
REPORT AUTHOR: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
SUBJECT: 2023 HMICFRS INSPECTION REPORT

 For further information on this Report contact: Chief Fire Officer

 Background Papers: Previous HMICFRS Inspection Reports;

Implications:

Implications	Yes/No	Impact/Reference
Financial	Yes	Fire and rescue services receive no additional funding for the additional workload placed by an HMICFRS visit, including preparation for and resourcing of an inspection team. Items within the draft action plan that require additional funding will be managed through the annual budget bidding process
Risk Management	Yes	This Service has built an effective relationship with HMICFRS. Several findings within the report influence the internal corporate risk management process particularly around resourcing the service change programme and also reputationally given the requires improvement gradings. The cause of concern was addressed prior to the publication of the report so presents no current risks. Progress against the action plan will be managed via the PMO and leadership team meetings with oversight and scrutiny provided by the FRA.
Legal	Yes	The current Fire and Rescue Service National Framework issued under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, to which the Authority must have regard when carrying out its functions, states as follows at paragraph 7.5: 'Fire and rescue authorities must give due regard to reports and recommendations made by HMICFRS and – if recommendations are made – prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how the recommendations are being

		actioned. If the fire and rescue authority does not propose to undertake any action as a result of a recommendation, reasons for this should be given.’[emphasis added] It continues: ‘When forming an action plan, the fire and rescue authority could seek advice and support from other organisations, for example, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Local Government Association’
Privacy and Security	No	There are no Privacy and Security implications as part of the report.
Duty to collaborate	Yes	Officers have developed our approach to inspection with our regional fire service partners and the NFCC.
Health and Safety	No	There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications from this report. The cause of concern was addressed prior to the publication of the report so presents no current risks.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Yes	There are no further Equality and Diversity implications as part of the report beyond the identified area for improvement which will be addressed via the HMICFRS Action Plan.
Environmental Sustainability	No	There are no Environmental Sustainability implications as part of the report.
Consultation & Communication	Yes	See the comments in the legal section above.

PURPOSE

To present Members with the report and findings from the 2023 service inspection undertaken by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and to discuss and agree the proposed action plan to address the areas for improvement identified by the inspectorate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Members:

1. Note the findings of the HMICFRS as set out in their report, and;
2. To discuss and approve the draft HMICFRS action plan, and;
3. To receive regular updates on progress in delivering against the action plan.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Government commissions His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to inspect all fire and rescue services in England every couple of years.
- 1.2 HMICFRS last inspected Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in January 2021 and inspection report on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people was published in December 2021. This latest inspection contains their third assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well the service looks after its people. They have measured the service against eleven areas and given a grade for each.
- 1.3 For this third round of inspections, HMICFRS haven't given separate grades for effectiveness, efficiency and people as they did previously with graded judgments applied only to each of the eleven inspection areas. They have also expanded their previous four-tier system of graded judgments to five (Outstanding, Good, Adequate, Requires Improvement and Inadequate). Their own guidance makes it clear that these changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between grades awarded in this round of fire and rescue service inspections with those from previous years. A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless they say so in the report.

2 2023 Inspection Report

- 2.1 This service was one of the first three services to be inspected in this latest round. Given the changes to the assessment criteria and grading system, it will be important to benchmark the judgments for this service against other services as their reports are published over the coming months. The following table summarises the graded judgments for this service in each of eleven areas:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Understanding fire and risk	Responding to major incidents	Preventing fire and risk	
	Future affordability	Right people, right skills	Public safety through fire regulation	
		Promoting fairness and diversity	Responding to fires and emergencies	
		Managing performance and developing leaders	Best use of resources	
			Promoting values and culture	

2.2 The full HMICFRS inspection report is provided at Appendix 1. A summary of the findings in each of the eleven areas is provided in the following sections:

Area 1	Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	Judgment: GOOD
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service is good at identifying and understanding community risk The service is improving how it works with its community The service has good processes in place to share risk information across the organisation 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None identified 	

Area 2	Preventing Fire and other Risks	Judgment: Requires Improvement
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service has introduced a person-centred approach to HFVSS • Staff are confident they have the right skills to make the community safer • Staff are proud of the safeguarding process • The service works well with other organisations to keep people safe • The service works well with other organisations to tackle fire setting • The service is improving its evaluation of prevention activities 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service should develop a clear prevention plan that implements the prevention strategy in its community risk management plan. The prevention plan should target people most at risk and make sure the level of activity is proportionate to reduce that risk. • The service should make sure it targets its prevention work at people most at risk. • The service should make sure it quality assures its prevention activity, so staff carry out safe and well visits and home fire safety visits to an appropriate standard. 	
Area 3	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Judgment: Requires Improvement
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks identified in the CRMP • The service has introduced a quality assurance policy for fire safety • The service is consistently exercising its powers • The service is adapting to new legislation • The service is working effectively with local organisations to take joint action • The building consultations process had been realigned with service priorities 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service should assure itself that it has effective systems and processes in place to manage its risk-based inspection programme. • The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process, so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard. • The service should have effective processes to manage the burden of false alarms (unwanted fire signals). 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service should make sure it works with local businesses and other organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations. 	
Area 4	Responding to fires and other emergencies	Judgment: Requires Improvement
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have a good understanding of how to command incidents safely Operational firefighters can access risk information easily The service effectively keeps the public informed about ongoing incidents 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service should make sure its response strategy provides the most appropriate response for the public in line with its community risk management plan. The service should make sure fire control is sufficiently resourced and has resilience arrangements and appropriate fallback cover. The service should make sure it uses its on-call crews effectively to respond to incidents based on risk in line with its community risk management plan. The service should do more to align with national operational guidance to improve a co-ordinated response to the most high-risk incidents. The service should make sure it has an effective system for learning from operational incidents and assure itself that all areas of the service can contribute to debriefs. 	
Area 5	Responding to major and multiagency incidents	Judgment: Adequate
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents The service can respond to major and multiagency incidents The service is working effectively with other fire and rescue services Incident commanders are demonstrating the JESIP principles The service works effectively with LRF partners The service keeps up to date with national learning 	

Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service should make sure it has an effective method to simultaneously share fire survival guidance information with multiple callers and that it has a dedicated communication link in place. • The service should make sure it has an overarching cross-border exercise strategy. The strategy should assure the service that exercise objectives are in line with community risk management plan risks and that learning is recorded, shared and actioned. 	
Area 6	Making best use of resources	Judgment: Requires Improvement
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service is taking steps to improve productivity • The service actively collaborates with others • Business continuity arrangements are robust • The service has sound financial management 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service needs to show a clear rationale for the allocation of resources between prevention, protection and response activities. This should reflect, and be consistent with, the risks and priorities set out in its community risk management plan. • The service should have effective measures in place to assure itself that its workforce is productive and that its time is used as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet the priorities in the community risk management plan. • The service should assure itself that all processes in place to support performance management are effective. 	
Area 7	Making the fire & rescue service affordable now and in the future	Judgment: Good
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service understands future financial challenges • The service has clear arrangements for the use of reserves • The service makes good use of fleet & estate • The service is taking steps to transform but needs to do more to improve efficiency • The service takes advantage of opportunities to secure external funding & generate income 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None identified 	

Area 8	Promoting the right values and culture	Judgment: Requires Improvement
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values & behaviours are established & culture continues to improve • There is good provision to support workforce wellbeing • The service has appropriate health & safety provision in place • There is a clear process to manage absence 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Cause of Concern) The Service cannot assure itself that its operational members of staff meet the minimum fitness requirements to perform their roles 	
Area 9	Getting the right people with the right skills	Judgment: Adequate
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service considers protected characteristics and reasonable adjustments to support learning • There is a positive culture of learning and development 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service should review its succession planning to make sure that it has effective arrangements in place to manage staff turnover while continuing to provide its core service to the public. • The service should assure itself that on-call firefighters are appropriately supported in their initial development. 	
Area 10	Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Judgment: Adequate
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service has improved its overall approach to equality impact assessments • The service has introduced more ways to seek staff feedback • The service has changed its approach and is taking robust steps to improve scrutiny of bullying, harassment and discrimination • The service has reviewed its workplace facilities with respect to EDI 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service should make sure it has effective grievance procedures. It should identify and put in place ways to improve staff confidence in those procedures. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service should have a consistent plan to promote positive action with under-represented groups and make sure staff understand the purpose and benefits of a diverse workforce. 	
Area 11	Managing performance and developing leaders	Judgment: Adequate
Main Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service effectively manages individuals' performance The service is improving its approach to fairness in promotion processes The service is adopting fire standards 	
Areas for Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service should ensure it has arrangements in place to identify, develop and support all high-potential staff across the organisation. 	

3 Cause of Concern

- 3.1 The Cause of Concern within Area 8, 'Promoting the right values and culture'; relates to the backlog of fitness tests caused by the intentional suspension of annual fitness testing during the COVID pandemic. When HMICFRS had conducted the inspection, the percentage of operational staff who had passed a fitness test within the last 12 months was quite low and an action plan was already in place to address the backlog before the anticipated publication of the report. At no time, was a firefighter allowed to ride a fire appliance without first having undertaken a fitness test. It was simply that some staff had not undertaken one within the previous 12 months and the service had not fully caught up with the backlog.
- 3.2 At the time of writing this report, 98.6% of operational staff had undertaken a fitness test within the past 12 months, with the only outstanding tests relating to individuals on long term sickness absence. A Service Fitness Advisor had recently been appointed to the vacant post and would commence in post later shortly. Further investment has been made in training station fitness advisors and the fitness and wellbeing strategy has been refreshed. HMICFRS are due to revisit the service for this specific area later this year and it is anticipated with the action already taken that HMICFRS will agree to discharge the cause of concern.
- 3.3 It should be noted that no other areas for improvement were identified within the 'promoting the right values and culture' area.

4 HMICFRS Action Plan

- 4.1 Appendix 2 sets out the draft HMICFRS Action Plan designed to address the areas for improvement identified within the latest inspection report. Members should note that officers were already aware of the majority issues identified by HMICFRS with many already captured within existing projects or workstreams including the latest Community Risk Management Plan.
- 4.2 The action plan will be managed as part of the Programme Management Office (PMO), with regular reporting into the chief fire officer and the leadership team. It is proposed that the Authority be kept informed of progress in delivering against the HMICFRS Action Plan via regular reporting to both the Executive Committee and full Authority.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that HMICFRS will next undertake another full service inspection in 2025.

5 Summary

- 5.1 The HMICFRS inspection report highlights many areas of good practice and recognises the improvements made since the last inspection. However, it is evident there is still more to do and members should be assured that officers were well aware of this and whilst some of the graded judgments were disappointing, the feedback from the inspection is accepted in full and officers will continue to strive to deliver the improvements needed be judged good or outstanding in all areas.
- 5.2 It should be also noted that this service was one of the first three services to be inspected in this latest round. Given the changes to the assessment criteria and grading system, it will be important to benchmark the judgments for this service against other services as their reports are published over the coming months.

Recommendations

That Members:

1. Note the findings of the HMICFRS as set out in their report, and;
2. To discuss and approve the draft HMICFRS action plan, and;
3. To receive regular updates on progress in delivering against the action plan.

ANDREW HOPKINSON
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