HMICFRS STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2019

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

For Information

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform Members of the State of Fire and Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England Report attached at Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members note the contents of the State of Fire and Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England Report attached at Appendix 1.

2.2 Members note the Chief Fire Officer will ensure that all areas for development highlighted within the Report, as set out in Section 5, are captured within the Authority's Internal Operating Plan for 2020/21 onwards.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As part of its reform agenda, the Government has introduced an independent inspection regime for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England – and the fire and rescue service they oversee. The inspections are delivered by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The Chief Fire and Rescue Inspector and inspectors of fire and rescue authorities in England have powers of inspection given to them by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

3.2 Under section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services must report to the Secretary of State on the State of Fire and Rescue Services in England.

3.3 The Report attached as Appendix 1, has been produced by Sir Thomas Winsor WS the current Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services. It contains his assessment of the sector in England, based on the inspections carried out between June 2018 and August 2019. It was published in Jan 2020.

4. HMICFRS STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RECUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2019

4.1 The HMICFRS State of Fire and Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2019 Report draws on findings from inspections in the 45 fire and rescue services in England, to provide an overall view of the state of the fire and rescue sector; the report is set out in three parts.

5. PART ONE

5.1 Part one of the Report contains Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services' assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England. It draws on the inspections carried out between June 2018 and August 2019, as well as the findings and reports of other organisations, and other information and analysis available to him.

5.2 The Chief Inspector acknowledges that the strong commitment from firefighters to protect the communities they serve. He states that the Sector's greatest strength is in how it responds to emergencies, with a demonstration of a number of impressive life-saving prevention initiatives and a strong health and safety culture. The Sector is admired by the public.

5.3 However, the Chief Inspector states that the fire and rescue sector needs some significant reform. He states that:

- 'there is lack of consensus over what the role of a firefighter is and what the role of a fire and rescue is responsible for' (Pages 24 and 25)

- 'discussions between the sector, employers and, more recently, central government having been going on for several years. Everyone, not least fire and rescue employees, would benefit from these being satisfactorily resolved' (Page 26)

- 'Trade Union influence is not always in the best public interest'. (Page 27 and 28)

- 'Chief Fire Officers should have operational independence to run their services effectively and efficiently to meet the priorities and commitments in their integrated risk management plans' (Page 29)

5.4 Other specific areas highlighted by HMICFRS on Pages 31-44) relate to:

- strength of the response service
- lack of evaluation of whether an incident was resolved efficiently and effectively
- unavailability of fire engines
- insufficient resources allocated to protection
- failure to meet risk-based inspection programmes

- the unacceptable variations between services as to what constitutes high-risk premises and how frequently such premises should be inspected
- limited capacity nationally to support and promote sector-wide change
- lack of implementation of National Operational Guidance by some services
- ineffectiveness of the 'on-call' duty system
- toxic culture of some fire and rescue services
- watch cultures which are contrary to service values
- lack of robust performance and talent management processes
- lack of diversity across the sector
- rapidly expanding range of wellbeing support
- degree of financial disparity which is having a detrimental effect on the service provision of some FRSs
- too many inefficient paper based systems
- insufficient collaboration
- poor evaluation of collaboration
- better use of technology

5.5 HMICFRS makes four specific recommendations that reflect his expectations for the sector to create a modern fire and rescue services fit for the future. These are set out below with comments from the Chief Fire Officer.

Recommendation 1 (Page 45)

5.6 By June 2020, the Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of a) fire and rescue services and b) those who work in them.

Comment

The Brigade will influence and support the work of the Home Office by participating in any relevant consultations.

Recommendation 2 (Page 46)

5.7 By June 2020, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'Grey book'.

Comment

The Brigade will influence and support the work of the Home Office through the Chief's work on the National Fire Chief's Council Programme Board and by participating in any relevant consultations.

Recommendation 3 (Page 48)

5.8 By September 2020, the Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the Fire and Rescue Framework for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the chief fire officer.

Comment
Demarcation of roles and responsibilities between the CFA and its Brigade is currently set out in the Authority's Scheme of Delegation which is reviewed each year. Any amendments to either the National Framework document or legislation will need to be reflected appropriately in these current arrangements.

Recommendation 4 (Page49)

5.9 By December 2020 the National Fire Chief's Council, with the Local Government Association should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered as part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.

Comment
The Authority and its Brigade have in place Code of Conduct for Elected Members and Employees respectively. The Brigade has a clear set of organisational values (PRIDE) and a Value and Behaviours Framework in place. Any new Code of Ethic will need to be incorporated into our existing Framework.

6. PART TWO

6.1 Part 2 of the Report, Pages 53-133 provides an HMICFRS overview of the gradings and findings from the first round of inspections across all 45 fire and rescue services.

7. PART THREE

7.1 Part three of the Report, Pages 136-139, sets out the full list of HMICFRS fire and rescue reports and other inspection publications for the period covered by this report.

8. NEXT STEPS

8.1 The Chief Fire Officer will ensure that all areas for development highlighted within the Report as set out in Section 5 above are captured within the Authority's Internal Operating Plan for 2020/21 onwards.

8.2 In line with current arrangements the Chief Fire Officer will continue to provide the Executive Committee with update reports as and when details of the next round of Inspection are clarified.

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