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By email

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

07 July 2020

Dear colleague,

**FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE INSPECTIONS UPDATE**

I hope everyone is keeping well during these difficult times. I write to keep you updated with our plans.

*Recommencing our activity*

2. On 13 March 2020, Sir Thomas Winsor wrote to inform the police and fire sectors that we were suspending our inspection activity as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. He promised to let you know in good time before inspections recommenced. This letter serves to keep that promise and sets out our plans for the rest of the financial year. A separate letter is being sent to police forces.

*FRS response to Covid-19*

3. At the outset I would like to express my gratitude to your staff who are maintaining fire and rescue services during the Covid-19 outbreak. The current national emergency has necessitated a major shift in fire and rescue practice – ranging from delivering medicine and supplies, driving ambulances, providing staff to work in ambulance control rooms and transporting patients and the deceased. Many of you have told me about how you've changed not only what you do but also how you do it. This includes transforming IT provision, strong multi-agency relationships with partners and other new ways of working. I hope you can preserve the best of what you have created.

4. I know of the very real health threats faced by your staff, through their daily interaction with the public, which at times cannot be subject to any social distancing. The added issue of returning home to family and loved ones must only heighten levels of stress unique to this situation. I am humbled by the contributions you and your colleagues have made to the national response to the pandemic.

### *Supporting the Covid-19 response*

5. I am delighted that we have been able to support the request from services, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office and others for resources, skills and expertise to support their work in response to Covid-19. A number of our inspection team have been deployed to support these organisations and I am immensely proud of what they have achieved. Some have already returned to us and we look forward to welcoming back the remainder as soon as they can be returned. We have begun getting in touch with these organisations to start planning towards their eventual return in the coming weeks.

### *Round two FRS inspections*

6. We have had initial discussions with our External Reference Group about next steps. Our current working assumption is that round two will recommence in early 2021. We will provide you further information about this shortly.

### *Potential Covid-19 inspection*

7. In the meantime, we have discussed internally and with our External Reference and Technical Advisory groups whether - and how - we could support the sector by carrying out an inspection on the response to Covid-19. Feedback has been positive and so we will approach the Home Secretary for permission to undertake such an inspection under section 28A(3) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. If the Home Secretary commissions us to do this work, we expect to inspect every service and determine:

- (a) how the fire sector is responding to the Covid-19 outbreak;
- (b) what is working well and what is being learned;
- (c) how the sector is dealing with the problems it faces; and
- (d) what changes are likely or appropriate for the fire and rescue sector as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

8. While this is all dependent on agreement from the Home Secretary, if she is supportive, we will undertake this inspection virtually, with pilots beginning in August and service inspections shortly thereafter. Reports – with narrative rather than graded judgments – should be published by the end of the calendar year. We will engage with services individually to arrange convenient times to gather evidence and Sir Thomas Winsor will write to you providing the commission once it has been agreed by the Home Secretary.

9. I recognise you may have questions about this and will want further information. Should we receive a commission from the Home Secretary, I will hold a virtual chiefs and chairs event to give you more information and answer your questions. We will also host a similar event with service liaison officers. We will be in touch to organise the event should we receive the green light. While we will try to give you as much notice as possible, depending on timings this may not be possible. If you are not available, by all means delegate the invitation to a colleague so that your service is represented.

### *Round 1 causes of concern*

10. In addition to Covid-19 inspections, we want to follow-up with each of the fourteen services who were given a cause – or causes – of concern in round 1 to consider what progress is being made. Round 2 will be delayed by approximately twelve months following the suspension for Covid-19 and so we don't want to wait over three years in some services to follow up on this work.

We will inform each of these services shortly what this follow-up work will entail, but we expect to begin this activity later this calendar year in advance of round 2 recommencing early in 2021.

#### *Data*

11. We intend to shortly restart our data collection and request data for the period October 2019 to March 2020 - this is data that we would have originally asked for in April had inspection activity not been paused. We will also request data for the period from April 2020 to June 2020. To assist services, this request will mirror the previous one. Should the Home Secretary commission us to do a Covid-19 inspection, we will ask for additional data to contribute to the inspection. We have already discussed this with our Technical Advisory Group and will keep the request as small as possible. We will provide further information to services on this new collection when we are in a position to do so.

#### *State of Fire & Rescue 2020*

12. As previously mentioned, the chief inspector is under a legal obligation to publish an annual assessment on the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England. We are therefore planning to publish our second State of Fire and Rescue report in January. I wanted to let you know that like he did last year, Sir Thomas Winsor will shortly be writing to the sector for any contributions to this assessment.

#### *HMI Phil Gormley*

13. You may be aware that HMI Gormley has tendered his resignation and will be leaving us shortly. Interim arrangements are needed until his successor is appointed. Responsibility for his fire and rescue services (and police forces) has been shared amongst the other HMIs, and affected services are being informed who their new HMI will be. I am sure the respective HMI will be in contact with the chiefs of their new services shortly.

14. Since my last letter, Laura Gibb has returned following her maternity leave. I am very grateful to Alex Hill for his support and leadership of the fire portfolio team while covering Laura's absence. I know Laura has met many of you since her return. If you require any further information about the FRS inspection programme, please do not hesitate to contact her ([lauraalice.gibb@hmicfrs.gov.uk](mailto:lauraalice.gibb@hmicfrs.gov.uk)).

15. Finally, thank you for the work that you and your teams continue to do to meet this historic challenge. I wish you and your staff all the very best for the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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