



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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| MEETING | Overview and Audit Committee |
| DATE OF MEETING | 11 November 2020 |
| OFFICER | David Norris, Chief Operating Officer/ Deputy Chief Fire Officer |
| LEAD MEMBER | Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE |
| SUBJECT OF THE REPORT | Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Improvement Plan Update |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | <p>Following completion of the first inspection round of all 45 fire and rescue services, HMICFRS published the report into Buckinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service on 17 December 2019, as part of the final tranche of reports.</p> <p>An improvement plan has been developed addressing specifically the report recommendations and identified areas for improvement. At the meeting of the Authority on the 12 February 2020, it was agreed that progress against this plan will reported to this committee.</p> <p>Our Service Liaison Lead, Paul Kay, visited on the 10 March 2020 and indicated our approach to improvement, and addressing matters raised in the report, was sensible. On the 13 March 2020 Sir Tom Winsor (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services) wrote to all fire and rescue services (FRSs) confirming;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All inspection work is suspended (FRS performance would continue to be assessed based on available information) • Arrangements for secondees (GC Richard Priest is our seconded officer) <p>On the 20 March 2020, HMICFRS confirmed suspension of the HMICFRS survey of staff for FRSs in round 2, tranche 1 inspections. Whilst preparations have been made for the inspections to restart, we wait to be notified of the refreshed inspection programme.</p> <p>Following a commission by the Home Secretary in the Summer of 2020, HMICFRS announced a national review of fire and rescue service COVID-19</p> |

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| | <p>preparations. The three Thames Valley fire and rescue services are being inspected at a similar time, with this service receiving the inspection team commencing Monday 2 November 2020.</p> <p>We remain in regular contact with our Service Liaison Lead Paul Kay.</p> <p>Through the efforts of all our staff we continue make satisfactory progress against the items in the improvement plan, notwithstanding the current inspection uncertainty.</p> <p>CFO Thelwell is a member of the HMICFRS External Reference Group (ERG). Formed of representatives from Home Office, Local Government Association, Police Fire and Crime Commissioners, National Fire Chiefs Council and HMICFRS Portfolio team, the ERG is a mechanism through which HMICFRS test the effectiveness and impact of the inspection regime.</p> |
| ACTION | Noting. |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | That Members note current position regarding HMICFRS inspection programme, and the BFRS inspection improvement plan. |
| RISK MANAGEMENT | <p>There remain reputational corporate risks to the organisation should we have been judged as inadequate. The Service had already taken steps to mitigate this through having extensive internal and external audits of a number of areas of the Service. Notably, our operations have been subject to external independent assurance. Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing function has been independently audited by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and received a Gold Award.</p> |
| FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS | <p>FRSs are not funded for the burden of preparation for, resource implications of, HMICFRS inspections, nor is the Service charged. This round of inspections was funded directly by the Home Office. The Police are top sliced from their government grants to fund the HMICFRS inspections of Police Forces. There has been no indication yet that this might be a future funding model for the inspection of FRSs.</p> |
| LEGAL IMPLICATIONS | <p>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:</p> <p>'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</p> |

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| | <p>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]</p> <p>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'.</p> |
| <p>CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF DUTY TO COLLABORATE</p> | <p>Officers have developed our approach to inspection with our Thames Valley FRS partners, and with 'peer' support from Thames Valley and Gloucestershire Police Forces.</p> |
| <p>HEALTH AND SAFETY</p> | <p>There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications from this report.</p> |
| <p>EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY</p> | <p>There are no Equality and Diversity implications as part of the report.</p> |
| <p>USE OF RESOURCES</p> | <p>Following this Service's inspection, an improvement plan was presented to the Fire Authority and approved on 12 February 2020.</p> <p>We maintain a robust and enduring relationship with HMICFRS. Our ongoing approach to HMICFRS inspections is now being led by the Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience, as the designated Service Liaison Officer.</p> <p><u>Communication with stakeholders</u></p> <p>Engagement and briefings have regularly been carried out, and points of communication with Members and staff have been scheduled.</p> <p><u>The system of internal control</u></p> <p>Specific areas for service improvement have been identified through a number of workshops. These are being captured in relevant departmental plans and in the Operational Assurance Plan. These will be reported on in the usual way and ultimately to the Overview and Audit Committee.</p> <p><u>The medium-term financial strategy</u></p> <p>No direct implications for the strategy are identified at this time. There may be future implications depending on the long-term funding model for HMICFRS.</p> <p><u>The balance between spending and resources</u></p> <p>No new capability requirements have been identified as being required to prepare for, and support an inspection. The Corporate Planning Manager oversees preparation of evidence with support from the</p> |

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| | <p>Service’s Resilience and Business Continuity Manager. The Viper system has been designed to capture evidence on an ongoing basis. This allows managers to provide evidence as part of their usual reporting process. Performance Management Board provides further scrutiny of progress towards the delivery of the corporate plan.</p> <p>The ethos of the Service will be to continue to deliver the Service’s vision and strategic aims and gather the relevant evidence for the HMICFRS on a business as usual basis, rather than as an extra burden. While we develop an understanding of the inspection process and monitor the experience and effect on other Services we will revisit the resourcing needs. We have identified that preparations for aspects of the new Public Safety Plan (PSP) due in 2020 need to be closely aligned with preparations for the HMICFRS. This is reflected in the Public Safety Plan 2020-2025.</p> |
| <p>PROVENANCE SECTION & BACKGROUND PAPERS</p> | <p>Background</p> <p>Background Chapter four of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 established the legal framework for the inspection of English Fire and Rescue Services. Wales and Scotland have their own mechanisms for assuring Services. The Home Office subsequently awarded a contract to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and consequently they changed their name to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.</p> <p>Our preparation plans together with our response to HMICFRS’ consultation on the inspection methodology was presented to, and considered at, the 14 February 2018 Fire Authority meeting (see pages 131 – 162):</p> <p>https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/140218_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/</p> <p>14 November 2018 O & A preparation update (see pages 185-192):</p> <p>https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overview_and_audit_committee_agenda_and_reports_141118-min.pdf/</p> <p>13 February 2019 – Fire Authority preparation update (see pages 155-244):</p> <p>https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/130219_fire_authority_agenda.pdf/</p> <p>23 January 2020 - Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Findings Report: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/230120_item_7_hmicfrs_cover_report_23012020_appendix</p> |

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| | <p>-min.pdf/</p> <p>12 February 2020 - HMICFRS Inspection Findings Report – Action Plan: https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item12_hmicfrs_inspection_findings.pdf/</p> <p>22 July 2020- Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Improvement Plan Update https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/07/item-18-hmicfrs-bfrs-inspection-improvement-plan.pdf/</p> |
| APPENDICES | BFRS Inspection Improvement Plan |
| TIME REQUIRED | 15 minutes |
| REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT | <p>David Norris – Deputy Chief Fire Officer</p> <p>01296 744627</p> <p>dnorris@bucksfire.gov.uk</p> |



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| Report Reference | Inspection Pillar | HMICFRS inspection report item | Improvement Activity | R/A/G |
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| Page 11 | Prevention – Area for improvement | The service should evaluate its prevention work, so it understands the benefits better. | <p>An evaluation of the prevention activity commenced in July 2020. The evaluation uses a diagnostic methodology developed from academic research and with colleagues from Manchester University. The approach uses the Viable Systems Methodology, which has been adapted for the Services purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach.</p> <p>The evaluation has been separated into work-stream to enable a more focussed and pragmatic approach to the evaluation. The first phases include fire and wellness checks (linked to the item above, youth engagement and safeguarding.)</p> | |
| Page 11 | Prevention - Area for improvement | The service should understand the reasons for its reducing number of prevention visits and consider how it can better target those who are most at risk to fire. | <p>An increased shift to referral led prevention visits has been implemented from April 2019 to utilise service resources more effectively. Administration teams that are responsible for screening and booking in Fire and wellness visits, have previously been under established, affecting the ability to book in visits. A recruitment campaign has been undertaken and will soon see the three administration teams back to full establishment.</p> <p>Specific roles have been identified & funding has been agreed by the Authority to establish a number of new Prevention posts, which will help to oversee and deliver F & W visits, to address the volume of prevention visits in identified areas of increased risk, including to deliver a program of high-rise intervention and engagement</p> | |



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| | | | <p>with specialised housing. Intervention post incident, is being reinvigorated through a revised procedure supported by processes which enable this activity to be recorded in PRMS.</p> | |
| Page 14 | Protection - Area for improvement | The service should ensure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme. | <p>Several recruitment campaigns have been undertaken to fill posts that have become vacant following resignations and also to fill newly created apprentice fire safety roles, approved 2019/20 by the FA. Training is currently underway of these new staff members.</p> <p>This year 2020/21, the FA have approved four further fire safety posts, which will be utilised to increase capacity of existing inspecting officers, through the creation of lead teams in specialist areas, such as: Enforcement and prosecution, Specialised Housing and High Risk Residential Buildings (HRRB).</p> | |
| Page 14 | Protection - Area for improvement | The service should review its response to false alarms to ensure operational resources are used effectively (termed 'unwanted fire signals'). | An evaluation of the policy on Automatic Fire Alarms commenced in July 2020, as part of a collaborative project with Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire fire and rescue services. The evaluation uses a diagnostic methodology developed from academic research and with colleagues from Manchester University. The approach uses a methodology, which has been adapted for the Services purposes and forms the basis of the evaluative approach. | |
| Page 14 | Protection - Area for improvement | The service should ensure it works with local businesses and large organisations to share information | Capacity to deliver proactive engagement activity has been limited due to vacancies in an already small protection department. These posts have now been | |



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| | | and expectations on compliance with fire safety regulations. | <p>filled and training up to Level 4 Diploma is currently underway.</p> <p>The creation of additional posts will enable the increased capacity to focus work on targeted engagement of lower risk premises that may not be included within a refreshed Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP).</p> | |
| Page 16 | Response – Area for Improvement | The service should ensure it has a sustainable system to provide its operational response model. | <p>Following a review of the Resourcing Model, the Service has commenced work to improve further availability of appliances and disposition of staff. The introduction of new staff contracts has led to a better employment proposition for staff, which in turn provides resilience and opportunity.</p> <p>Total staffing numbers remain low, and the review has identified a range of areas in which efficiency can be improved. These efficiencies will be supported by the introduction of 20 additional firefighters to the establishment following a recent successful growth bids.</p> <p>The Service has clear plans for the recruitment and introduction of these new staff, which will have a significant and positive impact to appliance availability, and corresponding reduction in the use of Bank Shifts over the next two years.</p> | |
| Page 16 | Response – Area for Improvement | The service should improve the availability of its on-call fire engines to respond to incidents. | <p>A new revised approach to On-Call awareness sessions has been created and delivered online (virtual) on three occasions now. This has seen an increase in new applications.</p> <p>A new On-Call Contract was introduced in 2018 which</p> | |



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| | | | <p>created four options of availability. This ranged from immediate response through 20mins, 60mins and 3 hour response to mobilising.</p> <p>A new resource management system (FSR - Fire Service Rota) was introduced and the resilience availability options are being developed into the system. The strategic resourcing model requires only three appliances with up to 10 minute availability and this has been a focus on the stations that require priority On Call recruitment. All of this in line with the budgeted requirements for this crewing system</p> | |
| Page 23 | Efficiency – Recommendation | Ensure it has the capacity and capability to support its activity in its public safety plan; | <p>Officers adopted a zero-based budget approach when developing the budget proposal for 2020/21. This approach has been developed alongside the new Public Safety Plan and feedback from our recent inspection report from HMICFRS. Although our report noted that the inspectorate “would like to see improvements in the year ahead, but without increased funding, it is difficult to see where progress can be made” the zero-based budget approach has identified some key opportunities within the current budgetary constraints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the wholetime establishment by up to 20 firefighters in 2020/21, with the potential to increase by a further 10 in the following year (depending on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review) • Increasing the Protection Team by 4 FTEs and introducing a Team Leader role and two further FTEs into the Prevention Team. • Introducing a Head of Technology, Transformation and Programme Management | |



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| | | | Office (PMO) to manage the actions required following our inspection report. | |
| Page 23 | Efficiency – Recommendation | Consult with the people of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes on options to have the most effective and efficient response against the financial environment in which it operates. | <p>The 2020-2025 Public Safety Plan (PSP) was approved for public consultation at the Authority’s 18 September 2019 meeting. The consultation was open for an eight-week period from 23 September to 18 November 2019.</p> <p>Officers will proceed with the further development of the strategy proposals set out in the PSP having regard to the consultation feedback as they are progressed and to undertake further consultations with stakeholders potentially affected by any specific changes arising from their implementation.</p> | |
| Page 25 | Efficiency – Area for Improvement | The service should use sound financial management to ensure all additional costs such as pension liability are accounted for and that there is a contingency plan. | <p>The zero-based budgeting approach adopted for 2020/21 reviewed all costs to ensure that the right amount of money is being spent in the right places.</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2020/21 to 2024/25 shows two scenarios, one with the continuation of the pension grant funding and the other showing the impact if it were to cease after 2020/21.</p> <p>Following approval of the PSP a Financial Strategy has now been developed, which will be considered by the Executive Committee in November 2020 with a recommendation that it should be referred to the Fire Authority for approval in December 2020. This Strategy includes the development of alternative scenarios and contingency plans and further addresses the two</p> | |



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| | | | Efficiency recommendations shown above. | |
| Page 31 | People –Area for Improvement | The service should put in place an achievable succession plan, for the whole organisation. | Implementation of a pan-organisation succession plan which undertakes regular systematic and rigorous Strategic Workforce and Succession Planning processes, incorporating Public Safety requirements | |
| Page 33 | People – Area for Improvement | The service should plan to be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce which better reflects the community it serves. | Attendance at Career Fairs at Colleges, Schools, MK Stadium etc. Have a go days for Females, BAME groups. Review of the People Strategy portal to ensure the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) message is consistent. Workforce Reform project as part of the Thames Valley Collaboration agenda established. Re-established Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) group to work on initiatives to attract a more diverse workforce. | |
| Page 34 | People – Area for Improvement | The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. | Our talent management programme, continues to ensure replenished development pools at each level, resulting in staff with the required skills to fulfil the roles when needed. A pilot scheme to identify and develop future senior leaders was successfully employed to recruit an interim replacement for a Head of Service position. This pilot is being validated later this year with a senior management assessment and development centre. This approach will continue to futureproof the Service and minimise the potential impact on its workforce, ensuring the operational commitment can be maintained. | |