

Sent by email:

mosborne@bucksfire.gov.uk

Mick Osborne
Chief Fire Officer
Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue

21 November 2023

Dear Mick,

INVITATION TO THE FIRE PERFORMANCE OVERSIGHT GROUP

Further to our recent conversation, I confirm that I have recently been considering concerns that I have with Buckinghamshire Fire Service's approach to several aspects of performance, specifically in prevention, protection and promoting fairness and diversity.

HMICFRS has introduced a fire monitoring process which has two phases – scan and engage. The scan phase uses data and information from a range of sources to flag poor or deteriorating performance and identify potential areas of concern. All services are at the 'scan' phase. If a cause of concern is identified in a service, HMIs consider progress made against the cause of concern, using the following key tests.

- (a) Does the service recognise the cause of concern and understand the implications?
- (b) What is the prospect that the service will succeed in managing, mitigating or eradicating the cause of concern (taking into account capacity and capability)?
- (c) Is the cause of concern likely to be short-lived or enduring?
- (d) The need for public protection to be attained by the service becoming more efficient and effective above the stated cause of concern;
- (e) Public confidence in the service; and
- (f) The public law requirement of fairness.

I applied these tests to the causes of concern (which I have outlined below) and following discussion at the internal HMICFRS Monitoring Group on 14 November 2023 with HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, my fellow HMIs and other HMICFRS staff, HM Chief Inspector has decided that Buckinghamshire Fire Service should now be moved to the 'engage' phase.

All services who are 'engaged' with HMICFRS are discussed at the Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG), chaired by Andy Cooke. Its members consist of the regional HMIs, HMICFRS's chief operating officer, senior HMICFRS analysts and representatives from the Home Office, LGA and NFCC. The focus of the engage phase is to assist the service in finding ways to improve and resolve the identified cause(s) of concern, where they have not been successful in doing so independently. At this stage, services are asked to carry out a comprehensive analysis and develop an improvement plan to set out how the cause of concern will be addressed.

The causes of concern for Buckinghamshire Fire Service are set out below:

- (i) 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.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) 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.

These are concerns that are facing the service. The lack of improvement, and in some cases, deterioration in performance, mean that there is work to be done to assure HMICFRS that appropriate leadership and governance arrangements are in place to drive the necessary activity, ensuring timely and sustainable improvement.

I would therefore like to invite you to attend a meeting of FPOG where you will be able to update the group on plans to improve the service's performance. HMICFRS's Monitoring Team will be in touch to confirm either 7 February 2024 or 5 March 2024 in London. Attendance in person is preferred.

I am sure that you and members of the service will work hard to address the issues raised in our recent inspection and I am committed to providing you and your service with support to assist with that work.

I will be monitoring the service closely over the coming months and will re-apply the key tests in due course. I will of course invite you to make representations to help inform any

future decision that I may make with a view to de-escalating the service to the scan phase of the monitoring process, when the causes of concern described in this letter have been addressed. I look forward to seeing you at the FPOG meeting.

If you would like to discuss this letter, or if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me. My team will be in touch with members of the Buckinghamshire Fire Service to discuss our programme of engagement and to agree milestones for improvement. I will be writing to Simon Rouse in similar terms to ensure we can collaboratively support improvements in the service.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'RW', is placed over a light grey dotted rectangular area.

Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

His Majesty's Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services