



# Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

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**Meeting and date:** Overview and Audit Committee, 13 March 2024

**Report title:** His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023-2025 Update

**Lead Member:** Councillor Simon Rouse, Chairman

**Report sponsor:** Chief Fire Officer, Louise Harrison

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**Action:** Noting

**Recommendations:**

That the Overview & Audit Committee note the HMICFRS 2023-2025 Update

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**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 the 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.

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

On 21 November 2023, 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.

### *Scrutiny and Support*

An internal HMICFRS Improvement Board has been set up and meeting on a regular basis. The Board is chaired by the Chief Fire Officer, attended by the relevant strategic leads and other subject matter experts including the Representative bodies when needed. The terms of reference for the HMICFRS Improvement board can be found in Appendix 1.

The Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Chairman attended Fire Performance Oversight Group on the 7 February to present the Service's progress against the action plan. It was a supportive session and the group were pleased to see how the Service had responded to the report and the initial progress we had made. The Service will remain in 'Engage' giving the Service time to ensure any changes are sustainable.

### *Action Plan*

The HMICFRS action plan focuses on the 3 Causes of Concern. As at the end of January 2024 the Service has made the following progress against the HMICFRS action plan:

|                      | <b>Prevention</b> | <b>Protection</b> | <b>EDI</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Complete             | 2                 | 3                 |            |
| In Progress/On Track | 5                 | 5                 | 14         |
| Risk to progress     |                   | 3                 | 2          |
| Not started          | 0                 | 1                 | 5          |

The detailed HMICFRS action plan can be seen in Appendix 2

Key Progress to highlight is:

#### **Prevention**

- A Referrals guidance document has been developed, approved and published, supported by a training package.
- The referrals backlog has been cleared and all referrals are now being processed inline with the Service's Referrals guidance.

#### **Protection**

- The Protection strategy 2023-2025 has been reviewed and updated with input from the NFCC. It was approved by the Fire Authority on 6 December 2023.
- The Protection Strategy is underpinned by a Risk Based Intervention programme. The programme is understood by all Protection staff to ensure they focus on Very High and High risk properties.

## EDI

- A new 360 feedback process has been introduced, designed around the NFCC Leadership framework. This has been rolled out to the Service's Senior Management team and next level Leadership group.
- To help us understand the barriers underrepresented groups experience, the Service held a Positive Engagement Have a Go event on 12 January 2024 attended by 13 candidates.
- The Service has kicked off a project to look at the Service's Vision and Values, initial workshops have been held with the Senior Management and Leadership teams to get their input.

### *Areas for Improvement*

Alongside the HMICFRS action plan officers have reviewed all the Areas for Improvement. These are being incorporated into the Service's 24/25 plan and relevant team plans.

The action plan is 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.

### *HMICFRS Values and Culture in fire and rescue services*

On Thursday 30 March 2023 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services'. The report has 9 themes supported by 35 recommendations and all Fire and Rescue Services, alongside the Government and national fire bodies are urged to implement them as a matter of urgency. Of the 35 recommendations, 20 are owned by the Chief Fire Officer. The Service's progress on these recommendations is:

| Status      | Number |
|-------------|--------|
| Complete    | 16     |
| In Progress | 4      |
| Not started | 0      |

The detailed HMICFRS Values and Culture update can be seen in Appendix 3.

## *Revisit*

The Service's revisit has been confirmed to take place week commencing 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024. The revisit will focus on the Round 3 causes of concern and include desktop reviews, interviews and reality testing.

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### **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.

### **Background papers:**

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

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/>

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](#)

28 April 2023 - Extraordinary Fire Authority Meeting: Values and Culture in fire and rescue services

[bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2023/04/bmkfa-extraordinary-meeting-28-april-2023-item-8-values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2023/04/bmkfa-extraordinary-meeting-28-april-2023-item-8-values-and-culture-in-fire-and-rescue-services.pdf/)

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

6 December 2023 – Fire Authority: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Action Plan

<https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2023/11/fire-authority-meeting-6-december-2023-item-15-hmicfrs-action-plan.pdf/>

8 February 2024 – Executive Committee: His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) 2023 Update

[bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2024/01/executive-committee-meeting-8-february-2024-item-12-his-majestys-inspectorate-of-constabulary-and-fire-and-rescue-services-hmicfrs-buckinghamshire-fire-and-rescue-service-bfrs-2023-update.pdf/](https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2024/01/executive-committee-meeting-8-february-2024-item-12-his-majestys-inspectorate-of-constabulary-and-fire-and-rescue-services-hmicfrs-buckinghamshire-fire-and-rescue-service-bfrs-2023-update.pdf/)

| <b>Appendix</b> | <b>Title</b>                                      | <b>Protective Marking</b> |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1               | BFRS HMICFRS Improvement Board Terms of Reference | N/A                       |
| 2               | HMICFRS Round 3 Action plan Jan 2024              | N/A                       |
| 3               | HMICFRS Values and Culture update                 | N/A                       |