

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
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SUBJECT: HMICFRS INSPECTION UPDATE

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Background Papers: See [HMICFRS Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2021/22 – Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service](#)

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to present members of the Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) with an update and comparative analysis of our 2020-21 inspection by Her Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue (HMICFRS) and the subsequent next stages of improvement planning.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members acknowledge the content of this paper.

1. Background

1.1 HMICFRS have judged us to be 'Good' at effectively delivering services to local communities and also judged to be 'Good' at 'looking after our people', an improvement on our 2018 inspection. This despite a much higher bar being set in their 2021 inspection than in 2018.

1.2 HMICFRS's focus was on the service we provide to the public, and the way we use the resources available. The inspection assesses how effectively and efficiently Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service prevents, protects the public against and responds to fires and other emergencies. They also assess how well we look after our people.

1.3 HMICFRS asked three main questions:

- How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

1.4 HMICFRS has inspected 13 fire and rescue services as part of this first tranche. These services are:

1. Avon
2. Buckinghamshire
3. Bedfordshire
4. Cambridgeshire
5. Cheshire
6. Cornwall
7. Greater Manchester
8. Hereford & Worcester
9. Lincolnshire
10. Merseyside
11. Northumberland
12. Surrey
13. Warwickshire

1.5 Inspection results were shared with staff and discussed in detail by Principal Officers, in Corporate Management Team (CMT) and various functional groups such as the Health and Safety Steering Group.

2. Comparative Analysis

2.1 We examined all Tranche 1 services and compiled the graded judgements for the 11 sub- questions to create a league table. Bedfordshire ranks as 4th best of the 13 Services in tranche 1.

2.2 With reference to all 13 reports and the table below, our analysis shows:

- We have the best score equal with Cambridgeshire for the People criteria.
- Only one service (Warwickshire) received an 'inadequate' for a sub criteria judgment which was for 'Preventing fires and other emergencies.'
- Merseyside was the only Service to receive any 'Outstanding' grades they achieved this in 3 sub questions.
- HMICFRS are publishing five cause of concern letters (38% of the Tranche 1 Services) for Cornwall, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, Lincolnshire and Warwickshire.

Rank	Service	Points
1st	Merseyside	35
2nd	Cambridgeshire	32
2nd	Cheshire	32
4th	Bedfordshire	30
5th	Greater Manchester	28
6th	Surry	27
7th	Avon	26
7th	Lincolnshire	26
9th	Buckinghamshire	24
9th	Cornwall	24
9th	Hereford & Worcester	24
9th	Northumberland	24
13th	Warwickshire	22

3. Noteworthy Practice

3.1 Across the 13 Services HMICFRS identified 9 noteworthy practices two of which were from the BFRS report:

- **Understanding fires and other risks.** Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has developed an app to display operational flashcards on both mobile data terminals and officers' mobile phones. This allows instant access to standard operating procedures;
- **Preventing fires and other risks.** Cornwall FRS and its partners have developed the tri-service safety officer (TSSO) scheme. This combines aspects of fire, police and ambulance prevention roles into a single officer. The initiative achieves financial efficiencies and community safety benefits for the community and the services involved;
- **Responding to fires and other emergencies.** Bedfordshire Fire Control staff make good use of technology to improve information gathering. Fire control staff use technology effectively to pinpoint accurate location of callers and access live imagery from incidents to inform assessment of risk and appropriate response. With permission but minimal interaction from the caller, the service is able to access a live video feed from their mobile device, which can be shared with incident commanders and emergency service partners;
- **Responding to major and multi-agency incidents.** Merseyside's preparedness team has developed a Sunday Six training programme to address six local and national risks: flooding, high-rise buildings, marine, wildfire, terrorism, and recycling and waste incident types. Topics are rotated every eight weeks to ensure that every watch (team) receives the training, which was adapted and provided virtually during the pandemic;
- **Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future.** Avon FRS actively considers and exploits opportunities for generating extra income. For example, it is the only fire and rescue service in England to secure a public sector decarbonisation grant of £823,670;
- **Cambridgeshire has effective and efficient asset management systems.** Staff use scanners and information tablets for undertaking equipment and appliance checks and inventories, automating the recording of defects, and alerting fleet and estates to action, significantly reducing administration;
- **Promoting the right values and culture.** Cambridgeshire FRS commissioned the British Safety Council to undertake an assurance assessment of its response to keeping its staff safe from COVID-19;
- **Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.** Greater Manchester introduced a Freedom to Speak Guardian – an initiative used by the NHS – for staff to have an informal way to give feedback to the service; and,

- **Managing performance and developing leaders.** Bedfordshire improved the way it manages succession planning for senior leadership roles. The service has signed a regional concordat to allow opportunities for secondment of senior manager(s) between service to fill gaps while a full and open recruitment process takes place. The secondees gain from the experience of working as a principal officer and the services benefit from the mutual exchange of knowledge and development

3.2 We examined in detail what makes Merseyside Outstanding. Highlights include:

- The service's prevention strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in its integrated risk management plan (IRMP). It is based on comprehensive internal and external data and intelligence;
- Prevention work doesn't take place in isolation, with risk information sent to other relevant teams across the service. Risk information is used to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between the service's prevention, protection and response functions;
- In September 2018, academics from Liverpool John Moores University worked with Merseyside and Public Health England to review the content of safe and well visits;
- HMICFRS were impressed with Merseyside's approach to maintaining staff skills and competency in responding to major and multi-agency incidents. Its Sunday Six training plan covers six subjects: flooding, high-rise, marine, wildfire, terrorism, and recycling and waste. Subjects are rotated every eight weeks to ensure that every watch (team) receives the training, which was adapted and provided virtually during the pandemic;
- Performance management arrangements in departmental and station plans clearly link to the strategic priorities in the integrated risk management plan;
- Merseyside has a long-standing commitment to partnership working and can clearly define the benefits of its joint ventures; and,
- A combination of the re-design of the operating model, modernising contracts and cumulative savings have led to a £1m investment in additional firefighters.

3.3 In contrast to this we also examined Warwickshire's report. HMICFRS identified three causes of concern and a commentary on their approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):

- the service hasn't got better at detecting who are the people most at risk from fire and doing prevention work with them to reduce the risk posed to them;
- the service hasn't done enough since 2018 to identify high-risk premises;
- ICT systems were unreliable, and the service hasn't invested in them or improved them, and this is hindering its work; and
- although the service has tried to improve diversity and inclusion since our 2018 inspection, its approach to this has made its staff disengage. In particular HMICFRS commented that the Service's approach was forceful and overzealous rather than educational and this was having a negative impact on the workforce.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Arrangements for monitoring the progress of the areas for improvement have been integrated into the 2022-23 CRMP Action Plan within the new Business Management Information System (BMIS).
- 4.2 We have recently been sharing our experiences of inspection with Fire and Rescue Services in Humberside and Hertfordshire.
- 4.3 We have conducted a gap analysis against the current HMICFRS criteria for Outstanding and will integrate this into BMIS in the new financial year. This analysis shows we are in a reasonable position to improve our scores next time.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Members acknowledge the contents of this report.

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