



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Fire Authority, 6 December 2023

Report title: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Action Plan

Lead Member: Cllr Simon Rouse, Chairman

Report sponsor: Interim Chief Fire Officer, Mick Osborne

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Action: Noting

Recommendations:

That the Authority note the BFRS HMICFRS 2023 Action Plan (Appendix 1)

Executive summary:

In July 2017, HMICFRS extended its remit to include inspections of England's fire and rescue service. They assess and report on the efficiency, effectiveness and people of the 44 fire and rescue services in England.

HMICFRS published the BFRS Round 3/2023-2025 report on 19 October 2023. The report can be found here: [BFRS 2023-2025 - HMICFRS](#)

This report sets out HMICFRS inspection findings for Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service following the inspection during May and June 2023.

The latest report for this Service identifies three causes of concern, accompanied by 10 recommendations, and 26 areas for improvement. The report was noted at the Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting on 24 October 2023.

Cause of Concern

The Service was issued with two causes of concern that continue from Round 2 and one new cause of concern, relating to Protection.

- 1) The first cause of concern from round three relates to Prevention activity.
The report states:
Some improvements in prevention have been made since our last inspection. The service has revised its prevention strategy, and this is giving its prevention and response teams better direction. But the service is still not adequately identifying and prioritising those most at risk from fire.

Within 28 days, the Service should review its action plan to make sure that:

- It has an effective system to define the levels of risk in the community;
- Its systems and processes for dealing with referrals from individuals and partner agencies effectively manage and prioritise those referrals with the highest identified risk.

2) The second cause of concern from round three relates to Protection activity.

The report states:

The service hasn't done enough since our last inspection to address its areas for improvement and provide clear direction to make sure that its teams can prioritise work according to risk.

Within 28 days, the Service should provide an action plan that:

- clearly defines its risk-based inspection programme, within a revised protection strategy, which is aligned to its next public safety plan;
- makes sure its increased number of staff complete a proportionate amount of activity to reduce risk and work to effective targets;
- assures the system to record fire safety activity is robust and well supported to enable prioritisation of highest risk;
- makes sure it has an effective quality assurance process so that staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

3) The third cause of concern relates to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The report states:

The service hasn't made enough progress since our last inspection to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. The service has done enough to complete one of our recommendations by reviewing its equality impact assessment process. But the other recommendations still require action to be taken or completed.

Within 28 days, the Service should review its action plan, detailing how it will:

- give greater priority to how it increases awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation;
- make sure that it has appropriate ways to engage with and seek feedback from all staff, including those from under-represented groups;
- make improvements to the way it collects equality data to better understand its workforce demographics and needs;
- be more ambitious in its efforts to attract a more diverse workforce that better reflects the community it serves.

As per requirements set out in the report covering letter to the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer on 17 October 2023, a copy of the action plan detailing how the Service will address the recommendations must be submitted to HMICFRS within 28 days of the report. Therefore, at its extraordinary meeting held on 24 October 2023 the Authority resolved that the Interim CFO be delegated to prepare and publish an Action Plan on behalf of the Authority in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice Chairman. It also resolved that the Overview and Audit Committee be delegated the monitoring of progress of delivery against the Action Plan.

Although much of the work to address the causes of concern is included in other plans including the Prevention Improvement plan and the Equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives for 2020-2025 the Service has built a new HMICFRS Action plan. (Appendix 1).

Following a review of the previous action plan, we have taken the following actions for the Round 3 action plan including:

- 1) The plan has prioritised the actions needed to meet the recommendations.
- 2) The associated actions are clear, measurable and achievable.
- 3) The plan has been built with feedback from Chairman, Vice Chairman, NFCC and other partners.

The action plan will be managed as part of the Portfolio Management Office (PMO), with regular reporting through internal governance structures. As stated in the recommendation at the Extraordinary Fire Authority meeting on 24 October 2023, the Authority will be kept informed of progress in delivering against the HMICFRS Action Plan via regular reporting to both the Overview and Audit Committee and full Authority. These updates will include progress on the recommendations, impact on KPI's and progress on Areas for Improvement.

A copy of the action plan was sent to HMICFRS within 28 days of the report publication; on the 15 November 2023.

The Service continues to have ongoing dialogue with HMICFRS at both a strategic and tactical level to ensure our progress is in line with their expectations.

In a letter received on 21 November 2023 (Appendix 2), HMICFRS informed the Service that it will now be entering the supportive Engage process. The Engage process provides additional scrutiny and support from the Inspectorate.

The focus of the engage phase is to assist the Service in finding ways to improve and resolve the identified causes of concern and provide a better service for the public, a process we are fully committed to.

The Service is already working hard to address the issues raised in its recent inspection and welcomes the support of HMICFRS in assisting with our improvement journey.

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.

Risk management:

There remains reputational corporate risks to the organisation. The Service continues to take 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. The internal audit plan for 23/24 can be found here: [Internal Audit Report – Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal](#)

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 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. The report states: “We were pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It continues to consider opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.”

Health and safety implications:

The HMICFRS report states:

- The service provides good well-being provisions to its workforce, but work-related stress is not being fully addressed
- The service has a positive health and safety culture

The areas for improvement relating to working hours and secondary contracts will feed into the health, safety and wellbeing group.

Environmental implications:

The HMICFRS report states:

“The service didn’t identify all the potential climate impacts and mitigation measures required in its 2020–2025 public safety plan. This is what it calls its integrated risk management plan. It has now recognised that it needs a different range of equipment to be ready to respond to this risk both now and in the future.”

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

The Service has been judged as ‘requires improvement’ in the area relating to ensuring fairness and promoting diversity, along with a cause of concern and four recommendations relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. All the findings from the HMICFRS round three inspection report have been fully considered and prioritised to ensure continual improvement is established and maintained.

The Authority’s equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives 2020-2025 – year 3 progress was presented to the Fire Authority on 14 June 2023.

Consultation and communication:

Specific areas identified for Service improvement are being captured in relevant plans and will be reported on in line with the recommendations.

Next steps -

- Report published on BFRS website

Background papers:

HMICFRS BFRS Home Page: [Buckinghamshire - His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/buckinghamshire/)

16 February 2022 – Fire Authority: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2021

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2022/02/fa-item-10-16022022.pdf/>

16 March 2022 – Overview and Audit Committee: 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/2022/03/oa-item-14-160322.pdf/>

20 January 2023 - State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2022

[State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2022 - HMICFRS](#)

24 October 2023 – Extraordinary Fire Authority: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) Inspection Report 2023

bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2023/10/extraordinary-fire-authority-meeting-24-october-2023-item-9-hmicfrs-inspection-report.pdf/

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	BFRS HMICFRS 2023 Action Plan	N/A
2	Letter from HMI Roy Wilsher Bucks Engage	N/A