

Chief Fire Officers
Chairs of Fire Authorities
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners
Police and Crime Commissioners
Lead Fire Authority Members
Locally elected Mayors
Other FRS interested parties

28 November 2022

Dear colleague,

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (FRS) INSPECTION 2023-2025

I am writing as the SRO for FRS inspections to confirm our inspection programme for 2023-2025 and to update you on progress on our second round of fire and rescue (FRS) inspections.

Round 3

The inspection programme is reviewed at the end of each cycle to consider changes in the fire and rescue landscape and findings from our inspections. We also embedded evaluation into the approach. Thank you for sharing your views and supporting the development of the programme.

Our next round of inspection will report on the progress a service has made since the second round. Round 3 will also involve several changes from the previous round. These include:

a) Grading system

Activity will be focused on the evidence needed to demonstrate the 'characteristics of good' and we will move to a 5-tier grading system, with an additional grade of 'adequate'. This will provide a greater degree of information on where service improvements are needed, better reflect the performance of each service, and provide a common grading approach throughout our FRS and policing inspections.

The characteristics of good reflect those contained within our existing judgement criteria and can be found at Annex A. HMIs will use these characteristics when making their assessment. The categories of graded judgement in Round 3 will be:

- Outstanding – The FRS has substantially exceeded the characteristics of good performance.
- Good – The FRS has substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance.
- Adequate – The FRS has demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, but we have identified areas where the FRS should make improvements.
- Requires improvement – The FRS has demonstrated few, if any, of the characteristics of good performance, and we have identified a substantial number of areas where the FRS needs to make improvements; and
- Inadequate – We have causes for concern and have made recommendations to the FRS to address them.

b) Pillar judgements

We will remove our graded judgements at pillar level for effectiveness, efficiency and how a service looks after its people, to better focus service improvements on the 11 principal areas of inspection. The 11 questions within the pillars will still be graded.

c) Report publication

To report in a timelier fashion, we will report our inspection findings in smaller batches, rather than the larger tranches used for previous rounds of our inspections.

Notification process

This letter is the initial notification to all FRSs of the preliminary inspection schedule, subject to confirmation of the Programme and Framework by the Home Secretary. Annex B provides you with this indicative schedule. This running order may be subject to change, which could be due to several reasons, including changes in performance or risk. Services affected by this will be informed of any planned changes at the earliest opportunity.

If industrial action is taken, then the inspectorate will need to consider the extent to which it is appropriate or feasible to continue with inspection activity as currently planned. I will write to you separately to outline any changes in our arrangements in more detail should this happen. Should any amendment or delay become necessary, it will be kept under review, and we will let you know in good time.

Document Request and Self-assessment

Our document request and self-assessment template, along with full instructions and guidance will be issued to your service liaison officer (SLO) 6-weeks before inspection fieldwork is due to start. Whilst we recognise that a service may feel it necessary to send additional documents within this period and throughout the inspection window, we ask that you:

- keep this to a minimum.
 - make clear why the document is being sent e.g., why the document is necessary.
- and
- highlight the section(s) you wish to be reviewed.

Staff Survey

As with previous inspections, we will be conducting a staff survey for all staff currently working for English fire and rescue services. We rely on your help to promote this survey and I would be very grateful for anything you can do to encourage your staff to complete it and ensure we have a good representation of their views.

We will coordinate the launch of the staff survey with each inspection and will send all SLOs a separate email with further details, including wording that you may use on your intranet to advertise both the staff survey and our reporting line. I would be grateful if you could promote the survey within your service.

Independent Reporting Line

Our independent reporting line remains open. The purpose of this line is to provide all fire and rescue service staff with a mechanism to inform us of any issues or areas of good practice which they feel should be taken into consideration as part of a service's inspection. Please note that this is not a whistleblowing service, nor a route for complaints. It is simply a way in which we can gather additional evidence outside of fieldwork which, can be accessed through the HMICFRS website via this link: [Independent reporting line - HMICFRS \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs).

Round 2 revisits

We are currently carrying out revisit activity for some services who were given a cause – or causes – of concern in round 2 to consider what progress is being made. We also intend to publish several reports early in 2023:

- Inspection reports for those services in Tranche 3
- State of Fire 2023

inspections to take place.

In the meantime, if you need any further information, please contact either me or Alex Hill, FRS Portfolio Director via alex.hill@hmicfrs.gov.uk

Thank you for your continued support of our inspection programme.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RW', written in a cursive style.

HMI Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services