

Internal Audit

Implementation of Learnings from National Incidents

2024/25

Internal Audit service provided by:



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Section One – Executive Summary

Overall assurance rating



Substantial

See Appendix A for Rating Definitions

Audit findings requiring action

Extreme	High	Medium	Low
0	0	1	1

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) has strong controls in place to ensure that learnings from national and regional services are implemented consistently and in a timely manner.

The Organisational Assurance Group (OAG) meets quarterly to monitor and report on performance against the service's preparedness, response, and learning. Its membership is agreed in its terms of reference and covers each operational area of the organisation. The group reviews action and information notes submitted by the National Operational Learning (NOL) and Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) and assesses the impact of these learnings against its own policies and procedures. Whilst these briefings are archived on the Assurance Monitoring System (AMS), meeting minutes sometimes lack sufficient detail regarding their impact on LFRS, which could inform members not present due to operational demand.

Actions identified from action and information notes submitted by other fire services are raised and assigned to appropriate officers on the AMS system, and updates tracked until completion. Notes uploaded were found to be sufficiently detailed and accompanied by supporting documentation. OAG meetings are supported by an action plan for issues raised during discussions, with updates given at the start of each meeting through a standing agenda item. Whilst updates provided are detailed in meeting minutes, our review identified two instances where issues from other fire services were not added to the action plan and subsequently not followed up at the next meeting.

Agreed actions from the audit	Action ref	Priority
Meeting minutes should reflect sufficient detail so that members that were not present can remain updated and reliably informed on agenda items discussed.	4.1	
Minute meetings will be reviewed to confirm that all actions raised as part of agenda discussions are captured in the appending action plan and assigned to an appropriate officer before being issued to members.	4.2	

Section Two – Background and Scope

2.1 Background

This audit has been undertaken in accordance with the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan as approved by the Audit Committee. The audit covers the period October 2023 to September 2024 and has been conducted in conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

2.2 Context

LFRS OAG was moved to report under Service Improvement in January 2024. The Terms of Reference for the group was approved in March 2024. As part of its remit, the group considers shared learning from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) through its National Operational Learning (NOL) tool. Fire Services use the online function as a central repository to improve the exchange of good practice and lessons learned. The group also considers learnings regionally from other fire services through Joint Organisational Learning (JOL), which exists to encourage closer interoperability between responder organisations.

2.3 Previous audit

We have not previously undertaken an audit in this area.

2.4 Scope of Audit


In this audit we have reviewed and tested the adequacy and effectiveness of the controls and processes established by management to mitigate the key risks relating to the following areas:

- Governance;
- Assessment and Identification of Actions Required; and
- Implementation and Follow Up of Actions.

Section Three: Summary of Audit Findings

Area of Coverage	Commentary	Action ref	Assessment
Governance	<p>The Organisational Assurance Group (OAG) meets quarterly for its regular meetings and holds additional interim meetings for informal progress updates on raised actions. The group considers learnings from safety events and incident monitoring, including those highlighted regionally and nationally by other fire services. The terms of reference for the group were last reviewed in March 2024 and sufficiently outline the roles and responsibilities of its members. The functions of the group are consistently carried out as per the terms of reference. Meetings are minuted; however, we have identified some minor instances where officers would have benefited from more detailed action and information notes from other authorities. These notes will serve as points of reference for those who have provided apologies for that meeting.</p> <p>A membership structure has been established for the group, including senior staff members from each area of the organisation. However, we have identified some service areas that have not had representation at half of the standard meetings in the last twelve months. This includes Service Delivery and Prevention. It is acknowledged that many of the group's members are operational officers, and as such, operational demands may prevent attendance.</p>	4.1	●
Assessment and Identification of Actions Required	<p>OAG agendas include standing items to discuss action and information notes received both regionally and nationally through the NOL and JOL. Meeting minutes record the number of action and information notes received in the previous quarter and confirm that actions are raised on the AMS system. These actions are attributed to notes and assigned to individuals. Actions are also given a risk rating and a deadline for completion.</p> <p>Changes in legislation are shared with the service both by the Home Office via the Fire Minister and via the National Fire Chiefs Council. The service considers the impact of these changes and implements actions as appropriate, which are monitored to completion via the AMS system. This has been evidenced through the actions from the Grenfell Inquiry, which include actions raised as a result of the Fire Safety Act (2021).</p> <p>OAG agendas have standing items to discuss LFRS learnings, which have been fed back to other fire services through the NOL and JOL.</p>	n/a	●

Section Three: Summary of Audit Findings

Area of Coverage	Commentary	Action ref	Assessment
Implementation of and Follow Up of Actions	<p>Actions raised by the OAG are discussed in detail at subsequent meetings as part of a standing agenda item that opens the meeting. They remain on the OAG's action plan until the group agrees they can be discharged. Meeting minutes provide sufficient detail on updates provided. However, in a couple of instances, we have identified actions that have not been added to the plan and therefore have not been followed up at subsequent meetings.</p> <p>Notes uploaded against actions recorded on the AMS system are annotated with the time of upload and the authoring officer's details. They are sufficiently detailed and supported with relevant documentation for officers to review. They are followed up promptly and closed where appropriate, otherwise, they are updated and monitored regularly for ongoing actions.</p> <p>Officers receive communications of changes to policies and procedures through the quarterly Organisational Assurance Quarterly report, which is archived on the service's intranet page. Updates of higher priority or urgency are issued to staff via Rec 1 notifications, which are published on an eLearning platform. Each member of staff confirms receipt and understanding of the content of these forms and carries out any actions where applicable.</p> <p>As part of Station Preparedness visits, officers are questioned on their knowledge of the Organisational Assurance reports to ensure awareness of topical events and compliance with subsequent learnings. Results are monitored by senior staff to support wider learning and training.</p>	4.2	

Section Four: Action Plan

4.1 Governance: meeting minutes

Finding

Our review of meeting minutes for the Organisational Assurance Group has identified instances where there has been limited detail from discussions on important agenda items, including action and information notes from the National (NOL) and Joint Organisational Learning (JOL). For example, as part of April 2024 minutes, there was minimal detail noted for the five new information notes received from the NOL, including considerations and implications of these notes to key areas of the service from the group's key stakeholders.

Implications

As has been acknowledged in our summary of audit findings, members of the group may not be present at meetings due to operational demand and will be reliant on sufficiently detailed minutes to understand the implications of topics such as learnings from other fire services in a timely manner.

Agreed Action

Meeting minutes should reflect sufficient detail so that members that were not present can remain updated and reliably informed on agenda items discussed.

Responsible:	Thomas Powell Head of Service Improvement
Priority:	Low ●
Target date:	January 2025

Section Four: Action Plan

4.2 Implementation of and Follow Up of Actions : actions raised in OAG meetings

Finding

Our review of meeting minutes for the Organisational Assurance Group has identified two instances where actionable items have been raised as part of discussions under 'learning from safety events in other fire and rescue services but not been attributed to the group's action plan. On both occasions, issues raised were not discussed at subsequent meetings. For example, as part of January 2024's minutes, an action mooted to liaise with Greater Manchester's fire service regarding sharing of appliances for resilience purposes was not added to the appended action plan, and subsequently not followed up in the April meeting.

Implications

Actions that are not added to the action plan will not be followed up by the group at subsequent meetings, meaning that the service is at risk of either understanding the implications of action taken, or not acting on the raised issues at all.

Agreed Action

Minute meetings will be reviewed to confirm that all actions raised as part of agenda discussions are captured in the appending action plan and assigned to an appropriate officer before being issued to members.





Responsible:	Thomas Powell Head of Service Improvement
Priority:	Medium ●
Target date:	January 2025

Appendix A: Rating Definitions

Audit Finding Risk Rating

Extreme residual risk	Critical and urgent in that failure to address the risk could lead to one or more of the following: catastrophic loss of Lancashire Fire and Rescue services, loss of life, significant environmental damage, or significant financial loss, with related national press coverage and substantial damage to reputation. Remedial action must be taken immediately.
High residual risk	Critical in that failure to address the issue or progress the work would lead to one or more of the following: failure to achieve organisational objectives, significant disruption to Lancashire Fire and Rescue business or to users of its services, significant financial loss, inefficient use of resources, failure to comply with law or regulations, or damage to reputation. Remedial action must be taken
Medium residual risk	Failure to address the issue or progress the work could impact on operational objectives and should be of concern to senior management. Prompt specific action should be taken.
Low residual risk:	Matters that individually have no major impact on achieving the service's objectives, but where combined with others could give cause for concern. Specific remedial action is desirable.

Overall Assurance Rating

 No assurance	There are some fundamental weaknesses in the design and/ or operation of the framework of control that could result in failure to achieve its objectives.
 Limited	There are some significant weaknesses in the design and/ or operation of the framework of control that put the achievement of its objectives at risk.
 Moderate	The framework of control is adequately designed and/ or effectively operated overall, but some action is required to enhance aspects of it and/ or ensure that it is effectively operated throughout.
 Substantial	The framework of control is adequately designed and/ or effectively operated overall.