

HMICFRS STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2021



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 2021 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 2021 Report attached at Appendix 1
- the Chief Fire Officer will review the Report and ensure that any new areas for development are captured within the Authority's corporate planning process and documented in the Internal Operating Plan for 2022/23 onwards
- that, in line with current arrangements, the Chief Fire Officer will continue to provide the Executive Committee with update reports in regard to the next round of Inspection
- further reports will be provided as necessary

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.

4. **HMICFRS STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2021**

4.1 HMICFRS State of Fire and Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2021 Report, attached as Appendix 1, has been produced by Sir Thomas Winsor the current Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services. The report is set out in three parts.

4.2 Part 1 contains his assessment of the state of fire and rescue services in England based upon the fire and rescue service inspection activity carried out since the first round of inspections in 2018. The report draws on findings from the 13 inspections of fire and rescue services in England, between February and August 2021, to provide an overall view of the state of the fire and rescue sector.

These 13 inspections formed the first tranche of our current second round of inspections. The second inspection round resumed in February 2021, having been postponed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

4.3 Part 2 is an overview of the gradings and findings from the 13 inspections between February and August 2021.

4.4 Part 3 contains the full list of our fire and rescue reports in the period covered by this report.

Headlines from the Report

4.5 The Chief Inspector recognised that the pandemic and remaining public health restrictions had continued to place strain on public services and on the HMICFRS inspection programme. However, the Chief Inspector highlighted that in addition to the 518,263 incidents¹ attended by fire and rescue services in England in the year ending 31 March 2021, firefighters and other service staff continue to go above and beyond their roles to help their communities. The Fire and Rescue Services' pandemic response continues to be GOOD.

4.6 The Report recognises that **progress has been made in some areas.**

4.7 The Inspectorate were encouraged to see many services that had received causes of concern in our first round of inspections have taken steps to improve and act on the recommendations. The Report highlights that:

- many services have done more to prioritise fire protection; this was an area the Inspectorate criticised heavily in the first round of inspections. This focus on protection has intensified alongside the national response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (Phase 1);
- the sector is well prepared when it comes to responding to routine and major emergency incidents, and this has been the case throughout the pandemic;

¹ Of all incidents attended by fire and rescue services, fires accounted for 29 percent, fire false alarms 42 percent, and non-fire incidents 29 percent.

- most services were better at promoting a positive professional culture: 84 percent of respondents to the staff survey stated that they are treated with dignity and respect at work (which is 3 percent more than in the first round of inspections), and that staff wellbeing and health and safety were clearly being prioritised, with 91 percent of respondents telling the Inspectorate they were satisfied their personal safety and welfare were being treated seriously by their service (7 percent more than in Round 1).

4.8 The Report also highlighted that **more change is urgently required**.

4.9 The Report highlights that:

- Too many services have failed to act sufficiently, if at all, on the 'areas for improvement' issued in Round 1 of the inspections. Of the 184 areas for improvement across the 13 services in Round 1, one third remain open.
- While all 10 existing causes of concern from Round 1 have now been closed, the Inspectorate issued 11 new causes of concern for the 13 services inspected between February and August 2021. Seven of these relate to effectiveness and four relate to people.
- Too many services aren't taking enough action on prevention. This is despite the range of areas for improvement in respect of prevention that was issued in our first round of inspections. In many cases, the Inspectorate found a clear disconnection between what is in public-facing service plans and what is actually being done by public-facing staff.
- Good intentions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion generally haven't resulted in tangible improvements, and many services don't clearly define what they are working towards. There remains a woeful lack of representation of both women and people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. In the most recent public perceptions survey, 78 percent of 1,981 respondents said that fire and rescue services being representative of local populations was either fairly or very important. The sector must do much more in this respect and must learn from experiences in other sectors. Not only should it recruit staff from a diverse range of backgrounds, but it should also foster environments and cultures that will keep those people in their jobs and develop them professionally
- The responsibility to make these changes does not lie solely with chief fire officers and their senior teams; political leaders must also take action to resolve both new and longstanding problems.

4.10 The Chief Inspector reiterated the previously made **six recommendations** for national reform of the fire service, which he said remains necessary and **needs to be brought in faster**. The national recommendations are:

- the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services, to remove any ambiguity; **(not yet implemented)**
- the sector should remove unjustifiable variation, including in how they define risk; **(not yet implemented)**

- the sector should review and reform how effectively pay and conditions are determined; **(not yet implemented)**
- the Home Office should invest chief fire officers with operational independence, whether through primary legislation or in some other manner; **(not yet implemented)**
- there should be a code of ethics; and
- the Home Office should ensure that the sector has sufficient capacity and capability to bring about change.

5. **2021 INSPECTIONS**

- 5.1 The 13 service inspections gave a clear picture of the sector's current state and the progress it has made since the first round of inspections, and the inspections of how services responded to the pandemic.
- 5.2 The Chief Inspector made changes to the inspection methodology, including:
- a greater focus on diversity, and in particular race and how services are trying to overcome inequalities;
 - considering the productivity of services;
 - assessing how services are identifying and planning against known risks to their communities; and
 - more case file reviews, particularly in relation to protection and the role carried out by services in fire safety regulations.
- 5.3 The report highlighted that some services make improvements this year, with both local successes and moderate improvements in some but not all areas. There have also been the continuing problems faced by services and the sector, with some services receiving lower grades on their effectiveness, efficiency and people assessments (see Appendix 2). In particular, so far in this round of inspections we have seen more causes of concern relating to the effectiveness of services.
- 5.4 The headlines from the 13 inspections are:
- Services are making good progress on protection
 - Services need to do more on prevention
 - Inconsistent funding and governance arrangements persist
 - Some services do not allocate resources appropriately
 - The on-call firefighter model needs more attention to make sure that it works now and in the future
 - Good intentions to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion are not always successful

6. **SIR THOMAS WINSOR' CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

- 6.1 "The fire and rescue services continue to be an enormous asset to our communities. In many respects, the sector's response to the pandemic has been exemplary. Services have had to adapt many aspects of how they operate as a result of the new requirements and restrictions brought in to reduce the transmission of the virus.

- 6.2 The dedication and expertise of the fire and rescue services have provided an invaluable source of security. But the sector faces significant obstacles that are hampering its progress. These include: rigid national terms and conditions that stop services from fully exploiting their resources to meet local needs; out-of-date working practices; a lack of diversity; and, in some respects, weaknesses in leadership development.
- 6.3 While improvements have been made at local and national levels, including in recent reforms, much more needs to be done. Policy-makers and legislators need to raise the priority of fire reform considerably. The service, its staff and the public deserve no less”.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 The Chief Fire Officer will review the Report and ensure the findings from the 13 inspections of fire and rescue services in England, between February and August 2021, are built into the final preparations for the inspection of Cleveland Fire Authority scheduled for May 2022.
- 7.2 The Chief Fire Officer will review the Report and ensure that any new areas for development are captured within the Authority’s corporate planning process and document any prioritised actions within the Internal Operating Plan for 2022/23 onwards.
- 7.3 In line with current arrangements the Chief Fire Officer will continue to provide the Executive Committee with update reports as necessary.

IAN HAYTON
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

KAREN WINTER
ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES