Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Performance Management Committee
12 June 2014

Service Transformation Programme Benefits Review

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact John Redmond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Ged Edwards, Planning and Performance Manager on 01743 260208.

1   Purpose of Report

This report provides information on the benefits achieved to date following the upgrade to the Fire Safety database, Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS).

2   Recommendations

The Audit and Performance Management Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

3   Background

As the projects within the Service Transformation Programme close, benefits from these projects will be reported to Members. Areas where benefits can be achieved are listed in Appendix A.

This report is the first of a number of regular reports and seeks to demonstrate the immediate improvements and efficiencies that have been created as a result of introducing CFRMIS 5. These will lead to financial benefits in the longer term and will be reported upon as the programme progresses.

4   CFRMIS 5 Fire Safety Database

CFRMIS was specifically designed by Civica as a fire safety database, which is currently used widely by fire services nationally.

The Service was not originally achieving the benefits experienced by other fire and rescue authorities, which was, in the main, due to using it in isolation, i.e. information being input was not available for use by other departments, missing valuable opportunities to utilise it to its full operating potential.

5   Achievement against Anticipated Benefits

The project to introduce CFRMIS 5 originally identified a number of anticipated benefits. Both the Short Audit[1] and the Home Fire Safety Visit processes were examined in detail and, by using the results of the review, the Service is now able to demonstrate areas where these benefits have been realised.

Ensuring that the organisation focusses its limited resources on those individuals, who are at most risk within Shropshire

The ability to target audits and visits has certainly been achieved. Improved information has enabled the Community Fire Safety (CFS) and Business Fire Safety (BFS) Departments to focus their attentions by avoiding duplication, and scheduling visits and audits on a risk-based approach.

Decreased administration time for prevention staff and operational response, allowing them to increase the amount of prevention activities

The decrease in administration time is demonstrated throughout the detail in the appendices, and has allowed BFS and CFS staff to introduce additional initiatives, such as extra BFS sessions, additional workstreams and reintroduction of CFS visits by the watches.

Introduction of an effective performance management system for prevention activities that can be utilised by a number of departments

BFS, CFS and Area Command have access to CFRMIS 5, which enables them to view detailed information about the number of visits and audits completed in real time. Performance reporting to executive officers and Members is more accurate and up-to-date.

Integration of legacy data stores into CFRMIS

Information previously held in both hard copy and other databases has now been integrated into CFRMIS 5. Although this has been a lengthy exercise, as the information has also been cleansed, the results have led to an improvement in the integrity of data contained within the system.

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[1] A short audit is a survey of the general fire safety arrangements and management procedures in place at non-domestic premises that fall within the low to medium risk range in order to determine the premises fire risk. They are carried out either by watch-based staff at wholetime stations or Rural Business Support Officers, who are specially trained Retained Duty Staff. Within the short audit process there are opportunities for staff to escalate any problems or concerns about the premises to a Fire Safety Inspecting Officer.

The improvement of communication links and information sharing between departments within the organisation

Communication between the watches, CFS and BFS with regard to visits and audits is more straightforward. There are fewer queries from the watches and the Assistant Group Commanders in Area Command can access the information directly with everyone seeing same information.

The capability of dynamically linking existing prevention activity data into the organisations planned IT improvements enabling users to have real-time information

Although the planned IT improvements, such as SharePoint and Mobile Working, which will link in with CFRMIS 5 have not yet been rolled out, expected benefits of these systems have been mapped out and will be part of the overall Service Transformation Programme of Change.

6a Benefits Realised for Short Audit Process

Examples are detailed in the appendices to this report. The main benefit to the process audited was time saving, which has:

- Given the Department the opportunity to develop and expand Business Fire Safety sessions and complete additional programmes of inspections for areas that had previously been on hold because of capacity;
- Enabled the Administration Support Team to work through, and eradicate the backlog of files, which had built up from the previous process;
- Created additional capacity for inspecting officers, as data input is now completed by the Administration Support Team;
- Allowed that Team time to cleanse data and apply naming conventions, enabling easier searching, leading in turn to a growing confidence in the information; and
- Simplified the process for the watches.

6b Benefits Realised for Home Fire Safety Visit Processes

The improvements to Home Fire Safety Visit processes have also created similar benefits, which include:

- Eliminating the backlogs in Administration Support Team;
- Enabling managers to report more accurately on the number of visits achieved in a more timely manner;
- Improving Community Fire Safety's ability to target their visits;
- Increasing the quality of the information by creating standard phrases; and
- Automating processes, thus reducing risk and time.

7 Conclusion

In short, the time savings resulting from using CFRMIS 5 have enabled the Service to do more by making better use of the people employed, and by helping to improve the integrity of information within the system. Ultimately, this will lead to a reduction in risk to both the community in terms of safety, and the Service in terms of reputation.

8 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10 Initial Impact Assessment

This report contains merely statements of fact and historical data. An Initial Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

11 Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

12 Appendices

Appendix A
Programme Benefits

Appendix B
Improvements to the Short Audit Process and Other Processes within Fire Safety as a Result of Introducing CFRMIS 5

13 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Programme Benefits

Benefits can fall into three main categories:

- Direct financial benefits

- Direct non-financial benefits

- Indirect benefits

and can be identified in several areas:

- Policy or legal requirement

- Quality of service

- Internal management

- Process improvement (productivity or efficiency)

- Personnel management

- Risk reduction

- Flexibility

- Economy

- Revenue enhancement or acceleration

- Strategic fit

Improvements to the Short Audit Process and Other Processes within Fire Safety as a Result of Introducing CFRMIS 5

Planned Improvements

The project aimed to deliver an improvement to the current use of CFRMIS and to ensure that it was fully utilised by its main users and the wider organisation. It was completed at the end of October 2013, with a small number of follow-on actions still to be completed.

The development of workflows and processes within CFRMIS 5 has improved a number of CFS and BFS processes.

For the sake of this report the Short Audit Process was fully investigated to find examples of the benefits originally identified and look at whether these had been achieved and to what extent.

Conclusion

Overview

It is clear that the main benefit to the Short Audit Process is in the saving of time for Business Fire Safety, the Administration Support Team and the crews on stations, although it is recognised that this is not the only benefit. It may be more accurate to assess the savings in terms of the opportunities gained as a result of these time savings and the indirect impact realised in other areas.

More Business Fire Safety Sessions

Some of the extra time gained by Business Fire Safety will be used to hold more Business Fire Safety sessions (they currently hold between 7 and 9 per quarter), as they are looking to develop the seminars and introduce them into other areas of the business community. The increase in numbers is unquantified as yet. Raising awareness with businesses before the audit enables them to be more prepared when the audit takes place. They may also take the initiative to address possible issues themselves before each visit. This would reduce the number of follow-up visits required (Policy, Quality of service).

Additional Programmes of Inspection

The additional time created has also allowed Inspecting officers to set up a programme of inspection that concentrates on premises with high-value business rates, those premises with sleeping quarters above them, risk premises (7iid) and heritage buildings (Risk reduction). This was a piece of work that had previously been on hold because of capacity.

Backlogs Cleared Providing Up-to-Date Information

Within the Administration Support Team the time has been used to clear the backlog of files (some 700 files) in the holding area that was used in the previous process. This has now been completed and the information is up-to-date. It was raised by members of BFS and station personnel that confidence had risen in both the integrity of the information that they are viewing and its currency (Risk reduction).

Additional Capacity for Inspecting Officers

Data input tasks previously carried out by the Unwanted Fire Signals Officer are now completed by the Administration Support Team, releasing approximately a day and half per month. This in turn has allowed the Officer to undertake development and become an inspecting officer, providing additional capacity within the Department. All the more important, as the number of inspecting officers within the Department has reduced by two full-time posts.

Data Cleansed

An exercise by the Administration Support Team to cleanse the information contained with the CFRMIS database has also been carried out. This was a time-consuming process that involved checking, amending and updating every record. Naming conventions have been applied, which enables easier searching. This has resulted in growing confidence in the information, which in turn leads to less queries by the watches and reduced frustration.

Simpler Process for Crews

The information, which is available to stations before the audit and the process of completing the report following the audit, is less complicated and less frustrating. There are less anomalies, as the information contained within the system is more complete, therefore the stations are able to complete more of the short audits, rather than referring them back to BFS. The watches carry out between 25 and 30 audits per quarter, with less of those audits being referred back to BFS. Referrals by the watches occurred because of a lack of location information or as a result of a problem at the premises, e.g. there was found to be a sleeping risk, which would be dealt with by an inspecting officer. The watch were unable to quantify how many they had previously referred back to BFS.

Other Workstreams Affected by the Introduction of CFRMIS 5

CFRMIS is not only used on the BFS side but has benefitted processes within Community Fire Safety.

Home Fire Safety Visits

These are carried out by the watches, retained stations and partner agencies on behalf of the Service. Previously, these were all completed on paper forms. The stations and watches would return them to the Administration Support Team, who would input them into CFRMIS. Those returned by partner agencies were just held in the paper format. A lack of capacity within the Administration Support Team lead to a backlog in the input stage. At one point the Team was six to eight months behind.

Managers were unable to access real-time, accurate, performance data with regard to the number of home fire safety visits. CFS was unable to confirm the number of visits, which watches and stations were making.

Backlogs Eliminated

Allowing stations and watches access to CFRMIS enables them to input the information onto the system themselves. As the Administration Support Team no longer inputs this information, the backlog in the Team no longer occurs. There is still backlog on some stations and watches, resulting from training issues or sickness absence, but these are isolated cases.

More Accurate Reporting

The information from partner agencies is also added to CFRMIS and is provided in a structured form, enabling consistency across the agencies. This enables managers to provide more up-to-date performance data with regard to CFS visits, as information is being input on a timelier basis, and more complete performance data, as it now includes the visits performed by the Service's partner agencies.

Ability to Target CFS Work and Improved Professional Image

The timeliness and completeness of the data returns more accurate information when searching. For example, a fire in an area would generate a level 1 or level 2 response by CFS. This could mean a leaflet drop in the vicinity or, in more serious cases, watches or stations would knock on people's doors in the area to offer free home fire safety checks and or advice. By searching on the area beforehand, CFS is able to see if any of the houses within the vicinity have already received a check or a leaflet, and when they received it. This allows crews to concentrate on the houses that have not received any contact from the Service and target their efforts more efficiently. This raises the professional image of the Service, as personnel are not visiting the same households unnecessarily.

Improved Quality of Information

The quality of information within the system is also being addressed, and standard phrases have been developed by the Department to provide some consistency when recording the information on CFRMIS. As more data is input, so the overall quality will improve.

Automated Processes

All the scheduled visits are now input into CFRMIS and a workflow has been created to divide the lists automatically and allocate them to stations and crews, based upon the addresses and station areas. Previously this would have been a manual task carried out by CFS.

Ability to record unsuccessful visits

The watches have reintroduced door knocking to provide home fire safety visits, fit smoke alarms or provide advice, and have targets of 20 successful visits per month. Previously, the watches were unable to record unsuccessful visits. This has now been remedied with CFRMIS 5. It is important to highlight those properties so that they can be targeted for another visit.