

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
Executive Committee
23 November 2023

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 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 Project Management Office 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 an update on the progress made against the Service HMICFRS Action Plan that addressed the Areas for Improvement identified by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in their 2023 service inspection report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Members:

1. Note and discuss the updated action plan.
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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 In addition to a narrative and graded judgement for each area HMICFRS issue recommendations when necessary in the form of 'Areas for Improvement' (AFI). The Service has produced an action plan setting out how the Service will address the Areas for Improvement set out in the 2023 report. A draft of this action plan has already been presented to members at the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 3 October 2023. This report and the attached action plan provides members with an update on the initial progress made against the action plan. The action plan is a live working document with action owners periodically providing updates. Each action is overseen by a member of the Principal Officer team and they will provide verbal updates to supplement the information in this report and in the action plan so that Members have the most up to date information possible.

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 Areas for Improvement are summarised in the table below:

Area	Area for Improvement
Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	None identified
Preventing Fire and other Risks	<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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
Protecting the public through fire regulation	<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). • The service should make sure it works with local businesses and other organisations to share information and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations.
Responding to fires and other emergencies	<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.
Responding to major and multi agency incidents	<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.

Making best use of resources	<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.
Making the fire & rescue service affordable now and in the future	<p>None identified</p>
Promoting the right values and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Areas for Improvement were given. However, the following Cause of Concern was given, 'The Service cannot assure itself that its operational members of staff meet the minimum fitness requirements to perform their roles'
Getting the right people with the right skills	<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.
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	<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. • 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.
Managing performance and developing leaders	<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 under '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 The Service has now caught up with its fitness testing and Service Fitness Advisor had recently been appointed. The fitness adviser has started to deliver against the Cause for Concern action plan which will provide assurance that fitness tests will continue to be conducted on a regular basis. 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 on the 29th and 30th November 2023 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 1 is the Service HMICFRS Action Plan with updates on progress that will be supplemented by verbal updates from the Principal Officer Team.
- 4.2 The action plan is being managed as part of the Project Management Office (PMO), with regular reporting into the Chief Fire Officer and the leadership team. The Authority will 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 This report along with Appendix 1 and the verbal updates provided to members demonstrates the progress made by the Service against the Areas for Improvement identified in the most recent HMICFRS report.

Recommendations

That Members:

1. Note and discuss the updated action plan.

ANDREW HOPKINSON
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER