete a USAR level 1 course during basic training.

The commitment to maintain and develop USAR by senior management was very clear and has enabled the USAR capability to develop to its current position, which was found to be conforming in all key areas of assessment. It was also apparent that the senior management of MFRS supported the wider National Resilience agenda with officer participation at all levels regional and national for all capabilities.

It was also noted that the MFRS has a comprehensive approach to training and development of skills of the USAR team and the USAR strategic reserve. The processes and systems to support training should prevent skill fade. A robust performance and review system utilising OSHENS was also in place to ensure that any issues or outcomes relating to incidents, exercises and training were quickly identified, addressed and communicated.

Communications are assisted by all MFRS USAR personnel having their own e-mail addresses and access to the National Resilience website and the documentation on it. All MFRS USAR personnel have login details to access the national USAR documentation, information notes, meeting minutes and other relevant documents on the site.

Communications are disseminated to all personnel which includes all information notes. Watch Managers (WM) record important items in the risk critical information handover book which is signed off by each WM. This is supplemented by the e-mail system to each Firefighter who will catch up with communications should they be away from station.

Links to the USAR National User Group via Watch Manager/Station Manager (SM) are also available through the station direct or the e-mail system.

It was evident that the areas the Assurance Review team were tasked to look at had been integrated into core business and that the discharge of statutory duties (The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) order 2007) with relation to USAR could be discharged by MFRS.

The Assurance Team would like to place on record their gratitude to Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and its staff for their hospitality and cooperation shown during the planning, undertaking and feedback of the review.

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