

Members' Falck Visit

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides an overview of the recent visit to Falck in Denmark of three Members of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO).

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Acknowledge the vision, drive and hard work of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) Worrall and his team in making the Leonardo da Vinci exchange programme such a resounding success.

3 Background

At a meeting of the Fire Authority on 10 May 2006, Members were advised that an innovative and unique opportunity had arisen to carry out staff exchanges between Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and Falck, who for many years have been the foremost provider of emergency services in Denmark. Members were also advised that the exchanges would be funded to a level of approximately £10,000 through the European Commission's (EC) – Leonardo da Vinci Community Vocational Training Action Programme.

Members were supportive of the exchange programme and agreed that a key objective should be the transfer of skills and competencies of personnel through exposure to differing national and organisational cultures. It was agreed that the exchange programme would promote personal development and organisational learning and, as such, would ultimately serve to add value to the services provided to the people of Denmark and Shropshire, leading to safer communities.



At a meeting of the Fire Authority on 20 December 2006, the ACFO gave a presentation on the outcomes of the 2006 Falck exchange programme. He reported that 16 members of SFRS from all levels of the Service had visited Falck to study such areas as fire fighting, road traffic collision techniques, breathing apparatus, fire investigation, control room operations etc. He also reported that 12 firefighters from Falck had visited SFRS to study our own procedures, and that the feedback from both our visitors and our own staff had been extremely positive. In summary the exchange programme had been a unique 'public-private partnership', which had provided excellent staff development opportunities and produced significant organisational benefits.

The presentation was then followed up at the February 2007 meeting of the Fire Authority with an 'Executive Summary Report', which documented key issues arising from the exchange programme, described the lessons learnt from managing the programme and put forward recommendations for ensuring that the benefits and notable practice arising from the programme were maximised. The report also advised Members of the following interim appraisal of the programme by Laura Laver, Programme Officer for the Leonardo UK National Agency:

"We usually do an evaluation of a project once the final report has been submitted, but it is worth highlighting that this project has been incredibly successful it has been an example of good practice within the Leonardo Programme."

In view of the obvious success of the 2006 programme Members authorised officers, in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to review and evaluate further opportunities for staff development through the Leonardo da Vinci programme for 2007.

4 Exchange Programme 2007

In July 2007 Members were advised that the Fire Authority had been successful in obtaining funding for a further staff exchange programme. The European Commission had approved a grant of approximately £35,000, which would enable a further 36 personnel from the Service to undertake exchange visits during 2007 to fire and civil protection organisations operating within five European countries.

Members agreed that the programme should be extended to incorporate placements for three elected Members to visit Falck to observe and review arrangements within a private fire and rescue service for setting and implementing policy, strategy and governance.

5 Members' Visit

As agreed by the Fire Authority, Councillors West, Box and Hartin, accompanied by the CFO, visited Falck in Denmark between 7 and 13 October 2007 and undertook an extremely interesting and informative comparison between private and public fire and rescue service provision.



Throughout their stay, Members were hosted by Falck's own CFO, Henrik B. Hansen. The following provides a summary of the activities and visits undertaken:

Monday, 8 October 2007

9.30 – 11.45 am	Welcome and presentation on Falck	H Hansen
12.30 – 2.00 pm	Visit to Falck HQ, Copenhagen	CEO A Larsen
2.00 – 4.00 pm	Transfer to Korsor	H Hansen
4.00 – 6.00 pm	Visit Youth Fire Brigade, Korsor	FO T Krakau
6.00 – 8.00 pm	Transfer to Aarhus	H Hansen

The morning session with Henrik and the lunchtime meeting with Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Allan Larson provided Members with an excellent overview of the entire Falck organisation, which employs almost 14,000 staff in Denmark, the remainder of Europe and as far away as Brazil and Malaysia. Falck's staff are employed in many different roles, including firefighters, ambulance crews, paramedics, nurses, physicians, physiotherapists, ergo therapists and training instructors; all organised into the four main business areas, namely Assistance, Emergency, Healthcare and Training. It was also interesting to learn that the CEO had recently received visits from senior ministerial advisors from the United Kingdom (UK) and from the leaders of the Fire Brigades Union, for discussions on contingency arrangements for fire and rescue services in the UK.

The remainder of the day involved a quite lengthy transfer between Copenhagen and Aarhus with an enjoyable stop off en-route to visit Korsor Youth Fire Brigade. The Youth Brigade is made up of boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 17, who put on a first class demonstration for their visitors of how to deal with a flammable liquid fire, using foam making equipment. The Youth Fire Brigade have also recently been visited by a team of firefighters and Community Fire Safety (CFS) personnel from Shropshire. Conversely, the retained firefighters from Falck, who lead and support the Youth Fire Brigade, have also very recently visited SFRS.

Tuesday, 9 October 2007

9.00 – 10.00 am	Quality Control and ISO Certification	P Terkelson
10.00 am – 1.00 pm	Emergency Fire and Rescue	SVP O Qvist
2.00 – 5.00 pm	Visit to Falckgarden Fire Station	H Hansen

The first session of the day involved discussions around Falck's recent successes in achieving ISO 9001 accreditation for the firefighting arm of their organisation. Clearly, such accreditation is extremely important for Falck, as a recognised private fire service provider, in their endeavours to expand their share of the fire service market within Denmark and other European countries. It is noteworthy that SFRS are also gaining ISO 9001 accreditation on a department by department basis, with accreditation currently being held by both the Technical Services department and the Performance Improvement Department. The benefits of accreditation to a public service



provider are somewhat different to those gained by a private service provider; for SFRS the benefits are mainly focussed upon providing evidence to numerous external auditors!

During a most informative session with the Senior Vice President (SVP) responsible for Falck's fire service provision in Denmark, Members held lengthy discussions as to why and how the privatisation of public services has flourished in Denmark and were provided with some very interesting cost comparisons. The SVP provided figures, which were claimed to demonstrate that the cost of firefighting in Denmark accounts for only 0.08% of Gross Domestic Product, as compared to 0.15% in Sweden, 0.21% in the UK and 0.23% in the United States.

This session was followed by a visit to one of Falck's largest fire stations attached to the Headquarters at Falckgarden. There are clearly many similarities between the job of a firefighter anywhere in the world and, in reality, the fact that Falck is a private company appears to make little difference to the passion and pride in the job displayed by their firefighters. As may be expected, there are also many similarities between the working conditions of the firefighters (e.g., mess rooms, dormitories, locker rooms etc). One major difference, however, was the nature of the shift system. Falck's firefighters work a 24 hour shift, whereas in the UK the maximum period of work for firefighters is 15 hours, and many fire and rescue services are currently in the process of reducing this period.

Wednesday, 10 October 2007

9.30 – 11.30 am	Visit to Skejby Control Centre	H Hansen
12.30 – 3.00 pm	Meeting with Municipal Fire Chief	CFO JV Andersen
3.00 – 4.30 pm	Meeting with Chair of Preparedness Committee	
4.30 – 6.00 pm	Visit to Municipality HQ	CFO JV Andersen

The visit to a regional control centre was extremely useful in the context of changes currently underway in the UK to provide nine Regional Control Centres (RCCs). The set up of the control centre in Skejby was very different to that which is currently being established in the UK. In the Falck control room, the number of operators dealing with fire service calls for the region was very limited (normally four). Within the same room, however, there were upward of a further 20 operators, who were dealing with ambulance calls, patient transfers, roadside recovery calls and many other functions.

In the event of a large fire incident, or numerous spate calls, the number of fire operators can be increased rapidly by using the remaining operators already in the control centre and refocusing their activities. This was a first class example of the way in which the very variable demand levels applicable to a fire and rescue service can be planned for and dealt with cost effectively.

The afternoon spent with the Chief Fire Officer of the Municipality of Arhus Fire Service, and later with the Chair of the Municipality's Preparedness Committee, provided a much needed understanding of how private and public



fire services work together to protect the public of a town or region. Arhus has a population of approximately 300,000 people and is protected by a combination of both public service and Falck firefighters. It was clear that an excellent working relationship existed between the different service providers, but also that underlying tensions exist (particularly for the CFO) with regard to the driving down of costs, and the perceived hijacking by Falck of the excellent brand image which fire services throughout the world enjoy.

The CFO and Chair of Arhus Fire Service were extremely interested to hear of the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) undertaken in Shropshire and of the nature of our well established CFS and other risk reduction activities. As such, they have been invited to visit the Fire Authority and SFRS at their convenience and have recently written declaring a wish to take up that offer.

Thursday, 11 October 2007

9.00 – 11.00 am	Transfer to Esbjerg	H Hansen
11.30 am – 5.00 pm	Visit to Nutec Training Centre	H Hansen

Within the training sector Falck offers rescue and safety courses on four continents to the off-shore and maritime sectors. The aviation industry, the chemical industry and the armed forces also use Falck's competencies in this area. During 2006 Falck provided over 130,000 courses and increased their revenue in this area by over 18%.

At the Nutec Training Centre, in addition to viewing a wide range of what could be perceived as normal fire and chemical training rigs and scenarios, we were also privileged to be given a demonstration of a sea survival training simulator. The simulator was capable of producing a total illusion of the situation of a rescue from a helicopter crash into the sea, by producing waves of over 1.5 metres in height and gale force winds of up to 30 metres per second.

In the context of more conventional training, there appeared to be a much greater demand for courses in dealing with ammonia than is the case in the UK. It would appear that, following a number of emergency incidents involving fatalities due to ammonia leakages in Denmark, those companies, which utilise ammonia in their processes, are now required by law to ensure that their staff are adequately trained in its use. Falck have clearly recognised and filled a gap in the market by providing such training. Interestingly, training staff at Nutec were keen to point out the limitations of the chemical protection suits used by many companies, which in many cases will only resist ammonia in gas or liquid form for very short periods. The gas tight suits provided by the Fire Authority on Shropshire's fire appliances will protect against the effects of ammonia (in any form) for a minimum of 480 minutes.



Friday, 12 October 2007

9.00 am – 12 noon	Visit to Esbjerg wholetime/retained	H Hansen
12.30 pm – 2.00 pm	Visit to Esbjerg Regional Fire Station	H Hansen
2.00 pm – 4.00 pm	Visit to retained station	H Hansen
2.00 – 4.00 pm	Transfer to Copenhagen	H Hansen

A visit to Esbjerg fire station provided a further most clear difference between private and public sector fire and rescue service provision. Esbjerg fire station provides regional support to a further 15 (mainly retained) stations in their vicinity. Almost all of the support functions required by those stations are undertaken by wholetime firefighters at Esbjerg, e.g. the servicing, maintenance and repair of vehicles, breathing apparatus and communications equipment. With regard to breathing apparatus, the firefighters also service and repair equipment for companies working in the nearby harbour, around which the town of Esbjerg has grown.

It is noticeable that in recent years SFRS, along with the majority of other fire and rescue services in the UK, has moved away from using firefighters to carry out work, which it has been considered is more appropriately undertaken by professional external contactors. A total care breathing apparatus contract and the outsourcing of hydrant maintenance are both good examples of areas where SFRS has moved away from using firefighters to undertake support functions. Both examples have subsequently been held up as demonstrating best practice by external auditors.

There are two main differences between Falck and SFRS, which are clearly evidenced by the nature of the additional work undertaken by firefighters at Esbjerg. Firstly, the time allocated to training by Falck firefighters is vastly less than their counterparts in SFRS. The annual training programme for a Falck firefighter (wholetime and retained) consists of one 2 hour exercise each month, i.e. a total of 24 hours per year. In contrast the minimum amount of training time allocated to any firefighter in Shropshire is 11 hours per month for a retained firefighter. Secondly, Falck firefighters are not involved in community fire safety activities and, although there is some good work undertaken by Falck with children and youths, prevention is not, as yet, an important aspect of fire service activities in Denmark.

At the request of the visiting team (and taking into account developments within the Fire Authority's own IRMP), the final visit made was to view one of Falck's rapid response fire appliances. These vehicles are essentially vans crewed by two firefighters, which provide the first strike to a wide variety of incidents. They are in many ways similar to the concept of a small fires vehicle, which is currently being trialled by the Fire Authority at Tweedale, but they have been operated now by Falck for over seven years. The major difference, which provoked a good deal of discussion, however, is that Falck are now using these vehicles and their very limited crew to make the first strike on property fires also.



6 Food for Thought

As described above, the purpose of the visit by Members to Falck was to observe and review arrangements within a private fire and rescue service for setting and implementing policy, strategy and governance. These areas were explored during the visit, however, the main feature of much of the programme turned out to be a comparison of private and public sector fire and rescue service provision. This proved of much greater value in widening the outlook of all those taking part (including our hosts) and provided the following as just a few examples of the learning points established:

- The fire service brand is a very positive one, which can be worth a lot of money to a company wishing to build its name in similar areas, e.g. patient transfer, roadside recovery, health provision etc.
- Similarly, should UK fire and rescue services be permitted to trade on a profit making basis, there would appear to be many opportunities for raising finances.
- Although comparative costs for the provision of firefighting and rescue services provided during the visit have not been verified, there can be little doubt that the availability of a private fire service provider in Denmark has driven down costs to the public.
- Accreditation against international standards, e.g. ISO 9001, can be beneficial to both private and public fire and rescue service providers. The drivers for obtaining the accreditation are, however, very different.
- There are numerous similarities in the conditions of service and role of a firefighter in both private and public sector provision.
- A drive throughout the UK to reduce the length of shifts that firefighters work is not reflected in either the private or public sector in Denmark.
- It is difficult to perceive that Regional Control Centres, which deal solely with fire and rescue service incidents will provide the efficiencies evident in regional centres run by Falck.
- There appears to be little difficulty with private and public sector fire service providers working effectively together. As would be expected, however, tensions at management level are bound to exist.
- Regional and national fire and rescue service training can clearly be provided by the private sector. This can provide benefits, if the same provider is also training company employees, who will provide first strike risk control.
- Despite many concerns in the UK regarding the training for (and competency of) firefighters, it is abundantly clear that UK firefighters



undertake much higher levels of training than their counterparts in Denmark.

- Community Fire Safety, which is well established in SFRS and the UK and is demonstrating many successes in reducing fires, deaths and injuries, remains in its infancy in Denmark.

7 Acknowledgements

Over the past two years large numbers of staff employed by the Fire Authority have been given a unique opportunity to undertake developmental opportunities either with Falck in Denmark or, more recently, in a number of other European countries. The consistent factor with all visits is that the staff have returned totally enthused by their experience, and in some cases describing it as “a life-changing experience”. Having now experienced the same developmental opportunity, those Members involved are very clear as to why this should be the case. As such, they would wish to acknowledge the vision, drive and sheer hard work that ACFO Worrall and his team have put into making this project such an outstanding success.

On a more personal note, Members also wish formally to acknowledge and thank CFO Henrik Hansen for the VIP treatment provided to them throughout their stay in Denmark. In addition, to overseeing personally the first class programme of visits drawn up for Members, he also spent the entire week ensuring that all his visitors’ needs were met. As with everyone else we met in Denmark, Henrik was the perfect host and we are very much indebted to him for a most memorable visit!

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 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service’s Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

11 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.



12 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority:

10 May 2006. Report 22. Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service – Falck Staff Exchange Programme

20 December 2006. Report 18. Falck Exchange Programme

14 February 2007. Report 20. Falck - Shropshire

25 April 2007. Paper 3. Minutes of 14 February 2007 meeting

18 July 2007. Report 19. Leonardo da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programme 2007

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	*
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	*
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

