



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

19th December 2011

Health & Safety Executive Inspection Correspondence

Report by Paul Claydon, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides Members with information on recent correspondence sent to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) to proactively inform the HSE of the measures taken by the Service to address recommendations following their inspection of the Service in December 2009.

Background

- 2 In March 2009 the Service was notified of the HSE's intention to carry out an inspection of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service as part of a sample of eight fire and rescue services across the UK. The inspection took place in December 2009.
- 3 The inspection considered general health and safety management but was specifically focussed on the following areas:
 - training and competence in core firefighter skills including breathing apparatus and associated procedures; compartment fire behaviour training
 - competence for incident command
 - provision of risk critical information to inform operational decision making.
- 4 Following receipt of the HSE's report on the inspection Members will recall that a paper outlining the Service's action plan to address the resulting recommendations of the HSE was brought to the May meeting of the Executive Panel in 2010. It was noted that no response to the Service's action plan to meet the recommendations had been received from the HSE and that is still the case.

Information

- 5 It was decided that on the second anniversary of the HSE's inspection of the Service it would be appropriate to proactively write and inform the HSE of the progress made in completing the action plan and addressing their recommendations.
- 6 The attached letter which has been sent to the HSE covers the specific actions taken by the Service in addressing each one of the HSE's four recommendations.

Recommendation

- 7 That Members note the report and the progress the Service has made in addressing the HSE's recommendations as outlined in the attached letter.

December 2011

Gary Martin
HM Inspector of Health and Safety
Unit 7 & 8 Edison Court
Ellice Way
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Wrexham
LL13 7YT

Dear Mr. Martin

**The Management of Health & Safety at North Wales Fire and Rescue Service
December 2009**

As you will be aware it is two years since the HSE inspected the Service and provided the above mentioned report which contained four recommendations and a number of observations on the HSE's view of how the Service was performing.

As the Service's lead officer contact for the inspection, head of health and safety and operational service delivery within the Service the Chief Fire Officer, Simon Smith, has asked me to write to you on his behalf to update you on the progress the Service has made in addressing the HSE's recommendations following the inspection.

You will recall that in May 2010 I sent a copy of an action plan on how the Service intended to address the recommendations within the report. Much of that work is now complete, but it is recognised, as with the HSG 65 model itself, that maintaining performance in Health and Safety is an iterative process of audit and review so that the Service can constantly ensure performance in health and safety across all areas.

I have highlighted each recommendation in turn and the Service's action to date. The first recommendation stated:-

“The service should review the health and safety arrangements in place to ensure the trust, participation and involvement of employees. This review should take into consideration the difficulties experienced in bedding in the PDR system as well as exploring the perceived lack of consultation of employees when introducing new methods of working.”

The Service has reviewed the arrangements in place and as a consequence altered the process of engagement with the representative body. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer chairs regularly scheduled meetings with the Fire Brigades Union, principal officer colleagues and area managers. Managers are able to provide briefings on all areas of work being undertaken by the Service as a way of creating a platform

for open dialogue on issues and provide the representative body with an opportunity to engage with management.

The electronic version of the PDR system was trialled at stations with the end user providing feedback and as a consequence is now fully delivered on the Service's IT network. The system can be accessed and monitored both locally and centrally by Service managers at all levels. PDR is now an embedded part of the way the Service monitors the competence of operational personnel and plans their individual and collective development.

The second recommendation stated:-

“Review the arrangements in place to enable local management to fulfil their role in the delivery of a competent workforce. This review should include the effectiveness of the support mechanisms currently in place (e.g. IDFO, audit etc.) as well as local management issues and the monitoring arrangements in place.”

Following the Service restructure in April 2011, a system where each RDS (Retained Duty System) station is allocated a manager or trainer has been introduced. One of seven geographically located Response managers liaises with the Service's reorganised central Operations department on each individual stations development and competence requirements. The restructure has ensured that a manager or trainer is available to attend a station every week and report back on delivery and progress to the Response manager. This gives the opportunity for information to be promulgated to all stations quickly. This support is currently being reviewed as part of the periodic assessment of the restructures effectiveness.

The third recommendation stated:-

Ensure that the systems in place to support those less experienced individuals who are placed in incident command positions are fit for purpose and used consistently and correctly.

Each new incident commander (IC) is shadowed by an operational officer when they take charge of an appliance and support offered on the incident ground. Each IC will also undergo a vector (software based) simulation annually and with the introduction of a new Operational Assurance system all Incident commanders are observed at least once a year, at either incidents or under simulated conditions to identify areas of strength and areas for development.

The last of the four recommendations asked that:

“The service should ensure that a robust system is in place for the quality assurance of training provided by trainers.”

The newly constituted Performance Standards section within the Service has developed a programme of quality assurance for all operational trainers. This is a cyclical and on-going process. In addition the three Fire and Rescue Services in Wales have peer assessed the delivery of breathing apparatus (BA) refresher courses as part of an all Wales approach to quality assuring training on risk critical courses.

The Service recognises that this is just a snap shot of what we continue to do to improve in all aspects of our performance to ensure a safe and competent workforce and we commend these actions to you. Should you wish to discuss the contents of this letter please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Paul Claydon
Assistant Chief Fire Officer