



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Fire Authority, 16 February 2022

Report title: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2021

Lead Member: Councillor Lesley Clarke OBE

Report sponsor: Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mick Osborne

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Action: Noting.

Recommendations:

That the BFRS HMICFRS round 2 inspection report (appendix 1) be noted.

Executive summary:

The second round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services is currently in progress with BFRS having been inspected as part of the tranche one schedule between 24 May 2021 and 9 July 2021.

The inspection methodology remains unchanged since the first round of inspections, covering three pillars (effectiveness, efficiency, and people) against each of which a judgement is given; outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. There is no overall judgement covering service performance.

HMICFRS published the latest BFRS report on 15 December 2021, as part of the first tranche of reports. The report is attached as appendix 1.

The Service was judged:

- Effectiveness- requires improvement
- Efficiency- requires improvement
- People- requires improvement

Depending upon the severity of their findings, HMICFRS may provide suggested areas for improvement, or causes of concern and recommendations. A recommendation will always accompany a cause of concern.

The latest report for this Service identifies 22 areas for improvement, and two causes of concern, accompanied by eight recommendations. Additionally, the previous cause of concern arising from the first round of inspections has been closed and HMICFRS has acknowledged the work undertaken to address key areas from the last report against a landscape of a global pandemic and over a short timeframe.

The report states ‘Since there was a gap of only 18 months between our first and latest inspections and much of the intervening time was overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it isn’t surprising that many of our findings are like those in our first report. The Service has worked hard to address the cause of concern from our 2019 inspection about whether its resources can meet its unique model of operational response. It has increased its capacity to meet its public safety plan and so this cause of concern has been closed.’

Source: [Buckinghamshire - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/buckinghamshire-hmicfrs/)

Although this inspection has revealed an improvement to our resourcing performance, at the time our resourcing was improved due to various lockdown periods when many staff were either furloughed from their primary employment or not necessarily taking their leave until later in the year. The reported improvement reflects the pandemic period, and the resilience of frontline services remains a key area of focus and priority for the Service over the short and medium term.

The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England requires fire and rescue services to give due regard to HMICFRS reports and recommendations. Where recommendations are made, the receiving Service is required to prepare, update and regularly publish an action plan detailing how such recommendations are actioned.

The first cause of concern from round two was issued to the Service by letter on 6 August 2021 (attached as appendix 2) and relates to Prevention activity, under the effectiveness pillar. The letter sets out a requirement that by 30 September 2021, the Service should have plans in place for the following recommendations:

1. An effective system to define the levels of risk in the community.
2. A revision of its Prevention strategy that clearly prioritises the people most at risk of fire and other emergencies, giving focus and direction to specialist teams.
3. The review of systems and processes for dealing with referrals from individuals and partner agencies. This is to make sure they are managed effectively and those referrals with highest identified risk are prioritised.

The Service provided a draft Prevention improvement plan to Her Majesty’s Inspector (HMI) Matt Parr before the September deadline, setting out how BFRS intend to address the issues identified. A routine HMICFRS action plan update, (including the three new recommendations) and an internal Prevention evaluation report (with additional internal recommendations) was also presented to the Overview and Audit Committee on 10 November 2021.

Officers have since met HMICFRS representatives to update progress against these recommendations and HMICFRS are planning to revisit the Service in Spring 2022, with an opportunity to close-off this cause of concern if sufficient progress is demonstrated. This was confirmed in a follow up letter to the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer on 12 January 2022 (attached as appendix 4)

The second cause of concern from round two was issued under the people pillar on 15 December 2021 along with the full report publication, and states that the Service hasn't made enough progress since the last inspection to improve equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Recommendation is that by 31 January 2022, the Service should:

1. give greater priority to how it increases awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation
2. make sure it has appropriate ways to engage with and seek feedback from all staff, including those from under-represented groups
3. make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographics and needs
4. ensure it has robust processes in place to undertake equality impact assessments, implement and review any actions required
5. be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce which better reflects the community it serves

Much of the work required to meet the recommendations is included within Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority's equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives for 2020-2025 which are a range of ambitious and progressive objectives. HMICFRS was provided with evidence of progress against these objectives, including the year-one update presented to the Fire Authority on 16 June 2021, and following a meeting on 7 January 2022 HMICFRS were assured that there has been a continued and significant trajectory of progress in this area, suitable evidence was provided and is being considered by the inspection team to demonstrate that the Service is continuing to deliver its equality, diversity and inclusion objectives therefore meeting the recommendations, continuing to take EDI matters seriously.

HMICFRS does not schedule revisits to close-off causes of concern issued under the people or efficiency pillars. Therefore, this cause of concern will remain in place until the next round of full inspections.

This Service has built an effective relationship with HMICFRS, which it intends to maintain. Matters raised in the report will be addressed through internal governance structures and reported to Members through the Overview and Audit Committee. Following publication of the most recent report, the Service's updated HMICFRS improvement plan will be presented to the 16 March Overview and Audit Committee, and thereafter to each Overview and Audit Committee meeting.

Furthermore, as per requirements set out in the report covering letter to the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer on 14 December 2021, (attached as appendix 3) a copy of the action plan will also be sent to HMI Matt Parr within 56 working days of the report publication; no later than 7 March 2021.

Further to the tranche one inspection report publications on 15 December 2022, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Tom Winsor also published

his annual assessment of fire and rescue services in England. This report is his third and final report to the Secretary of State.

Notably within his annual assessment, Sir Tom Winsor recognises BFRS to have made significant progress in increasing the numbers of fire safety inspectors, developing risk-based inspection programmes, and ensuring that protection activity is a main strategic priority. The report also recognises that BFRS has been “creative and flexible” in its approach to using on-call firefighters and by introducing a flexi-firefighter contract which enables staff to work more flexible shift patterns.

The annual assessment report can be accessed via the link: [State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021 \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/state-of-fire-and-rescue-the-annual-assessment-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2021/)

Financial implications:

The prioritisation of improvements to address the specific recommendations raised within the causes of concern may introduce additional financial implications, either through reprioritisation of other projects, or through new workstreams.

Consideration will be given to ensure associated costs, both direct and indirect, are fully understood and managed effectively.

FRSs are not funded for the preparation for, HMICFRS inspections, nor is the Service charged. The inspections are 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.

Risk management:

There remain reputational corporate risks to the organisation should we be 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, in addition to the HMICFRS inspections.

Legal implications:

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.’

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 implications:

No privacy or security implications have been identified that are directly associated with this report or its appendices. The respective strands of the improvement plan will undergo Data Protection Impact Screening and full impact assessments will be completed and reviewed where appropriate.

The report and its appendices are not protectively marked.

Duty to collaborate:

Each fire and rescue service is inspected individually. However, the latest report includes findings relating to the Service’s ability to collaborate effectively with partners.

Health and safety implications:

There are no health, safety or wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Environmental implications:

There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

The Service has been judged as ‘requires improvement’ in the people pillar, along with a cause of concern and five recommendations relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. All the findings from the HMICFRS round two inspection report will be fully considered and prioritised to ensure continual improvement is established and maintained.

Consultation and communication:

An internal and external communications plan was established in anticipation of the report publication period. Internal briefings and articles were held and published, and responses to the report findings were published externally. External media enquiries were managed through the Service’s communication team.

Background papers:

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/

12 February 2020 - HMICFRS Inspection Findings Report – Action Plan:

https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/03/120220_item12_hmicfrs_inspection_findings.pdf/

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/>

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/>

17 March 2021 - 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. <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2021/03/oa-item-13.pdf/>

16 June 2021 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives 2020–2025 – Year one update ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority, 16/06/2021 11:00 \(bucksfire.gov.uk\)](#)

21 July 2021 - 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/2021/07/oa-item-16-210721.pdf/>

10 November 2021 - 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/2021/10/oa-item-18-10-11-21.pdf/>

10 November 2021 - Prevention Evaluation - Phase one report 2021 <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2021/10/oa-item-17-17-10-21.pdf/>

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2021	Not protectively marked
2	HMICFRS - BFRS inspection follow up letter, 06 August 2021	Not protectively marked
3	HMICFRS Letter to T1 inspected Services - BUF	Not protectively marked
4	Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service assessment of progress – cause of concern	Not protectively marked