Head Light

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The Journey Towards Cultural Change at South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue

South Yorkshire FIRE & RESCUE

"360 might not have been on our task list for the year initially, but we have made huge strides.

We now have a positive and sustainable 360 programme.

The support from Head Light has been a critical success factor in this."

Chris Marwood, People Partner, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue strives to create the culture, values, behaviours and leadership associated with an inclusive and respected service.

As part of this, it planned to introduce 360-degree feedback across its leaders and managers. This plan accelerated after the publication of the HMICFRS Report, exploring the values and culture of fire services across England.

With support from Head Light, this is its story of that journey.

The context: A plan for cultural change, inclusivity and brilliance

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue is planning a bright future to serve and educate its community and create a culture of inclusion and excellence for its people.

Its leaders have embarked on a bold 10-year journey to develop and create the culture, values and behaviours that will deliver a forward-looking and respected service as well as building an inclusive and "brilliant" place to work.

While 360-degree feedback had never been used wholesale across the service, adopting a 360 has been firmly on the agenda. 360 is known to provide valuable insight into leaders' and managers' strengths and possible areas for development, and to serve as a foundation on which to build. While some managers had been able to participate in a 360 as part of a training programme, no service-wide manager and leader 360 had ever been undertaken.

The catalyst to move 360 up the agenda came after the publication of the HMICFRS Report into the values and culture of services across England; 360 featured in several of the Report's recommendations for all services.

The solution: A robust and relevant 360 designed for Fire and Rescue Services

The timeline outlined in the Report for the deployment of 360 was tight. The team at South Yorkshire, led by Chris Marwood, People Partner, knew that they needed a validated and robust 360 questionnaire, that was relevant to a fire and rescue service and supported by a supplier experienced in the IT roll-out, process management and training of in-house feedback facilitators.

Head Light and its Fire 360 were selected.

"Feedback on the training has been very positive. It was excellent; it gave the managers the skills to understand the reports but, more than that, it gave them the confidence to manage a formal feedback session."

About Head Light and Fire 360

- Developed specifically for Fire and Rescue Services based on the leadership standards for fire service leaders.
- Three questionnaire versions available to ensure relevance to the participants.
- Easy to understand and complete.
- Outsourced management of the roll-out and review process when needed.
- Training of in-house feedback facilitators by business psychologists with decades of 360 feedback experience.
- Data analytics portal to allow for service-wide view, and the capability to drill down into data when needed.

Supported wholeheartedly by the senior leadership team and appointed to manage the project, Chris Marwood planned out the 360 implementation into four phases, with the start point being the most senior of the leaders. This not only met with the recommendations of the Report, but also ensured visible, top-down leadership and commitment to the initiative.

Phase 1: Senior Leadership Team – including the Chief Fire Officer, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer plus six other senior leaders.

Phase 2: Middle Managers – including 63 managers both those in uniform and corporate managers.

Phase 3: Junior Managers – including watch managers and corporate equivalent grades.

Phase 4: Crew Managers – including crew managers and corporate equivalents.

Adopting good practice to harness the value of the 360 results

The real value of taking part in any 360 programme comes from understanding the results, the feedback, the strengths identified and the areas which might need action.

Feedback facilitators have a vital role to work with each manager to focus attention and clarify understanding. With plans to roll out 360 to all leaders and managers across the service, the team recognised the need to build a pool of trained feedback facilitators. The team wanted line managers to take on the role of feedback facilitator as they could bring context to the 360 feedback, be part of a meaningful conversation about needed development and help implement any action plan.

Head Light's business psychologists, with their decades of experience in 360 feedback with hundreds of leaders, trained these in-house facilitators (line managers) via one-day, in-person courses for up to 16 people. The courses explored the 360 questionnaire and the results, building confidence in how to interpret the results and, importantly, how to frame these for the individual receiving the feedback. Not only did participants get to take part in a 360 but also they were able to practice in a safe learning space on how best to position and share the report.

Chris comments: *"Feedback on the training has been very positive. It was excellent; it gave the managers the skills to understand the reports but, more than that, it gave them the confidence to manage a formal feedback session."*

And the skills learned stretch beyond that of the 360.

"Many of our managers who have been promoted through the operational part of the service have little experience in how to have difficult conversations. The feedback course helped them to develop these skills and grow in confidence."

Positioning the 360

Positioning – and reinforcing that positioning – of the 360 programme was vital to the roll-out success. Crucially, the communications focused on the positioning of the 360 as a development opportunity – and not as an appraisal of performance.

Chris comments: *"We wanted people to understand that 360 is about identifying strengths, shining a light on capability and highlighting those with the potential to mentor others. Importantly, we emphasise that the focus of 360 is to support development, rather than it being an indicator of poor performance."*

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External feedback providers for the most senior leader

For the senior leadership team, the Service decided to look outside for feedback facilitators.

"We knew we wanted our senior leaders to be wholly confident in the security of their feedback. More than this, we wanted them to have the 'best practice' experience from using external and expert feedback facilitators who have years of experience from working with hundreds of leaders.

One of Head Light's business psychology team helped each leader to read, understand and make sense of their report. Everyone was extremely positive about this."

"From the initial set-up, the management of the questionnaire completion and report generation, through to the training of our people and the feedback to our senior team, Head Light has played a key role."

Chris Marwood, People Partner, South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue

Meeting the challenges

The sheer enormity of the task was a challenge in itself. Planning the roll-out, implementation and feedback across the Service required training and planning – and support from Head Light. There were frustrations too about the timescales (as outlined in the HMICFRS Report) which meant that it was not always possible to dedicate the time to communications that they would have wanted. Feedback fatigue means that the level of commitment to feedback can wane, and on-going communications has helped mitigate this. Similarly, for those in operational roles with a focus on fire and rescue and for whom 360 can have little perceived connection with their daily work, additional encouragement and reminders are needed to complete the reviews of their colleagues on time.

The Outcome: A 360 set up for the future

Senior leaders have fully embraced the 360 roll-out, recognising the value to the service as a whole and to them as individual leaders. They have been pleased with the progress made and the plans for the future.

Chris sums up: *"360 might not have been on our task list for the year initially, but we have taken huge strides and have established a positive and sustainable 360 programme."*

"The support of Head Light has been a critical success factor in this. From the initial set-up, the management of the questionnaire completion and report generation, through to the training of our people and the feedback to our senior team, Head Light has played a key role."

Next steps

With plans in place to complete the four phases of roll-out, thoughts can turn to creating greater consistency in the subsequent development plans. There is also now the opportunity to explore the analytics portal, one of the deciding factors in deciding to work with Head Light. The team will be able to split the Service into its four geographical areas and explore the 360 for each district. The plan is to repeat the 360 in two years' time.

"Repeating the 360 will give us a great indication of not only how the organisation has progressed, but how individuals have too," comments Chris.

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