



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

UPDATE ON HIS MAJESTY'S INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY AND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 26 July 2024

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with an overview of the State of Fire and Rescue 2023 report published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and to provide an update on Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's most recent inspection.

Recommendations:

That Members note the content of this report.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is, by Royal appointment, the inspectorate body for fire and rescue services in England.
- 1.2 Each year, His Majesty's Chief Inspector publishes a 'State of Fire and Rescue, Annual Assessment', which summarises the findings from the year's inspections of the sector.
- 1.3 On 9 May 2024, Andy Cooke QPM DL, published his second report to the Secretary of State under Section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, based on the inspection reports published by HMICFRS between 20 January 2023 and 31 March 2024.
- 1.4 In March 2023, HMICFRS commenced the third full round of inspections, aiming to inspect all 44 Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) within an 18 month period. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) inspection took place between 23 February 2024 and 19 April 2024.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The HMICFRS State of Fire report is an annual report which consolidates learning and findings from all inspections conducted by HMICFRS in FRSs in England within the review period. The report can be accessed here: [State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/state-of-fire-and-rescue-the-annual-assessment-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2023)
- 2.2 The purpose of the State of Fire report is to support and drive continuous improvement through the identification of common areas of improvement and good practice.
- 2.3 This year's report summarises His Majesty's Chief Inspector's reflections on the fire and rescue sector's progress since the first inspections in 2018, findings from the values and culture in fire and rescue services spotlight report (March 2023) and initial findings from the thematic inspection on staff misconduct.
- 2.4 The report also considers information gathered from HMICFRS events such as the annual Chiefs and Chairs event where Chief Fire Officers and Chairs of fire and rescue authorities meet to discuss specific topics.
- 2.5 The report is split into two chapters; chapter one sets out the systemic challenges facing the fire and rescue sector and chapter two sets out the interim findings from the Round 3 inspections, identifying some key themes.

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

- 2.6 There are four main points highlighted within this section:
- At a national level, the fire and rescue sector has made some good progress, but the Government must press ahead with reforms;
 - Values, culture and the management of misconduct needs to 'urgently improve' across the sector;
 - Fire and rescue service leaders need to take a strategic approach to service improvements; and
 - HMICFRS requires additional powers to continue to make communities safer.
- 2.7 As Members will be aware, in 2019 HMICFRS made six national recommendations covering some of the structural aspects of the fire and rescue sector. The report highlights that three of these have been completed with the outstanding three recommendations – determining roles of FRS and their staff; reviewing and reforming structures for determining pay and conditions; and giving Chief Fire Officers operational independence – being a matter for the Government to resolve. The Inspectorate notes slow progress being made against these three areas and therefore highlights the need for sector reform.
- 2.8 The report covers in detail the need for the sector to improve its culture, values and misconduct management, citing that despite the focus on this area from HMICFRS, instances of inappropriate behaviour were still commonplace.
- 2.9 Following the second round of inspections, based on the Inspectorate's findings on values, culture, and fairness and diversity, causes of concern, inadequate grades and areas for improvement were issued to a significant number of fire services. Members can be assured that the Strategic Leadership Team continues to place the highest priority on ensuring an appropriate and inclusive culture exists at every level within the organisation, and that cultural considerations are embedded within decision making processes.
- 2.10 The report states that FRS leaders need to take a more strategic approach to service improvements, and that across the sector this has resulted in ineffective decision making and duplicated work.
- 2.11 The report states that HMICFRS needs more powers so it can continue to make communities safer, and that these powers should be in line with those legislative requirements that govern police forces' response to their inspections. Additionally, the Inspectorate has highlighted that FRSs should be able to request commissioned inspections in the same way as police forces do to fulfil their duty to deliver efficient and effective services to their communities.

INTERIM FINDINGS FROM ROUND 3 INSPECTIONS

- 2.12 As Members will be aware, HMICFRS has introduced an 'adequate' grade which sits in between 'requires improvement' and 'good', to deliver a more balanced reflection of the appropriate grade. In the third round of inspections, grades have fallen in some Services in relation to:
- Protection;
 - Multi-agency incidents;
 - Values and culture; and
 - Getting the right people with the right skills.
- 2.13 Of the 15 Services inspected, seven Services have 12 causes of concern in place, of which eight are new and four have been carried over from Round 2. Members will be aware that NFRS has had no causes of concern issued and the four areas of improvement issued following the last inspection were formally signed off at the Fire Authority meeting on 23 February 2024.
- 2.14 Workplace culture is once again highlighted as an issue for the sector, with HMICFRS stating that whilst progress is being made, some Services are struggling to make improvements. NFRS's biennial staff survey concluded on 14 July and a breakdown of the results and follow up actions will be brought back to the Human Resources Committee, which will provide Members with insight into NFRS's culture and the progress the Service is achieving in this area.
- 2.15 The report states that a lack of diversity is affecting public and staff trust in fire and rescue services and this has resulted in a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grade being issued to six of the 15 Services inspected so far in Round 3. The Inspectorate identifies appropriate equality impact assessments (EIAs) as a solution to this; as Members will know, NFRS's recently refreshed EIA process will ensure the Service considers the needs of its staff and communities, meets its legislative obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and delivers more effective services.
- 2.16 Employee wellbeing remains a priority for HMICFRS, with a lack of oversight of secondary employment, in particular those individuals who are dual contractors being of particular concern.
- 2.17 The report highlights the problems some Services are having with maintaining an effective On-call duty system, citing the difficulties in the recruitment, retention and training for On-call personnel. Members will be aware of the support the On-Call Support Team (OCST) provides to On-call firefighters throughout the Service which, along with the dedication of NFRS On-call personnel, has resulted in On-call appliances being available for 86.5% of the time in 2023/24; one of the highest levels in the sector.
- 2.18 Only four out of the 15 Services inspected in Round 3 have electronic systems in place to manage information when dealing with incidents in high

rise buildings, and there has been inconsistent training delivered. Members should be assured that NFRS has implemented an electronic system for managing this information in collaboration with Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service within Joint Fire Control and trained relevant personnel in its operation.

- 2.19 Protection activities are highlighted within the report as being inconsistently applied across the sector with unsuitable quality assurance processes and a failure to meet audit targets common areas discovered by the Inspectorate. In addition, difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably experienced protection staff are also highlighted. The Inspectorate raises more effective partnership working and better engagement with businesses as potential methods to mitigate the issues discussed.
- 2.20 Members should be aware of the collaborative work undertaken by NFRS Fire Protection staff through the Joint Audit and Inspection Team (JAIT) with Nottingham City Council, which inspects multi-occupied, higher risk residential premises. NFRS Fire Protection staff are also able to access appropriate training and development to ensure their continuing competence and development in role.

NFRS INSPECTION

- 2.21 The NFRS inspection took place between 23 February 2024 and 19 April 2024.
- 2.22 Whilst the full report from NFRS's most recent inspection will not be published until late Summer 2024, initial high-level feedback has been given to the Chief Fire Officer which explicitly outlined the positive manner in which the inspectors were greeted whilst undertaking the inspection, and the high levels of engagement they found from all Service personnel.
- 2.23 When the inspection findings are published, a report will be brought back to Members to allow for scrutiny of the results and the resulting action plan.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report.

5. EQUALITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because of the nature of this report.
- 5.2 As detailed in Paragraph 2.7, one of the six national recommendations that HMICFRS has assessed as complete is the implementation of the core code of ethics across the sector. Members will be aware of how the core code of ethics has been fully implemented across NFRS. This supports the Service's ambition to be an outstanding organisation through the recruitment and retention of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental or sustainability implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Government Act 1999 places a statutory duty on the Service to 'secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised'.
- 7.2 The Police and Crime Act (2017) Chapter 4 Section 11 outlines that the English inspectors must inspect, and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of, fire and rescue authorities in England.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the content of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER