

Fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework commencing January 2023

**An inspection programme and
framework prepared under section
28A of the Fire and Rescue Services
Act 2004**

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His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses and reports on the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services (FRSs) in the public interest.

We ask the questions that we believe the public requires to have answered, and publish our findings, conclusions and recommendations in an accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence. We provide authoritative information to allow the public to compare the performance of their police force or FRS against others and to determine whether performance has improved or deteriorated over time. Our recommendations are designed to bring about improvements in the service provided to the public.

Foreword

All safety-critical, essential public services benefit from the scrutiny of inspection and reporting. Our inspections are valuable to both the public and the fire and rescue sector. Since our first round of inspections in 2018, we have seen evidence of how, in many respects, services have improved. Staff have also told us that they have seen worthwhile changes for the better.

In February 2021, we resumed our second full cycle of all FRS inspections in England, known as our 'Round 2' inspections. These inspections were postponed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

We found that, while many services that had received causes of concern had taken meaningful steps to improve and act on our recommendations, some services had failed to act sufficiently on the areas for improvement we issued in Round 1.

In order to maintain the focus of the sector on the areas we have identified for improvement, we will continue to inspect the effectiveness and efficiency of FRSs and how well they look after their people.

However, to state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed, and how FRSs should achieve it, we will move to a common grading approach throughout our FRS and police inspections. We will expand our four-tier grading to five and introduce a new judgment of 'adequate'. We will also remove our pillar judgments to bring greater focus on the specific areas where improvements are needed.

In May 2022, we published the draft inspection programme and framework for consultation. This inspection programme and framework takes account of the observations provided throughout the public consultation, which ran from 9 May to 6 June 2022.

We received 46 responses, compared to 54 responses for the Round 2 consultation. These have helped us to establish the priorities for inspection of FRSs in 2023/24. We have also used the responses to adjust our inspection methodology (which is now published in its final form). We are very grateful to all those who took the time to respond to the consultation.

Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Introduction

This document provides details of our inspection programme and framework for all 44 FRSs in England, commencing January 2023.

In our inspections, we focus on the operational service the FRS provides to the public. We carry out a rounded assessment of every FRS and cover its effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. We also assess:

- the operational service provided to the public (including prevention, protection and response);
- the efficiency of the service (how well it provides value for money, allocates resources to match risk and collaborates with other emergency services); and
- how well the service looks after its people (how well it promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for the workforce, and develops leadership and service capability).

Our assessments are designed to allow the public to see how each FRS is performing, including changes over time and in relation to the performance of other services. The resulting assessments include graded judgments of performance.

Our inspection programme and framework has the approval of the Home Secretary, which is required before inspectors act in accordance with it.

State of Fire and Rescue

HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services for England is required to report each year on the carrying out of inspections, including an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the fire and rescue authorities in England. The third assessment, [State of Fire and Rescue 2021](#), was published in December 2021. We may also report on particular themes (through spotlight reports) emerging from our inspections if we consider it appropriate.

An overview of HMICFRS's inspection programme for fire and rescue services commencing 2023

Round 3 inspection programme

In our next round of inspections, known as 'Round 3', we will continue to inspect how effective and efficient FRSs are at carrying out their principal functions of:

- fire safety;
- firefighting; and
- responding to road traffic collisions and other emergencies.

Since 2018, every service has been inspected at least twice. There is now a benchmark against which we can monitor progress.

We would like to see more progress from FRSs in the areas we have identified for improvement. In Round 3, we will therefore be assessing the progress made by FRSs since our last round of inspections, and we will comment on their progress in our reports.

Round 3 will start in early 2023; we will inspect all 44 FRSs in England over a two-year period. We will use a similar methodology to our Round 2 inspections.

The principal questions that the FRS inspection programme is designed to answer are set out below, along with the corresponding questions that will be assessed by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs).

Principal question	Assessment question
How effective is the FRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	<p>How well does the FRS understand the risk of fire and other emergencies?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?</p> <p>How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?</p>
How efficient is the FRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	<p>How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk?</p> <p>How well is the FRS securing an affordable way of managing the risk of fire and other risks now and in the future?</p>
How well does the FRS look after its people?	<p>How well does the FRS service promote its values and culture?</p> <p>How well trained and skilled are FRS staff?</p> <p>How well does the FRS ensure fairness and diversity?</p> <p>How well does the FRS develop leadership and capability?</p>

Our assessment of effectiveness will continue to consider how well each FRS is performing its principal functions of preventing fires from happening, making sure the public is kept safe through the regulation of fire safety and responding to emergency incidents. We will continue to provide the public with clarity on how well FRSs are prepared to respond to major incidents with other FRSs and agencies.

Our assessment of efficiency makes a clear distinction between the way each FRS uses its resources to manage its current risks and how well it is securing an affordable way of managing its risks in the future. During Round 3, we will place a greater focus on assessing how productive a service is and what productivity improvements it has made since our last inspection. We will also continue to improve how we inspect value for money.

Our assessment of how each FRS looks after its people will remain focused on leadership at all levels of the organisation. While we will continue to look closely at training, values and culture, there will be a particular emphasis on diversity and how services are trying to overcome inequalities.

Fire and rescue authorities

Fire and rescue authorities must have regard to the [*Fire and rescue national framework for England*](#) in carrying out their functions.

The *Fire and rescue national framework for England* states that each fire and rescue authority must produce an integrated risk management plan that identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community.

Our inspectors will consider the content of each fire and rescue authority's integrated risk management plan and how this translates into the operational practice of its FRS. The plan will be used as a source of information about:

- the assessment of risk and vulnerability in respect of each service;
- the factors that affect considerations of public safety; and
- how each FRS will use prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate the risk to communities.

The [*Fire Standards Board*](#) has been set up to oversee the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional standards for FRSs in England. All fire and rescue authorities must implement approved standards, and we will take account of their implementation as part of our inspection.

Inspecting governance arrangements

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, created powers to inspect fire and rescue authorities.

Our first two rounds of inspections of the FRS sector have focused on the service provided to the public and not on the accountability and scrutiny structures that govern FRSs. We will continue this approach as part of our Round 3 inspection programme.

In Round 3, HMICFRS inspectors will meet representatives from fire and rescue authorities, police, fire and crime commissioners, locally elected mayors and, in London, the Mayor's Office. But we won't routinely include an assessment of corporate governance as part of the FRS inspection programme.

The Home Secretary may also at any time require us to carry out an inspection of a fire and rescue authority in England, all fire and rescue authorities in England, or all fire and rescue authorities in England of a particular type.

Other inspections

The Home Secretary can commission thematic inspections on individual matters if needed, outside the approved inspection programme and framework. In 2020, the Home Secretary commissioned us to review how the London Fire Brigade was progressing with its plan to implement the recommendations from the [*Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report*](#). We were also commissioned to inspect how each service had responded to the first phase of the pandemic; we published [our findings](#) in January 2021. We will publish any commissions received from the Home Secretary on our website.

We can carry out thematic inspections, which consist of in-depth assessments of themes or issues. These inspections establish areas of strong and weak practice in FRSs and may result in recommendations that are relevant to the FRS as a whole.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has determined that in Round 3 we will continue to inspect the effectiveness and efficiency of FRSs and how well they look after their people. HMCI doesn't intend to carry out thematic inspections as part of the forthcoming round of inspections set out in this programme and framework, but these may be conducted if we consider it necessary. We will engage with the sector and the Home Office through, for example, our external reference group should a decision be taken to begin thematic inspections. When we establish the need to conduct a thematic inspection, we will consult the Home Secretary.

Inspectorate capacity

This inspection programme and framework is predicated on there being a full complement of inspectors of constabulary and supporting staff, all working full-time on the affairs of the inspectorate during the inspection years in question. While the inspectorate has received notification of its funding for 2022/23, funding for subsequent years remains indicative. The breadth, number and extent of inspections beyond 2022/23 will be dependent upon the financial allocation provided to the inspectorate.

HMICFRS's inspection framework

Inspection methodology for FRSs

In our inspections, we gather information to inform our assessments using a range of methods, including:

- analysis of documents and data;
- reviews of operational incidents;
- surveys of the public and of FRSs' staff;
- interviews;
- focus groups; and
- observations of fire and rescue practice.

Graded judgments

In our Round 3 inspections, we measure FRSs against the 'characteristics of good performance'. These characteristics describe the levels of performance needed for an FRS to achieve a grade of 'good'. These characteristics allow our inspectors to make consistent assessments across all services. They also mean that services can see what they are being graded against.

The characteristics are examples to help inspectors to determine appropriate judgments. They aren't intended to prescribe specific standards or to be exhaustive lists of how we expect services to perform.

The characteristics have regard to national standards and take account of operational guidance and evidence from research, but we aren't limited to these. We are entitled to establish our own view of efficiency and effectiveness. We will take into account new guidance, standards and research as they become available.

In previous rounds of inspections, our graded judgments for FRSs were divided into four categories. We found that these graded judgments created strong incentives to improve for FRSs receiving 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' grades. However, those FRSs that had received 'good' or 'outstanding' grades weren't incentivised in the same way and 'good' covered too broad a range.

In Round 3, we will use the same grading categories as in our policing inspections – meaning that we will expand our Round 1 and Round 2 four-category grading to five. This means we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and how to achieve it, as well as incentivising all FRSs to do so.

The categories of graded judgment 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.

In our previous rounds of inspections, we assessed and gave graded judgments for the three principal questions of the inspection methodology (efficiency, effectiveness and people) and for 11 diagnostic questions. We will now assess and give graded judgments only for the 11 diagnostic questions. This better serves the aims of promoting improvements in fire and rescue and highlighting where an FRS is doing well and where it needs to improve.

In our reports, we will comment on progress made by the service since its last inspection. But these changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades we will give in our Round 3 inspections with those in previous rounds of inspection.

Accelerated causes of concern

Previously, when we have identified a public safety cause of concern as part of an FRS inspection, we have alerted the relevant service immediately so that remedial action can be taken. Subsequently, we have reported that cause of concern and the associated recommendations more publicly in the full service report. This can be some time after we initially uncovered the concern.

In our Round 3 inspections, we will continue to immediately alert services to public safety causes of concern as we discover them. But we will also publish the cause of concern and recommendations as soon as practicable thereafter. The full evidence base and background to the cause of concern will be covered in the service's next report, along with an update on the progress made against it.

We don't publish all causes of concern this way – only those immediately related to public safety. Other causes of concern (for example, those that relate to the organisation and running of the service) are published in the service's next report as we have previously done.

Follow-up from previous inspections

We will conduct a number of follow-up activities throughout the year. They will include formal revisits and tracking the progress that services have made against our recommendations. We will report on the progress each service has made since the previous inspection.

Monitoring, assurance and analysis

HMICFRS's monitoring process

HMIs routinely monitor the performance of all FRSs in England in order to ensure that:

- any emerging problems with individual services with respect to effectiveness, efficiency or how well they look after their people are spotted quickly, and that chief fire officers and fire and rescue authorities (or equivalent bodies) are aware of those problems and are taking corrective action; and
- if problems with a service's efficiency, effectiveness or how well it looks after its people are substantial, and there is a low prospect of them being resolved, those problems are raised formally with the service or the authority so that it can respond.

The monitoring process is linked to FRS inspection. Information from the FRS assessments feeds into the monitoring process, and vice versa. HMIs are guided by, but not limited to, examining the principal questions from the FRS assessments when monitoring services. All of this information contributes to the HMI's regular assessments of each service. Additionally, data analysis and routine information gathering undertaken by HMICFRS staff form part of the monitoring process.

We review the approach to monitoring frequently to ensure that it evolves in line with changes to FRSs in England.

Routine monitoring identifies apparent issues for closer scrutiny. Some of these will be outside the control of the service or the authority, or will already have been tackled, but some may be indicators of systemic or management failings in the service. The decision on whether to follow up on any concerns with the service and authority rests with the [HMI who leads on our relationship with that service area](#).

There are two stages in our monitoring process:

1. Scan: The default phase of monitoring, the scanning phase uses data and information from a range of sources to highlight poor or deteriorating performance and identify potential areas of concern. Regular monitoring will be undertaken and a summary monitoring report produced that will be discussed with HMIs and, if possible areas of concern are found, at the regular monitoring group meetings.
2. Engage: If a service is not responding to a cause of concern, or if it is not succeeding in managing, mitigating or eradicating the cause of concern, it is

probable it will be moved to the Engage phase. The service may receive support from external organisations such as the National Fire Chiefs Council and Local Government Association.

Advisory and reference groups

This inspection programme and framework has been developed with FRSs and authorities. It has been designed to promote improvements across FRSs.

The FRS external reference group includes representatives from FRSs, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, the Local Government Association and police, fire and crime commissioners who have specific skills and experience in the areas that will be inspected. We continue to use their knowledge and advice to maintain a sound methodology for inspections.

Our fire technical advisory group considers how to develop appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to support the inspection methodology. The members of this group include representatives of the National Fire Chiefs Council co-ordinating committees, the Home Office, representative bodies, FRSs and others.

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