

Fire and rescue services inspection programme and framework commencing June 2025

**An inspection programme and
framework prepared under section
28A of the Fire and Rescue Services
Act 2004**

Contents

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services	1
Foreword	2
Introduction	4
An overview of our inspection programme for fire and rescue services commencing 2025	5
Our next round of inspections: FRS 2025/27	5
Fire and rescue authorities	7
Inspecting governance arrangements	7
Other inspections	8
Inspectorate capacity	8
Our FRS inspection framework	9
Inspection methodology for FRSs	9
Graded judgments	9
Accelerated causes of concern	10
Follow up from previous inspections	10
Monitoring, assurance and analysis	11
Our monitoring process	11
Advisory and reference groups	12

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

His 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 (FRSs) in the public interest.

We ask the questions that 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 police force or FRS 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.

Foreword

In December 2022, we published the programme and framework for our current round of inspections of all 44 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England. In that document, we set out changes to our approach from the previous round. These were intended to focus more precisely on the improvements that FRSs should make and how they should achieve them. These changes included expanding our four-tier grading to five, removing our pillar judgments, and issuing an [accelerated cause of concern](#) when we identify a public safety risk.

The round of inspections carried out under that programme and framework is nearing completion. We will complete the final evidence-gathering in spring 2025 and we will publish our final reports in summer 2025. We expect that the changes we made to our inspection programme will help us to highlight where services still need to improve, as well as where they have made progress.

In our current 2023–25 inspection round, we have found that the performance of some services has deteriorated. Services that require improvement often don't have strong and effective senior leadership, and their staff don't have the skills they need to manage change. We also identified many services tackling issues relating to their culture and how they manage misconduct. We covered these in our spotlight report '[Values and culture in fire and rescue services](#)' and our [thematic inspection 'Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services'](#). This has led to us bringing more services than ever before into our enhanced monitoring process, which is known as Engage.

However, we have also seen the beginnings of improvements within this round of inspections. FRSs have raised awareness among their staff of the expected standards of behaviour, and have created strategies and action plans, including implementing the [Core Code of Ethics](#). When combined with strong leadership, these changes are having a positive impact.

This is the context in which we have designed the programme and framework for our next round of inspections of all 44 FRSs in England, which will run from 2025 to 2027. This inspection round will retain the successful methodological changes we made for the current round. But we are adjusting our focus to incorporate aspects of performance that we haven't previously evaluated in as much depth, including:

- the impact of [Fire and Rescue Authorities' \(FRAs'\)](#) governance, oversight and scrutiny of their FRSs;

- leadership at all levels in FRSs; and
- FRSs' work to improve community resilience.

We have also identified opportunities to inspect more efficiently by reducing duplication and combining some inspection questions, and to better show the context within which FRSs are operating.

With this programme and framework, we will continue our important work of examining the effectiveness and efficiency of FRSs and how well they look after their people, identifying how they can improve, and communicating our findings to the services and the public.



Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Introduction

This document provides details of our inspection programme and framework for all 44 FRSs in England that will begin in June 2025.

In our inspections, we focus on the operational service the FRS provides to the public. We carry out a rounded assessment of every FRS and evaluate its effectiveness and efficiency and how it looks after its people. We also assess:

- 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).

We design our assessments to allow the public to see how each FRS is performing, including changes over time and in relation to the performance of other services. We make graded judgments of performance as part of our assessments.

Our inspection programme and framework has the approval of the Home Secretary, which is required before we implement it (in line with section 28A(2) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004).

State of Fire and Rescue

HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services for England is required to report each year on the inspections we have carried out, including a summary assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the FRAs in England. His second assessment, '[State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023](#)', was published in May 2024.

We may also publish spotlight reports that contain a summary of findings or themes that emerge from our inspections if we consider it appropriate.

An overview of our inspection programme for fire and rescue services commencing 2025

Our next round of inspections: FRS 2025/27

In our next round of inspections, known as FRS 2025/27, we will continue to inspect how effective and efficient FRSs are at carrying out their principal functions of:

- fire safety;
- firefighting; and
- responding to road traffic collisions and other emergencies.

Since 2018, every service has been inspected at least three times. Unfortunately, in our current round of inspections we have seen some services' grades fall in relation to protection, multi-agency incidents, values and culture, and getting the people with the right skills. The performance of some services has greatly deteriorated since our earlier inspections.

In services that require improvement, we often found that they don't have enough capacity to manage change and their staff often don't have the skills they need to manage change throughout the service. This can be a result of:

- insufficient oversight or organisational planning;
- recruitment challenges;
- unequal access to funding; or
- insufficient support and training for existing staff.

FRS 2025/27 will begin in mid-2025; we will inspect all 44 FRSs in England over a two-year period. We will use a similar methodology to our previous inspections, but we will make some adjustments. This will allow us to better examine areas of national importance, the areas where performance is deteriorating and the underlying causes of this deterioration that we identified in our current round.

The principal questions that our FRS inspection programme is designed to answer are set out below, along with the corresponding questions that we will also assess.

Principal question	Assessment question
How effective is the FRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	<p>How well does the FRS understand and manage the risk of fire and other emergencies?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at preventing fires and other risks?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at protecting the public through the regulation of fire safety?</p> <p>How effective is the FRS at responding to fires and other emergencies?</p> <p>How well prepared is the FRS to respond to major and multi-agency incidents?</p>
How efficient is the FRS at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	How well does the FRS use resources to manage risk, making sure it is efficient and affordable?
How well does the FRS look after its people?	<p>How well does the FRS promote, integrate and improve its values and culture, and consider the health and well-being of its workforce?</p> <p>How well trained, skilled and prepared for the future are FRS staff?</p> <p>How well does the FRS demonstrate fairness and diversity?</p> <p>How well does the FRS lead its people?</p>

In our assessment of effectiveness, we will continue to consider how well each FRS is performing its principal functions of preventing fires from happening, making sure the public is kept safe through the regulation of fire safety and responding to emergency incidents. We will continue to provide the public with clarity on how well FRSs are prepared to respond to major incidents with other FRSs and agencies. In 2025/27, we will also examine how FRSs work with local communities to make them more resilient.

In our assessment of efficiency, we consider the way each FRS uses its resources to manage its current risks and how well it is planning to manage its risks affordably in the future. During previous inspection rounds, we examined these aspects separately. In 2025/27, we will combine these questions to reduce duplication and concentrate more on outcomes for communities and the workforce.

Our assessment of how each FRS looks after its people will focus on leadership at all levels of the organisation. We will continue to closely examine training, values and culture, and diversity. We will add a new section to our reports after the overall summary, where the HMI will set out the most important findings in relation to the service's leadership.

Fire and rescue authorities

FRAs must have regard to the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) in carrying out their functions.

The framework requires each FRA to produce a [community risk management plan](#), identifying and assessing all foreseeable risks related to fire and rescue that could affect its community.

We will consider the content of each FRA's community risk management plan and how it is implemented in practice. We will use the plan as a source of information for:

- assessing risk and vulnerability in respect of each service;
- the factors that affect public safety; and
- how each FRS will use prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate the risk to communities.

The [Fire Standards Board](#) has been set up to oversee professional standards for FRSs in England, including how they are identified, organised, developed and maintained. All FRAs must implement the standards approved by the board, and in our inspections, we will assess how well they have been implemented. FRAs are also required under the national framework to give due regard to our reports and recommendations, and to regularly publish an action plan detailing how our recommendations are being addressed.

Inspecting governance arrangements

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017, created powers to inspect FRAs.

In our earlier rounds of FRS inspections, we focused on the service provided to the public and not on the accountability and scrutiny structures that govern FRSs. In our current round, we met with representatives from FRAs, but we didn't routinely include an assessment of corporate governance as part of our inspection programme.

In 2025/27, we will introduce a new assessment of how each FRS is affected by its FRA's governance, oversight and scrutiny arrangements. This assessment will be an overarching consideration of effectiveness, efficiency and people rather than forming a separate question. It will focus on the robustness of the arrangements for making sure the service is effective and efficient at keeping the public safe from fire and other risks. We will also assess whether these arrangements create a positive culture and whether standards of conduct exist to support the health and well-being of the workforce.

We will not inspect governance in the FRA, only the impact of FRA governance on the FRS.

Other inspections

We can carry out thematic inspections, which consist of in-depth assessments of themes or issues. These inspections establish areas of notable practice or specific concerns in FRSs and may result in recommendations that are relevant to all FRSs.

HM Chief Inspector has determined that in 2025/27 we will continue to inspect the effectiveness and efficiency of FRSs and how well they look after their people. No specific resources have been allocated for thematic inspections – if we decide a thematic inspection is necessary, we will reprioritise our inspection programme to provide the resources. If we establish that we need to carry out a thematic inspection, we will consult with the Home Secretary, and we will work with the sector and the Home Office to carry it out – for example, through our external reference group.

If needed, the Home Secretary can also commission thematic inspections on individual matters outside the approved inspection programme and framework. For example, in 2023, the Home Secretary commissioned us to review the handling of misconduct in FRSs. We will publish any commissions we receive from the Home Secretary on our website.

HM Chief Inspector can also provide assistance to other public authorities at their request. In 2024, the commissioners for the South Wales FRS requested that we carry out a full inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. We will publish any requests for assistance from public authorities on our website.

Inspectorate capacity

This inspection programme and framework relies on us having a full complement of fire and rescue inspectors and supporting staff working during the inspection years in question. The breadth, number and extent of our inspections will depend on the funding we receive.

Our FRS inspection framework

Inspection methodology for FRSs

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

- analysis of documents and data;
- reviews of operational incidents and case files;
- surveys of the public and of FRS staff;
- interviews;
- focus groups; and
- observations of fire and rescue work.

Graded judgments

In our 2025/27 inspections, we will measure FRSs against the 'characteristics of good performance'. These describe the levels of performance needed for an FRS to achieve a grade of 'good', which allows us to make consistent assessments across all services. They also help services to see what we are grading them against.

The characteristics are examples to help us to determine appropriate judgments. They aren't intended to set out specific standards or to be exhaustive lists of how we expect services to perform.

The characteristics take account of national standards, operational guidance and evidence from research, but we aren't limited to these. We are entitled to establish our own view of efficiency and effectiveness. We will consider new guidance, standards and research as they become available.

The categories of graded judgment in 2025/27 will be:

- **Outstanding** – the FRS has substantially exceeded the characteristics of good performance.
- **Good** – the FRS has substantially demonstrated all the characteristics of good performance.
- **Adequate** – the FRS has demonstrated some of the characteristics of good performance, but we have identified areas where it should make improvements.

- **Requires improvement** – the FRS has demonstrated few, if any, of the characteristics of good performance, and we have identified a substantial number of areas where it needs to make improvements.
- **Inadequate** – we have causes of concern and have made recommendations to the FRS to address them.

In our reports, we will give graded judgments for the ten assessment questions set out above.

We will also comment on progress made by the service since its last inspection. But changes between inspection rounds mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between the grades we will give in our 2025/27 inspections with those in previous rounds.

Accelerated causes of concern

In our current inspection round, we began reporting accelerated causes of concern and recommendations where there was a risk to public safety earlier, rather than waiting to give details in our service report. We published the full evidence and background for the cause of concern later in the report, along with an update on any progress made against it. We issued three accelerated causes of concern in this way, two relating to Avon FRS in August 2023, and one relating to Hertfordshire FRS in October 2024.

We will continue to publish any causes of concern and recommendations that relate to public safety as soon as possible. As we have done previously, we will publish other causes of concern (for example, those relating to the organisation and running of the service) in the full service report.

Follow up from previous inspections

We will carry out follow-up activities throughout the year. They will 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 our previous inspection.

Monitoring, assurance and analysis

Our monitoring process

HM Inspectors routinely monitor the performance of all FRSs in England to make sure that:

- any emerging problems with individual services with respect to effectiveness, efficiency or how well they look after their people are spotted quickly, and that chief fire officers and FRAs (or equivalent bodies) are aware of those problems and are taking corrective action; and
- if any of these problems are substantial, and there is a low prospect of them being resolved, they are raised formally with the service or the authority so they can respond.

We use information from the monitoring process to inform our FRS assessments, and vice versa. When we are monitoring services, we are guided by, but not limited to, examining the main questions from the FRS assessments. All this information contributes to our regular assessments of each service. Our staff also carry out data analysis and routine information-gathering that forms part of our monitoring process.

We frequently review our approach to monitoring to make sure it evolves in line with changes to FRSs in England.

In our routine monitoring, we identify apparent issues so we can scrutinise them more closely. Some of these will be outside the control of the service or the authority, or will already have been addressed. But some may be indicators of systemic or management failings in the service. The decision on whether to follow up on any concerns with the service and authority is that of the HM Inspector who leads on our relationship with that service.

Our monitoring process has two stages:

1. **Scan:** This is our default phase of monitoring. We use a range of data and information to identify potential areas of concern. We carry out regular monitoring and produce a summary monitoring report. If possible areas of concern are found, we will discuss these at our regular monitoring group meetings.

2. Engage: If we have causes of concern about a service's effectiveness or efficiency, or how well it is looking after its people that appear to need closer scrutiny, HM Chief Inspector may move it to our Engage phase. The service may receive support from external organisations such as the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#) and the [Local Government Association](#).

Advisory and reference groups

We have worked with FRSs and authorities to develop our inspection programme and framework. It has been designed to promote improvements across FRSs.

The FRS external reference group includes representatives from FRSs, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the Fire Standards Board, and [police, fire and crime commissioners](#) who have specific skills and experience in the areas that will be inspected. We will continue to use their knowledge and advice to maintain a sound methodology for inspections. We also meet with unions and staff associations to get their input on an ad-hoc basis.

Our FRS technical advisory group considers how to develop appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to support our inspection methodology. The members of this group include representatives from FRSs across England, the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Home Office and others.

We also communicate with the fire and rescue sector through regular sector updates, conferences and our network of service liaison leads.

January 2025 | © HMICFRS 2025

hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk