

HMICFRS STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN ENGLAND 2020



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 2020 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 2020 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 Internal Operating Plan for 2021/22 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 2020

- 4.1 HMICFRS State of Fire and Rescue: Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020 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 inspections that have been carried out this year. These include the Home Secretary's commissions to assess how fire and rescue services are responding to the pandemic, and how the London Fire Brigade is responding to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations. They also include the work to consider how services are responding to the causes of concern given in Round 1 of the fire and rescue service inspections and findings and reports of other organisations, as well as other information and analysis available.
- 4.3 Part 2 is an overview of the findings from the inspection activity completed during 2020.
- 4.4 Part 3 sets out the full list of fire and rescue publications in the period covered by the Report.

Headlines from the Report

- 4.5 The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the practical implications of outdated and inflexible working arrangements in the fire service, reinforcing the need for national reform. Fire services rose to the challenge of the pandemic, with many staff taking on additional activities, however, fire leaders were not always able to quickly deploy fire-fighters to support the pandemic response – for example the COVID-19 national vaccination programme – because fire National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union failed to reach a national agreement. Sir Thomas questioned why such an agreement was even necessary during a public health emergency, given there were strong safety protections in place for all fire and rescue staff.
- 4.6 The Pandemic has highlighted that there are too many barriers preventing fire-fighters from fully supporting their local communities when they need it most, which fire-fighters find frustrating and that national reform of the fire service is needed now more than ever.
- 4.7 The Chief Inspector has previously made six recommendations for national reform of the fire service, which he said remains necessary and needs to accelerate.
- 4.8 Changes to improve fire and building safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire are necessary and welcome.
- 4.9 Progress has been made on introducing a code of ethics to address toxic working cultures found in a few fire services.

4.10 Sir Thomas re-emphasised his recommendations for fire service reform, including:

- Improving a woeful lack of race and gender diversity. Only five percent of fire and rescue staff are from a minority ethnic group, compared to 14.6 percent of the total English population;
- The government should change the law to give chief fire officers operational independence, which if put in place before the pandemic, could have helped them deploy firefighters more quickly to do tasks beyond their normal duties;
- The way the government allocates funding to the fire sector should be reviewed, as fire services are worried about their long-term financial future once the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are known.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 The Chief Fire Officer will review the Report and ensure that any new areas for development are captured within the Authority's Internal Operating Plan for 2021/22 onwards.
- 5.2 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 are clarified.
- 5.3 The Chief Fire Officer will provide further reports as necessary.

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