

Fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework 2020/21

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Foreword

In July 2017, HMICFRS began a programme of inspection into the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England. This was the first time in over a decade that the sector had been subject to independent inspection. We have just finished the first full inspection of every service and our final tranche of reports was published in December 2019.

We have learned much about the fire sector over the past two years. We welcome the response to our work from services and authorities, who have generally viewed inspection as a positive development.

Our principal approach at this stage is to evolve and improve our existing methodology, rather than reinvent it. Our inspection process worked. We inspected every service, giving clear judgments on three pillars and 11 questions covering effectiveness, efficiency and people. We have therefore chosen to continue to focus on these main themes:

- how effective each fire and rescue service is at preventing, protecting against and responding to incidents, and whether the service properly understands where future risks lie;
- whether the service provides value for money; and
- the ability of the service to train staff, embrace diversity and develop a positive working culture to reflect the level of public and professional interest.

As part of our inspection reports, we will keep providing graded judgments, which will help the public to see how well their fire and rescue services are performing. We will also report on what improvements each service has made since our last inspection.

In October 2019, 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 21 October 2019 to 29 November 2019.

We received 54 responses, compared to 65 responses for the Round 1 consultation. These have helped us to establish the priorities for inspection of fire and rescue services in 2020/21. 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.

(Sgd.) Thomas P Winsor

**Sir Thomas Winsor WS
HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services**

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

Her 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 in the public interest.

In respect of the fire and rescue service, we ask the questions which 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 fire and rescue service 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.

Introduction

This document provides details of HMICFRS's inspection programme and framework for fire and rescue services for 2020/21. It concerns the second full cycle of inspection of all the fire and rescue services in England.

The fire and rescue services inspection programme enables HMICFRS to draw together evidence from inspections of all 45 fire and rescue services in England. Our focus is on the operational service provided to the public. Our inspection is a rounded assessment of every fire and rescue service and covers the effectiveness and efficiency of each service and how it looks after its people. It includes an assessment of:

- 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).

HMICFRS's assessments are designed to enable the public to see how each fire and rescue service is performing, including changes over time and in relation to the performance of other services. The resulting assessments include graded judgments of performance.

This inspection programme and framework has the approval of the Home Secretary, which is required before inspectors act in accordance with it.¹

¹ Section 28A(2), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

An overview of HMICFRS’s inspection programme for fire and rescue services 2020/21

Fire and rescue services inspection

As in our first round of inspections, HMICFRS will inspect how effective and efficient fire and rescue services are at carrying out their principal functions: fire safety, firefighting and responding to road traffic collisions and other emergencies.² We will inspect all 45 fire and rescue services in England, beginning in 2020.

The principal questions which the fire and rescue services inspection programme is designed to answer are set out below, along with the corresponding inspection focus.

Principal question

Inspection focus

How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service understands its current and future risks, works to prevent fires and other risks, protects the public through the regulation of fire safety, and responds to fires and other emergencies, including major and multi-agency incidents.

How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?

How well the fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage risk, and secures an affordable way of providing its service, now and in the future.

How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

How well the fire and rescue service promotes its values and culture, trains its staff and ensures that they have the necessary skills, ensures fairness and diversity for its workforce, and develops leaders.

The more detailed FRS inspection methodology is provided on our website [insert link].

² Sections 6-9, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

Our assessment of **effectiveness** will continue to consider how well each fire and rescue service is performing its principal functions of preventing fires happening, ensuring the public is kept safe through the regulation of fire safety, and responding to emergency incidents. During the second cycle of inspections we will provide the public with more clarity on how well fire and rescue services are prepared to respond to major incidents with other fire services and agencies.

Our assessment of **efficiency** will now make a clearer distinction between the way each fire and rescue service uses its resources to manage its current risks, and how well it is securing an affordable way of managing its risks in the future. New questions have been added which focus on whether a service can demonstrate what savings it has made, the effect of these on its operational performance, and whether its use of reserves is sustainable.

Our assessment of how each fire and rescue service looks after its **people** will remain focused on the leadership at all levels in the organisation, including training, diversity, values and culture. The question sets have been altered slightly to reflect an additional focus on the behaviours within the workforce, and to also consider individuals' career pathways.

Each inspection will result in a rounded assessment and graded judgments for each fire and rescue service.

We will publish a report on each fire and rescue service inspection with our judgments. We may also report on particular themes emerging from our inspections if we consider it appropriate.

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.³ His first assessment was published in January 2020.

Inspecting governance arrangements

Our first round of inspections of the fire and rescue sector focused on the service provided to the public, rather than on the accountability and scrutiny structures that govern fire and rescue services. We will continue this approach as part of the 2020/21 inspection programme.

During inspections, 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 will not routinely include an assessment of corporate governance as part of the fire and rescue service inspection programme.

³ Section 28B, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, created powers to inspect fire and rescue authorities.⁴ If, during a fire and rescue service inspection, we consider that we may need to conduct a corporate governance inspection of a fire authority, we will assess the need to do so against an appropriate set of indicators.

The Home Secretary may also, at any time, require HMICFRS 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.⁵

We are still developing an approach to corporate governance inspections and will consult on this shortly.

National thematic inspections

We can undertake thematic inspections by way of in-depth assessments of specific themes or issues. These inspections may identify areas of strong and weak practice in specific fire and rescue services, and may result in recommendations that are relevant to the fire and rescue service as a whole.

We haven't yet undertaken a thematic inspection on a specific fire and rescue service matter. Potential themes may be identified through our monitoring processes or as a result of a commission from the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary can commission thematic inspections on individual matters if needed. HMICFRS is not funded to carry out thematic inspections as part of the 2020/21 inspection programme and framework, but we may undertake one if we consider it necessary. We will engage with the sector through our External Reference Group should a decision be taken to undertake one.

⁴ Section 11, [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#).

⁵ Section 28A(3), [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#).

HMICFRS's inspection framework

Inspection framework for fire and rescue services

The fire and rescue service inspection 2020/21 will be the second round of inspection of all 45 fire and rescue services in England. Following this round of full inspections, we may move to a risk-based inspection programme, which will be developed and consulted on at a later date.

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

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

Graded judgments

Fire and rescue services will continue to be assessed and given graded judgments for the three principal pillars of the inspection methodology (efficiency, effectiveness and people), as well as for eleven diagnostic questions within the pillars. The categories of graded judgment are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Good is based on policy, practice or performance that meets pre-defined grading criteria that are informed by relevant national operational guidance and standards. If the policy, practice or performance exceeds what is expected for good, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of **outstanding**.

If there are shortcomings in the policy, practice or performance of a fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of **requires improvement**. If there are serious critical failings of policy, practice or performance of a fire and rescue service, then consideration will be given to a graded judgment of **inadequate**.

We will set out in our reports the progress made by the fire and rescue service since its last inspection.

Fire and rescue service authorities' priorities

Fire and rescue authorities must have regard to the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) in carrying out their functions.⁶ The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England⁷ 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 fire and rescue service. The plan will be used as a source of information about the assessment of risk and vulnerability in respect of each service, the factors which affect considerations of public safety, and how each fire and rescue service will use prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate the risk to communities.

A newly created Fire Standards Board has been established as part of the Home Office's reform programme for fire and rescue services. When designing future inspections, we will take account of all existing and new professional standards for fire and rescue services, including national operational guidance.

⁶ Section 21(7), Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

⁷ The Framework is prepared by the Home Secretary. It must set out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions; it may contain guidance to fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of any of their functions; and it may contain any other matter relating to fire and rescue authorities or their functions as the Home Secretary considers appropriate. (Section 21, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.)

Methodology, monitoring, assurance and analysis

Advisory and reference groups

We have developed this inspection programme and framework with fire and rescue services and authorities. It has been designed to promote improvements across fire and rescue services.

We have established a fire and rescue service External Reference Group. Its members include those who have specific skills and experience in the areas that will be inspected such as representatives from fire and rescue services, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, the Local Government Association and police, fire and crime commissioners. We continue to use their knowledge and advice to establish 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 the Fire Technical Advisory Group include representatives of the National Fire Chiefs Council co-ordinating committees, the Home Office, representative bodies, fire and rescue services and others.

HMICFRS's monitoring process

HM inspectors of fire and rescue services (HMIs) will regularly monitor all services in order to promote improvements. If an HMI identifies a cause of concern about practice in a particular fire and rescue service, it will be raised with the relevant chief fire officer/chief executive/commissioner and the fire and rescue authority, so that they can take action.

Follow-up from previous inspections

We conduct a number of follow-up activities throughout the year. They 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.