

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
29 April 2021

REPORT AUTHOR: DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SUBJECT: HMICFRS – STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE – THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2020

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Background Papers:

State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue services in England 2020, HMICFRS March 2021.

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-fire-and-rescue-2020-single-page-format.pdf>

State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019, HMICFRS Jan 2020

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-fire-and-rescue-2019-2.pdf>

Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New		

Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.

PURPOSE:

To inform Fire Authority Members of the key findings from the report by Sir Thomas Winsor: State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue services in England 2020.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members **acknowledge** the paper.

1. Background

- 1.1 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), formerly Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, has statutory responsibility for the inspection of the police forces, and since July 2017 the fire and rescue services, of England and Wales. HMICFRS independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire & rescue services in the public interest.
- 1.2 HMICFRS commenced their inspection of Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales in 2018. The inspection process provided graded judgments in the three key areas of effectiveness, efficiency and people. In 2018 Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was judged being 'Good' for our effectiveness and 'Requires Improvement' in the areas of Effectiveness and People. BFRS responded to the findings and areas for improvement identified by HMICFRS by developing an action plan. In addition to the reports for each Fire and Rescue Service, HMICFRS published a State of Fire and Rescue Report 2019 based on their Round One inspections. The 2019 report made six national recommendations.
- 1.3 During 2020 HMICFRS inspected all fire and rescue services to understand how they have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this round of inspections along with other activity undertaken by HMICFRS has been used to inform the 2020 State of Fire and Rescue Report. The 2020 report provides an update on the six national recommendations from 2019 and discusses the key findings from the COVID inspections and other inspection activity. It also sets out their plans for the Round 2 inspections. HMICFRS are currently undertaking their Round 2 inspection of BFRS.

2. Six National Recommendations - Progress

2.1 In summary the six national recommendation made in 2019 were:

1. The Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity;
2. The sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk;
3. The sector should review and reform how effectively pay and conditions are determined;
4. The Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner;
5. There should be a code of ethics; and
6. The Home Office should ensure that the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change

2.2 Sir Thomas states that 'While encouraging progress has been made in relation to some of these recommendations, in others, work is still in its infancy, or hasn't begun.' He also notes that 'While Home Office ministers recognise the importance and persuasiveness of our recommendations, an implementation plan remains outstanding.' Based on his assessment of a number of factors including the impact of the COVID pandemic Sir Thomas has proposed a new set of completion dates for these recommendations. No new national recommendations have been made but Sir Thomas is clear that the six existing actions need to be progressed as in his view 'the Sector needs fundamental reform'.

3. Key Findings and areas of discussion

3.1 The report discusses at length the need to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) within the sector. Sir Thomas states that the 'Lack of diversity and equality is a conspicuous failure of fairness that shames the sector.' As such there is a much greater focus on EDI in Round 2 of their inspections.

3.2 The report also discusses the need for the sector to address the long-term problems in recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters, a resource of clear value. It states that 'the pandemic has changed working lives, with more people working from home and fewer commuting. Services now have an opportunity to recruit from this pool.' Sir Thomas hopes that 'the Government and the fire sector can capitalise on this opportunity.'

- 3.3 The Building Safety Bill which is currently before Parliament that will implement Dame Judith Hackitt's recommendation for a building safety regulator is discussed within the report. Sir Thomas discusses the need to ensure there are sufficient numbers of suitably qualified fire safety professionals to support this work. Sir Thomas also identifies considerable variation between services as to what constitutes high-risk premises and how frequently such premises should be inspected and that many services' risk-based inspection programmes don't have enough resources
- 3.4 The implementation of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations is discussed at length. Whilst this section of the report primarily focuses on London Fire Brigade it does recognise that there is work underway across the sector addressing the findings.
- 3.5 In relation to Prevention activity the report identifies that: Services are doing less prevention work and don't always target it effectively; greater evaluation of prevention activities is needed; Services could do more to engage with their local communities and there is an inconsistent approach to identifying risk
4. Impact on BFRS
- 4.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Whilst the round 2 inspection of BFRS is still ongoing, the focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by the inspection team is clear. It is likely that HMICFRS will make recommendations in this area when our report is published. The recent recruitment of our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager who brings a great deal of knowledge and experience in to the Service, along with a restructure bringing the department under the Head of HR means that the Service is now well placed to swiftly respond to any improvements recommended by HMICFRS. The clear direction given from the Principal Officer Team that EDI is a key priority and our new Service values will help ensure that EDI is prioritised across the Service. Members should note and consider when making future appointments that Sir Thomas states that: 'The sector should focus on improving diversity and equality in leadership roles. Without improved representation throughout the workforce, cultural and equality barriers will still exist, and the service won't gain from the benefits of diversity.'
- 4.2 Recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters – Improving our on-call availability is a clear priority for the Service. The establishment of our recruitment team, the work on the on-call improvement project and our new recruitment vehicle place

the Service in strong position to make clear progress in this area and capitalise on the opportunities identified by Sir Thomas.

- 4.3 The Building Safety Bill – BFRS has already taken a number of steps to address Sir Thomas’ concerns in this area. We have increased our capability and capacity to deliver fire safety through the creation of new posts and creating clear career development pathways within the Protection team. We are also upskilling operations staff and have adopted the professional standards framework. We continue to review and refine our risk based inspection program in line with the latest national guidance as it emerges
- 4.4 The Grenfell Tower Inquiry – We continue to actively support and implement the learning from the Grenfell Tower. We have made good progress against a detailed Grenfell Tower Action Plan and this document has been submitted to HMICFRS as part of the document return for their Round 2 inspection.
- 4.5 Prevention Activity – In relation to Sir Thomas’ concerns we are going against the national trend and delivering more activity not less. 2020/21 was our best ever year for Safe and Well visits and we have set challenging targets for 2021/22. We are restructuring our prevention team to increase effectiveness and focus as well as developing a volunteer scheme to enhance prevention and community engagement.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members **acknowledge** the paper.

ANDREW HOPKINSON
DEPUTY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER