



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

MEETING	Overview and Audit Committee
DATE OF MEETING	17 March 2021
OFFICER	David Norris, Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience
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) Round 2 Inspections, and COVID-19 report.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The HMICFRS lead for Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), HMI Zoe Billingham, wrote to all FRS on the 27 November 2020. In this letter HMICFRS signalled the intention both to publish the COVID-19 inspection reports, and to re-commence round 2 inspections early in 2021.</p> <p>HMICFRS published COVID-19 inspection reports into all fire and rescue services on 22 January 2021. The report consisted of a letter sent to the Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer. HMICFRS judged that this Service 'responded well during the pandemic and provided additional support to its communities'.</p> <p>The BFRS COVID-19 report is at Annex 1.</p> <p>HMICFRS have configured the round 2 inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services, into three tranches; and this Service is in tranche 1. HMI Billingham wrote again on the 14 January to all fire and rescue services with a further update, including inspection format and engagement events.</p> <p>In preparation for round 2 inspections, a document request was received on the 18 January, along with a refreshed self-assessment template. HMICFRS will shortly open an independent reporting line and conduct a staff survey, as with the round 1 inspections.</p> <p>The decision to press ahead with the current inspection timetable was reviewed in mid-February, and our inspection is expected to take place around 24 May 2021. Preparations are well underway, although the final format of the inspections is yet to be confirmed.</p>

	<p>The inspection methodology has been reviewed within the COVID-19 restrictions, and will rely less on face-to-face interviews, focus groups and reality testing and more on virtual engagement. The questions set and judgment criteria remain largely unchanged from Round 1.</p> <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 be reported to this committee.</p> <p>Our Service Liaison Lead, Paul Kay, returned to Merseyside fire and rescue service in November 2020 and we await notification of a newly appointed Service Liaison Lead.</p> <p>Through the efforts of all our staff we continue make progress against the items in the improvement plan.</p> <p>On 16 February, HMICFRS wrote to all fire and rescues services requesting support by providing short-term secondees. This service continues to provide enduring support to HMICFRS with the secondment of a Group Commander (Service Liaison Lead).</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> <p>During a recent engagement event HMICFRS shared revised inspection themes to include an adjusted question; <i>How well does the FRS promote equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure fair and open opportunities for all?</i> The second principal change includes a focus on the effectiveness of the risk-based inspection programme.</p>
ACTION	Noting.
RECOMMENDATIONS	That Members note the current position regarding HMICFRS inspection programme, and preparations for BFRS’s round 2 inspection.
RISK MANAGEMENT	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.
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	FRSs are not funded for the burden of preparation for, resource implications of, HMICFRS inspections, nor is the Service charged. This round of inspections will be funded directly by the Home Office. The Police are top sliced from their government grants to fund their HMICFRS inspections. There has been no indication yet that this might be a future funding model for the inspection of FRSs.
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 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>
CONSISTENCY WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE	Officers have developed our approach to inspection with our Thames Valley FRS partners.
HEALTH AND SAFETY	There are no Health, Safety or Wellbeing implications from this report.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY	There are no Equality and Diversity implications as part of the report.
USE OF RESOURCES	<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</p>

	<p>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 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. The Performance Monitoring 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 identified that preparations for aspects of the new Public Safety Plan (PSP) due in 2020 needed to be closely aligned with preparations for the HMICFRS. This is now 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</p>

	<p>2018 Fire Authority meeting (see pages 131 – 162): 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): https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/overview_and_audit_committee_agenda_and_reports_14118-min.pdf/</p> <p>13 February 2019 – Fire Authority preparation update (see pages 155-244): 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-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> <p>11 November 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/2020/11/item-11-hmicfrs-improvement-plan.pdf/</p>
<p>APPENDICES</p>	<p>Annex 1 – BFRS COVID-19 inspection report January 2021</p> <p>Annex 2 – BFRS Inspection Improvement plan</p>
<p>TIME REQUIRED</p>	<p>15 minutes</p>
<p>REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT</p>	<p>David Norris – Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience</p> <p>01296 744627</p> <p>dnorris@bucksfire.gov.uk</p>